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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN CONTEXT

Series Editors:

Timothy Gorringer, Serene Jones, Graham Ward

The Christian Theology in Context series aims to provide students and general readers, as well as academics, with a collection of well researched yet accessible books on the most important theologians and theological movements of the Christian church from the apostolic period to the present day. The volumes are unique in setting theological thought in its full social, historical, and political context. Each attempts to show the close relationship between knowledge and social practice, rationality and cultural location.

This book provides a full, contextual study of St Irenaeus of Lyons, the first great theologian of the Christian tradition. John Behr sets Irenaeus both within his own context of the second century, a fundamental period for the formation of Christian identity, elaborating the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy and expounding a comprehensive theological vision, and also within our own contemporary context, in which these issues are very much alive again. Against the commonly-held position that 'orthodoxy' was established by excluding others, the 'heretics', Behr argues that it was the self-chosen separation of the heretics that provided the occasion for those who remained together to clarify the lineaments of their faith in a church that was catholic by virtue of embracing different voices in a symphony of many voices and whose chief architect was Irenaeus, who, as befits his name, urged peace and toleration.

The first chapter explores Irenaeus' background in Asia Minor, as a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, his activity in Gaul, and his involvement with the Christian communities in Rome. The second chapter provides a full examination of Irenaeus' surviving writings, concentrating especially on the literary and rhetorical structure of his five books *Against the Heresies*, his 'refutation and overthrowal' of his opponents in the first two books, and his establishing a framework for articulating orthodoxy. The final chapter explores the theological vision of Irenaeus itself, on its own terms.