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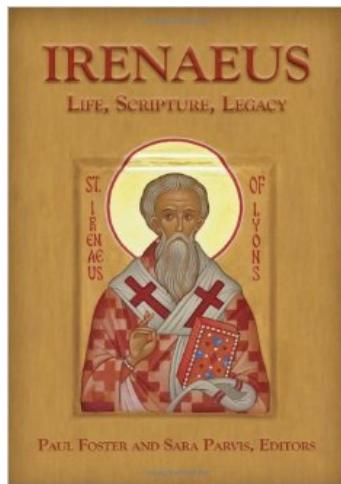
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Paul Foster and Sara Parvis, eds.

Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012

Pp. xvi + 274. ISBN: 978-0-8006-9796-9.

\$39.00 [Hardback]. Purchase

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The last half of this century has witnessed a renewed interest and appreciation for Irenaeus of Lyons. Several introductory works have been published that serve as helpful primers for the second century bishop and his milieu.¹ While these introductions offer an overview of Irenaeus and his context, each by a single scholar, *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* introduces readers to contemporary Irenaean studies through the contributions of sixteen experts. Collected from the 2009 Irenaean conference held at the University of Edinburgh by the Centre for the Study of Christian Origins, essays in this volume offer insights into Irenaeus and his context (Part One), his use of canonical and noncanonical texts (Part Two), and his influence on the faith (Part

¹ Some English language introductions include Robert M. Grant's helpful summary of Irenaeus's life, theology, and works in *Irenaeus of Lyons*, The Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge, 1997); Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1997); and Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

Three). Contributors hail from a broad range of confessions: Eastern and Western, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist. Indicative of the shift away from Harnack's and Loofs's negative and dismissive depictions of Irenaeus from the early twentieth century, contributors are “mainly Irenaeus's lovers” (p.1).

The volume's inclusion of only English language essays makes the field easily accessible to English-speaking readers. However, this necessarily underexposes budding Irenaeus lovers to the broader international community of scholarship, which is heavily populated by especially French and German works. Nevertheless, despite the inherent weakness of essays limited to English, the authors work comfortably and competently in the wide and diverse spectrum of international scholarship. The overarching argument of the volume seems to be that Irenaeus stands as a vital witness to the unity amidst diversity of early Christianity.

In the first part, “Life: Irenaeus and His Context,” three authors place Irenaeus in his historical context as representing diversity within unity both theologically and geographically. Paul Parvis examines Eusebius's portrayal of Irenaeus, positing that the bishop's polemical writings should be understood in light of his pastoral concerns. Jared Secord's essay then explores Irenaeus's abiding eastern ties despite his westward emigration to Lyons. And Allen Brent examines Irenaeus's teaching concerning episcopal succession, arguing that he was not creating monarchical episcopacy but defending “a coherence in philosophical or theological teaching” (p.52).

In the second part of the book, “Scripture: Irenaeus and His Scriptural Traditions,” the contributors investigate Irenaeus's use of traditional authorities, both seeking to shed light on which texts and traditions he utilized and how he employed them. Denis Minns argues that Irenaeus's discussion of Matt 21:28–32 indicates that the bishop

utilized a text similar to the fifth century Codex Bezae. D. Jeffrey Bingham posits that the book of Hebrews held a more important place in Irenaean thought than previously understood. Karl Shuve suggests that Irenaeus's use of Old Testament nuptial narratives laid the foundation for the future interpretation of the Song of Songs. In the coupled essays on the identity of the unnamed presbyter in *Against Heresies* 4.27, Sebastian Moll and Charles E. Hill let us in on a disputed issue in Irenaean interpretation. Moll advocates leaving the unnamed elder as unknown, while Hill maintains his view that it was, in fact, Polycarp of Smyrna. Paul Foster then examines Irenaeus's discussion of the non-canonical gospels, proposing that the bishop was "well informed" of his opponents' works. Finally, in a second article, Charles E. Hill argues that the use of *diplai* in P.Oxy 405 indicates a scriptural quotation, shedding light on an early scribal practice.

Finally, part three, "Legacy: Irenaeus and His Theological Traditions," begins with Michael Slusser identifying the heart of Irenaeus's theology as the interplay of God's greatness and love, though it leaves us wondering whether the incarnation or *regula fidei* are not more hearty candidates. Next, Peter Widdicombe explores the Irenaean concept of the (loving) fatherhood of God. Alistair Stewart zooms in on Irenaeus's assertion that Christians receive the rule of faith through baptism (*Against Heresies* 1.9.4), arguing a christological declaration during the actual rite of baptism is in view, not a full trinitarian interrogation. Sara Parvis then compellingly discusses how Irenaeus positively affirms women both in the history of redemption and in the church while he carefully avoids Gnosticism's unbridled extremes. Stephen O. Presley argues that Irenaeus's subdued use of second century prosopological exegesis (variously identifying triune persons speaking in Old Testament texts) is due to his polemical contest with the Gnostics, whose interpretations were not governed by

the principle of the one true God of the *regula fidei*. Sophie Cartwright introduces the reader to Irenaeus's theological anthropology by comparing and contrasting the bishop's concept of *imago dei* with those of the fourth century bishops Marcellus of Ancyra and Eustathius of Antioch. Paul Parvis's penultimate essay offers a helpful (and fascinating) account of the editors and published editions of *Against Heresies* from Erasmus in the sixteenth century to Rousseau in the twentieth. And as a capstone essay for this volume, Irenaeus M. C. Steenberg aptly and ably traces the Irenaean legacy as a crucial link in the chain of early Christian tradition.

In sum, *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, is an essential volume for "Irenaeus's lovers," an important collection for scholars of the second century, and a helpful overview for broader patristic scholars. The book can also serve as an excellent orientation to the world of contemporary Irenaean scholarship for the recent initiate into the life, thought, and legacy of the bishop of Lyons. A handful of features are appropriate for novices and laypeople, such as the catalogue of Irenaeus's writings (p.xi-xiii), the single-page timeline (p.xv), the first two introductory essays by Paul Parvis and Jared Secord, respectively, and the bibliography (p.255-68). However, this is not a primer for beginners but a standard for professional Irenaean scholars.

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