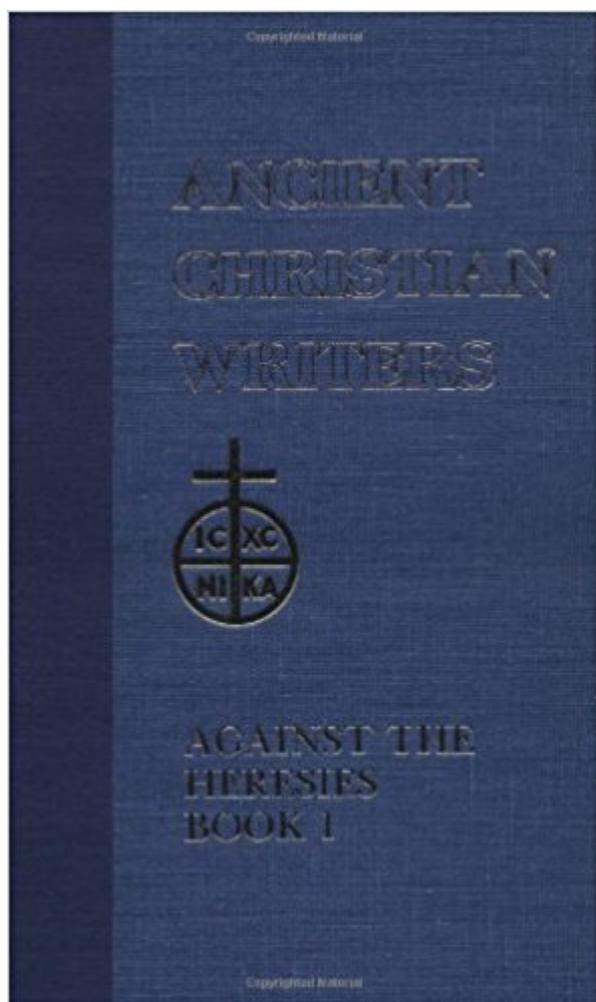


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# 55. St. Irenaeus Of Lyons: Against The Heresies Book 1(Ancient Christian Writers)



## Synopsis

This work, which establishes Irenaeus as the most important of the theologians of the second century, is a detailed and effective refutation of Gnosticism, and a major source of information on the various Gnostic sects and doctrines. This volume contains Book One.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Latin, Greek

Father Dominic J. Unger, O.F.M. Cap., was born at Herndon, Kansas in 1907. He entered the capuchin order as a novitiate in 1928, and was ordained a priest six years later. Subsequently he studied at Rome, receiving his licentiates in theology and literature. He taught theology and Sacred Scripture until 1950, and devoted many years to research and writing thereafter. Father Unger is the author of "Handbook for Forty Hours Adoration", "The Mystery of Love for the Single", "Our Lady's Daily Hours", and "The First Gospel: Genesis 3:15". He died in 1982 and was buried in Hays, Kansas.

This is an extremely dry theological book. It reads more like an Audobon Field Guide, except the subject is Gnostic Heretics instead of Birds. This is due to the dryness of the Gnostic Teachings that St. Irenaeus was trying to refute. Nevertheless, St. Irenaeus admirably accomplishes the task of identifying and refuting the major heretical groups of his era. Additionally, because "Against the Heresies" identifies the need to separate Good Scripture from Bad Scripture, which resulted in the

final Cannon of the New Testament as selected by the Council of Carthage of 397 AD. The book starts out with a review of Gnostic Cosmology. We have one Deity falling in love with a female Deity (who comes out of nowhere) to have a Godling Child to whom they give a ridiculous name. The Godling grows up and the cycle repeats. Senseing humor, St. Irenaeus asks why such important beings such as gods would want to go to all this trouble to give their kids ridiculous names. He goes on to imply that such a weak foundation to Gnosticism propogates to the various Gnostic Cults covered in the rest of the book, the "Field Guide" portion. Is it easy reading? No Way!!! In fact, it took me several false starts before I got the willpower to read it to completion. Is it an important book? There could be no New Testament without it, so YES, this Book is Vital. To be quite honest, only one in ten thousand people would ever be interested in reading this book; On the other hand, it is a Godsend to that one Person.

With Against the Heresies Book I, we have a much needed addition to the ACW library. This being said, we're still in need of four additional books to complete Against the Heresies. As others have noted, this is only book I of Irenaeus's work. The translation runs smooth and we have a fine primer on early gnostic belief - although I'd hate to think Paulist Press released this book merely to capitalize on the interest in gnosticism in the late 90s early 2000s. One does not actually get around to Irenaeus's theological vision until later in the work (read: the remaining four books yet to be translated for the ACW series). For anyone engaged in serious research of ancient gnostic belief, this volume is a sure companion. If, however, you want to acquire greater "gnosis" of proto-orthodox Christian theology (Irenaeus' development of recapitulation is a necessity!), then you may want to look to the reproductions of early translations.

Irenaeus' work in refuting the Gnostics of his day provides an acute understanding of the problems facing the early orthodox church. Had Irenaeus not dedicated himself I have to wonder what free-reign the Gnostics would have had as oral tradition declined and interpretation developed as a reliable understanding of truth. Irenaeus focused his attention on the Valentinian Gnostics and especially criticized the Gnostic Marcus. The notes in the book are remarkably helpful in determining what Gnostic heresies may have been preached against by the New Testament writers. What's disappointing about the books is that the publisher only provides book one of Irenaeus's five book volume. The reader is forced to search on-line for the refutation volumes (the most important part) to understand Irenaeus's principle view. The book is copyrighted in 1992 and part of an extended volume of ancient christian writers, therefore I'm not optimistic that further volumes will

follow. I would still encourage any theological minded individual to make this book part of their library. As for the hardened Catholic that previously used this book review as a proselytising forum, The translator (Dominic Unger) just lightly touches on the subject in the preface. As for Irenaeus, his argument is meant in the ecumenical sense of the Church of Christ that share the same tenets of faith. To classify Evangelicals in the same manner as the Gnostics is a dishonest exaggeration and she should have spent more time reading the book rather than writing a misleading agenda.

With an excellent array of notes explaining his decisions in translating the thirty-one chapters of Book One of Irenaeus's *Against the Heresies*, Unger has produced an admirable and accessible scholarly edition. Any translation is simultaneously an interpretation, and Unger has elucidated his choices in a minute and clear manner. Moreover, his introduction is quite helpful in setting the scene regarding Irenaeus's audience, style, and purpose.

St. Irenaeus wrote five volumes of *Against the Heresies*. This is only book one. If you're looking for anything in subsequent volumes (I was looking for material in book 3, for example), you won't get it in this volume. St. Irenaeus is cogent, clear, and brilliant, of course. Just be forewarned that this isn't the entire work.

This is a nice translation of Book One, and you can get all 5 books in the ANF reprint by Eerdman's at [...] at 9USD including St Justin Martyr and the Apostolic Fathers.

A little difficult to read, but the notes are great and completed my understanding.

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