

Agostino Agostini
 (Nesse Barm
 Fauré:
 ARGO-E-228
 2)

At this end of June, when so many students are beginning a new life, no longer 'students' in the full-time sense of the word but starting a career with their formal education behind them, a thoughtful phrase by an early Christian: 'for the things we learnt in childhood are part of our soul.' St Irenaeus wrote that; and he's the author, too, of a number of good and memorable phrases — one of them became quite fashionable some years ago, and you found it quoted in many places: The glory of God is man, fully alive. Today's the feast-day of St Irenaeus: so, besides quoting for you (later) the context from which that phrase comes, I thought a few words about the man wouldn't be out of place. For this he may be one of the earliest Christian writers, he's also surprisingly relevant today.... even to his name, which indicates a man of peace & unity. And that he was, despite his strong opposition to the Gnosticism of his day and his writings against the Gnostics. The ideas of Teilhard de Chardin in this century, which were so popular for a while in the 60s-70s, owe quite a bit to Irenaeus whose own significance as a theologian has really only been fully realised in modern times. The principal points he emphasised were the identity of the God of the Old Testament with that of the New, and the unity of the Father & the Son in the work of Revelation and Redemption. His special contribution to Christian theology about Christ is his theory of all human nature being summed up in Christ — something like Teilhard de Chardin's notion of Christ as the Omega, the completion & fullness of creation. He's also an important witness in the early history of Christianity because of his own time and place. That first quote I began with today, about the things learnt in childhood, comes from something he said about his relationship with St Polycarp who was a disciple of St John the Apostle, and the first bishop of Smyrna, in Asia Minor. As a boy, Irenaeus knew Polycarp and was strongly

influenced by him, treasure his teachings 'not on paper but in my heart, for the things we learnt in childhood are part of our soul.' But Irenaeus left his native Asia Minor as a young man and went to Rome for study. Then he became a priest at Lyons, in southern France, at that time a flourishing trade-centre, soon to become the most important of its kind in the West, and the principal bishopric there. Irenaeus himself became the bishop, after the death, in persecution, of the first bishop of Lyons who'd invited him there: Irenaeus had missed the brief period of persecution because at the time he was on a mission to Rome to act as a peacemaker between the Pope and a sect of enthusiasts from his own native Asia Minor. Some years later he was again in Rome acting as a mediator when the Pope, Victor III, excommunicated another group from Asia Minor in a dispute about the date for celebrating Easter — a regular cause of disagreements in the early church. Irenaeus died and was buried, at Lyons, about 200 A.D. May his memory, and his prayers, help us today to appreciate the glory of God, to understand better the Christian tradition of which he was both such a strong advocate and himself such an important link: in our prayers may we learn to grow in human life and so become one with Christ, and be God's glory made visible for humanity to see and to share. May the peace and union of Christian life bring fullness of life to people and a world divided and deprived. | And PHIL-O-1572 now, for a prayer in music today, the "Gloria" from a Mozart Mass.

MUSIC - PRAYERS (ECP p. 30)

To conclude today,

from the writings of St Irenaeus, a treatise 'Against the Heresies' @. Brev. [28 June]