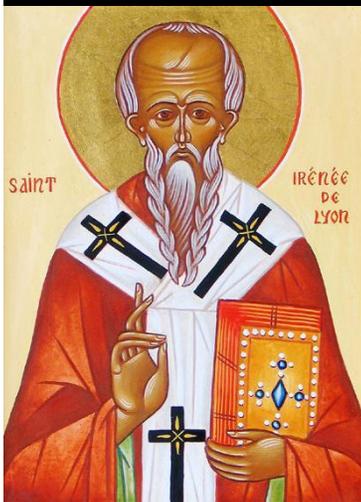




# Why God is Not Evil, Not One Bit According to Irenaeus of Lyons



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# Irenaeus of Lyons: Introduction

- Mentored by Polycarp
  - Polycarp (~69 – 155 AD), bishop of Smyrna, who was mentored by the Apostle John (died 90-100 AD)
- Sent to Lyons in Celtic Gaul to assist bishop Pothinus, another pupil of Polycarp
  - Sent from Lyons to Rome in 177 AD, corrected Eleutherus, bishop of Rome, about Montanism
- Becomes bishop of Lyons (177 AD)
  - Stopped Victor, bishop of Rome, in 190 or 191 AD from excommunicating Christians from Asia Minor over the calendar and date of Easter (like Polycarp of Smyrna and Anicetus of Rome)

# Irenaeus of Lyons: Introduction

- Lived ~125 – 202 AD, born in Smyrna
- The first major theologian outside the New Testament
- Witness to New Testament
  - First to name and quote from all four Gospels
  - Quotes from all NT except Philemon and 3 John
- Surviving writings:
  - *Against Heresies* (5 books; 175 – 188 AD)
  - *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (a training manual for new Christians; ~190 AD)

# Irenaeus of Lyons: Introduction

- Non-surviving writings (attested by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*):
  - *That God is Not the Author of Evil* (*Ecc.Hist.* 5.20.4-8)
  - *On the Ogdoad* (*Ecc.Hist.* 5.20.2)
  - *On Schism* (*Ecc.Hist.* 5.20.1)
  - *Letter to Pope Victor* (Syriac fragment)
  - *Concerning Knowledge* (*Ecc.Hist.* 5.26)
  - Fragments (authorship contested)

# Jesus' Victory Over Sin

- 'Man...had sin in himself... It behooved Him who was to destroy sin, and redeem man under the power of death, that He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man; who had been drawn by sin into bondage... so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death. For as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation... God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.'
  - Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7

# Jesus' Victory Over Sin

- 'Because death reigned over the flesh, it was right that through the flesh it should lose its force and let man go free from its oppression. **So the Word was made flesh, that, through that very flesh which sin had ruled and dominated, it should lose its force and be no longer in us.** And therefore our Lord took that same original formation as (His) entry into flesh, so that He might draw near and contend on behalf of the fathers, and conquer by Adam that which by Adam had stricken us down.'
  - Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration* 32

# Jesus' Victory Over Sin

- 'And He manifested the resurrection, Himself becoming the first begotten of the dead, and **in Himself raising up man that was fallen**, lifting him up far above the heaven to the right hand of the glory of the Father: even as God promised by the prophet, saying: And I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen; that is, **the flesh** that was from David. And his our Lord Jesus Christ truly fulfilled, when He gloriously achieved our redemption, that He might truly raise us up, setting us free unto the Father.'
  - Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration 38*

# Jesus' Victory Over Sin

- How does Irenaeus understand Jesus' death?
- Is this the view of most Protestant evangelicals?

# Is Hell Necessary?

- ‘God created the universe so that the full range of His perfections – including wrath and power and judgment and justice – will be displayed. To do that, there is a dark backdrop of the history of redemption called the fall and sin. The acts of grace and the acts of mercy and the experience of salvation shine the more brightly against the backdrop of the fall and of sin.’
  - John Piper, *How Does it Glorify God to Predestine People to Hell?*, March 21, 2013; <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-does-it-glorify-god-to-predestine-people-to-hell>

# Does God Have Two Aspects?

- ‘For one and the same God [that blesses others] inflicts blindness upon those who do not believe, but who set Him at naught; just as **the sun, which is a creature of His, [acts with regard] to those who, by reason of any weakness of the eyes cannot behold his light;** but to those who believe in Him and follow Him, He grants a fuller and greater illumination of mind.’
  - Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.29.1

# Does God Have Two Aspects?

- ‘But God, foreknowing all things, prepared fit habitations for both, kindly conferring that light which they desire on those who seek after the light of incorruption, and resort to it; but for the despisers and mockers who avoid and turn themselves away from this light, and who do, as it were, **blind themselves**, He has prepared darkness suitable to persons who oppose the light, and He has inflicted an appropriate punishment upon those who try to avoid being subject to Him.’
  - Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.39.4

# Does God Have Two Aspects?

- Is hell *necessary*?
- What are the implications on God's character for how we answer these questions?

# Do Humans Have Free Will?

- ‘God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice – for angels are rational beings – so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves.
  - Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.37.1

# Why Do Humans Have Free Will?

- ‘But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God.’
  - Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.37.2

# Why Do Humans Have Free Will?

- ‘...man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God, the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God.’
  - Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.38.3

# Why Do Humans Have Free Will?

- What are Irenaeus' reasons for asserting that God gave human beings free will, and maintains our free will?

# Why Israel?

- ‘Thus it was, too, that God formed man at the first, because of His munificence; but chose the patriarchs for the sake of their salvation; and prepared a people beforehand, teaching the headstrong to follow God; and raised up prophets upon earth, **accustoming man to bear His Spirit** [within him], and to hold communion with God: He Himself, indeed, having need of nothing, but granting communion with Himself to those who stood in need of it, and **sketching out, like an architect, the plan of salvation to those that pleased Him**. And He did Himself furnish guidance to those who beheld Him not in Egypt, while to those who became unruly in the desert He promulgated a law very suitable [to their condition]. Then, on the people who entered into the good land He bestowed a noble inheritance; and He killed the fatted calf for those converted to the Father, and presented them with the finest robe. **Thus, in a variety of ways, He adjusted the human race to an agreement with salvation.**’
  - Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.14.2

# Why Israel?

- ‘Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man [human nature] to cleave to and to become, one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished... But **the law** coming, which was given by Moses, and testifying of sin that it is a sinner, did truly take away his (death’s) kingdom, showing that he was no king, but a robber; and it revealed him as a murderer. It laid, however, **a weighty burden** upon man, who had sin in himself, showing that he was liable to death. For as the law was spiritual, **it merely made sin to stand out in relief**, but did not destroy it.’
  - Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7

# Why Israel?

- What are Irenaeus' reasons for explaining why God didn't just send Jesus right away? Why did He work through Israel?

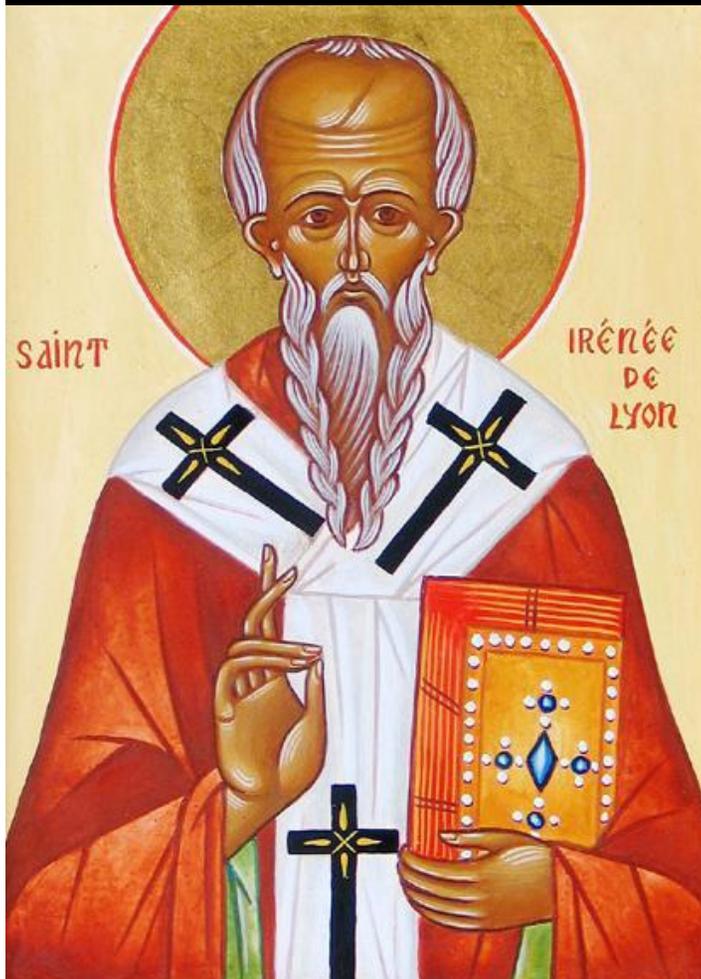
# Why is God Good, Despite Human Evil?

- Creation
  - God's goodness required human free will to love Him and relationally ascend into perfection
  - No robots; no fourth person of the Trinity
- Corruption
  - The possibility of a fall was necessary
  - The requirement of a fall was not
- Cure in Jesus Christ
  - Israel was God's partner to anticipate salvation, and to diagnose the human condition
  - God's goodness required Him to heal human nature and defeat evil in a loving way (since human free will to love Jesus is still necessary)
- Consummation
  - Hell is not necessary, but is based on human choices to shape our natures

# Why is God Good, Despite Human Evil?

- Character of God
  - Theodicy (salvation history) must fit with theology (character of God)
  - God is loving goodness only; not a conflict of attributes
- Does God 'allow' evil?
  - 'Allow' = God could do something else but didn't?
  - Could God – given His nature – have done something else?
  - God does not allow evil; He is against it, makes it known, and gives Himself utterly to defeat it

# Appendix A: Irenaeus & John Calvin



# Appendix A: Irenaeus & John Calvin

- Irenaeus: God does not require a hell, because He has one face
- Calvin: God does require a hell, because He has two faces
  - '[Judgment] day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; *and of His justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient...* the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.'  
(*Westminster Confession*, chapter 33, paragraph 2)

# Appendix A: Irenaeus & John Calvin

- Irenaeus: The Fall was not necessary, and not from God
- Calvin: The Fall was necessary, and from God
  - ‘God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also at his own pleasure arranged it.’ (*Institutes* 3.23.7)
  - ‘Nothing is more absurd than to think anything at all is done but by the ordination of God....Every action and motion of every creature is so governed by the hidden counsel of God, that nothing can come to pass, but what was ordained by Him....The wills of men are so governed by the will of God, that they are carried on straight to the mark which He has fore-ordained.’ (*Institutes* 1.16.3)
  - ‘But if He did not will it, we could not do it. I admit this... I concede more – that thieves and murderers, and other evil-doers, are instruments of Divine Providence, being employed by the Lord himself to execute the Judgments which he has resolved to inflict. But I deny that this forms any excuse for their misdeeds.’ (*Institutes* 1.17.5)

# Appendix A: Irenaeus & John Calvin

- Irenaeus: Jesus saves human nature from the corruption of sin, for all
- Calvin: Jesus saves some of us from God's punishment, allows/causes human evil in the rest:
  - 'The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the [retributive] justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, *for those whom the Father has given unto Him.*' (*Westminster Confession*, chapter 8, paragraph 5)
  - 'The Reformed position is that Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving *the elect*, and the *elect only*... they are the only ones whom God has determined to save... It should also be noted that the doctrine that Christ died for the purpose of saving all men, logically leads to absolute universalism, that is, to the doctrine that all men are actually saved.' (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology, Part Three: The Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Banner of Truth, 1949), 'The Offices of Christ,' 6.B.2)