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Comparison of Foundationalism in Irenaeus'
Second-Century Writings and in
Twenty-First-Century Evangelicalism*

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Locating Truth in the Search for Certainty

A Comparison of Foundationalism in Irenaeus' Second-Century Writings and in Twenty-First-Century Evangelicalism

Hannah R. Janes

Abstract:

With a vast library of literature written on Irenaeus of Lyons, this thesis seeks to offer particular insights regarding prominent secondary literature on the bishop and his legacy in modern evangelicalism. This essay finds that key literature positioned as introductions to Irenaeus do not integrate key sources which are necessary to establish the second-century context of his writings. Instead they rely on Irenaeus' own account of his context, and a skewed, fourth-century, Eusebian generalisation of earliest Christianity. The mistake of deliberating ideas without analysis of those being targeted is echoed in evangelicalism and, in particular, evangelical appropriations of Irenaeus' material. This essay also finds that language of the 'obviousness' of one's ideology and claims to 'common sense' reduces non-Irenaeian and non-evangelical ideologies from the level of ideas to the level of moral integrity. If this reduction is rushed, authors place their literature less in a genre of academic investigation on the level of ideas and closer to a rhetorical exhortation which aims to elevate certainty in the current self.

This paper concludes that to engage in a discussion on the merit of ideas, in both Irenaeus studies and in evangelical appropriations of Irenaeus, critical empathy with non-Irenaeian material or non-evangelical material must be demonstrated, respectively.

Among secondary contributions, this paper seeks to incorporate a heightened esteem for Irenaeus' other extant piece, *Demonstration*; includes a diagram and associated analysis of the bishop's truth verification network not before illustrated; and includes the beginnings of a critique of the viewpoints that (a) fundamentalistic evangelicalism and its key tenets (like biblical inerrantism) existed from earliest Christianity, but also (b) that fundamentalistic evangelicalism began with Enlightenment thinking. Instead, this essay attempts to show that the foundationalism which is key to fundamentalistic evangelicalism existed in similar but not identical forms to those in the second century.