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# IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

## Jerome notes:

Ignatius, third bishop of the church of Antioch after Peter the apostle, condemned to the wild beasts during the persecution of Trajan, was sent bound to Rome, and when he had come on his voyage as far as Smyrna, where Polycarp the pupil of John was bishop, he wrote one epistle *To the Ephesians*, another *To the Magnesians*, a third *To the Trallians*, a fourth *To the Romans*, and going thence, he wrote *To the Philadelphians* and *To the Smyrneans* and especially *To Polycarp*, commending to him the church at Antioch. In this last he bore witness to the Gospel which I have recently translated, in respect of the person of Christ saying, I indeed saw him in the flesh after the resurrection and I believe that he is, and when he came to Peter and those who were with Peter, he said to them Behold! Touch me and see me how that I am not an incorporeal spirit and straightway they touched him and believed. Moreover it seems worthwhile inasmuch as we have made mention of such a man and of the *Epistle* which he wrote *to the Romans*, to give a few quotations: From Syria even unto Rome I fight with wild beasts, by land and by sea, by night and by day, being bound amidst ten leopards, that is to say soldiers who guard me and who only become worse when they are well treated. Their wrong doing, however is my schoolmaster, but I am not thereby justified. May I have joy of the beasts that are prepared for me; and I pray that I may find them ready; I will even coax them to devour me quickly that they may not treat me as they have some whom they have refused to touch through fear. And if they are unwilling, I will compel them to devour me. Forgive me my children, I know what is expedient for me. Now do I begin to be a disciple, and desire none of the things visible that I may attain unto Jesus Christ. Let fire and cross and attacks of wild beasts, let wrenching of bones, cutting apart of limbs, crushing of the whole body, tortures of the devil—let all these come upon me if only I may attain unto the joy which is in Christ.

When he had been condemned to the wild beasts and with zeal for martyrdom heard the lions roaring, he said I am the grain of Christ. I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts that I may be found the bread of the world. He was put to death the eleventh year of Trajan and the remains of his body lie in Antioch outside the Daphnetic gate in the cemetery. (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 16)

Trajan reigned from AD 98 to 117, placing the bishop's martyrdom around 110. Ignatius was probably born between 35 and 50, with his life overlapping the writing of the New Testament. Jerome does not relate the circumstances of his arrest, but he was sent to Rome in the custody of ten soldiers, the "leopards" (*Letter to Rom.* 5.1). He may have traveled by ship to a port on the southern coast of Asia, although Syria and Asia were also connected by a highway.<sup>1</sup> At a fork in the road, probably near Laodicea, the company decided to take the northern route through Philadelphia to Smyrna, bypassing the churches to the south (Tralles, Magnesia, and Ephesus). Messengers were then probably sent to these churches, which sent delegations of church leaders (bishops and deacons) to meet him in Smyrna, where the company was delayed. In response, Ignatius writes a letter to each of the three churches. He also dispatches a letter to the Romans, alerting them of his arrival. The company next stopped at Troas, where Ignatius was informed that peace had been restored to the church at Antioch (*Phld.* 10.1; *Smyrn.* 11.2;

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<sup>1</sup> Trebilco 2004, 628.

*Pol.* 7.1). We may speculate that conflict arose over the authority of the bishop and false teaching.<sup>2</sup>

## AUTHORITY

The apostles are in the past (*Eph.* 11.2; *Mag.* 7.1; 13.2; *Trall.* 7.1; *Phd.* 9.1). The bishops stand in for the apostles (*Letter to Mag.* 8.1; 9.2; *Phd.* 5.2; 9.1-2; *Sm.* 5.1; 7.2), but do not have the same authority: “I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul: they were apostles” (*Letter to Rom.* 4.3). But Ignatius grounds unity with Christ in loyalty to the bishop.<sup>3</sup> He claims: “We must regard the bishop as the Lord himself” (*Letter to Eph.* 6.1). He is constitutive of the church: where he is, the church is.<sup>4</sup> As Christians are united with God spiritually in heaven, they are to be in communion with their bishop on earth.<sup>5</sup> Any activity or service that takes place without the bishop’s presence or permission is invalid.<sup>6</sup> Schismatics, who gather separately, cut themselves off from the true church (*Eph.* 5.3; *Smyrn.* 6.2).

But this authoritarianism is expressed with pastoral patience: “Not every wound is healed by the same treatment,” he exhorts Polycarp: “Relieve inflammations with cold compresses”—“If you love good disciples, it is no credit to you; rather with gentleness bring the more troublesome ones into submission” (2.1-2).

Ignatius is the first to use the term “Catholic” in Christian literature (*Letter to Smyrn.* 8.2). The *Letters* suggest a close, highly communicative relationship between the church leadership in Antioch, Asia, and Rome. These communities are linked to the apostles and what would become Nicene Orthodoxy.

In light of these strong claims, it not surprising that Ignatius becomes a polarizing figure in the Great Schism and Reformation. But the circumstances differ, so that finding the right analogies is a matter of prayerful discussion.

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<sup>2</sup> Trebilco 2004, 634.

<sup>3</sup> A bishop oversees a diocese, which, in the New Testament, signifies a “foreign country” (Acts 13:17; 1 Pet 1:17), but takes on the additional sense of a community perceived as foreign. We find two models: *monepiscopacy*—one bishop who chairs the elders—and *monarchical episcopacy*—one bishop, who rules over all. On the former P. Trebilco notes, “The bishop then is far from an autocratic ruler and to at least some extent needs to work with the elders in particular in a collaborative way” (2004, 642). Ignatius can speak of mutual submission (13.2). He mentions a presbytery (*Letter to Eph.* 2.2). But they, along with the rest of the church, should submit to the bishop (*Letter to Mag.* 3.1). He also mentions deacons, who should be respected like Jesus Christ (*Letter to Trall.* 3.1).

<sup>4</sup> Holmes 2006, 168. Onesimus is a “bishop in the flesh” (*Letter to Eph.* 1.3) in contrast to Jesus, the “heavenly bishop.” Ignatius also acknowledges the “Father of Jesus Christ” as the bishop for all [people]” (*Letter to Mag.* 3.1).

<sup>5</sup> *Eph.* 6.1; *Magn.* 3; *Trall.* 2.2; 3.1; *Phld.* 2.1; *Smyrn.* 8.1.

<sup>6</sup> *Letter to Smyrn.* 8.1-2; *Magn.* 7; *Trall.* 3.1.

## FALSE TEACHING

Ignatius believes false teaching within the church is a greater threat than Paganism. His primary targets are “Judaizers” and “docetists.”<sup>7</sup> In response, the bishop emphasizes the *divinity* of Jesus and the *incarnation* of the son of God.

### JUDAIZERS

Matthew evidences tension between those who have Jesus as their only teacher and those who still defer to the Pharisees.<sup>8</sup> Ignatius sides with the Evangelist and Paul: “It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity” (*Letter to Mag.* 10.3).<sup>9</sup> To the Philadelphians, he claims:

But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from a man who is circumcised than about Judaism from one who is not. But if either of them fails to speak about Jesus Christ, I look on them as tombstones and graves of the dead, upon which only the names of men are inscribed. (6.1)

The admonition alludes to Jesus’s excoriation of the scribes and Pharisees:

Upon the seat of Moses<sup>10</sup> have sat the scribes and the Pharisees. So everything they might preach to you practice and keep.<sup>11</sup> But do not practice according to their works, because they say but do not practice... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel over sea and dry land to make one proselyte. And when he becomes (one), you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna than you... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside shine [as if they were] beautiful, but on the inside are full of bones of the dead and all uncleanness.<sup>12</sup> [28] In the same way, *you* also on the outside shine [as if you were] righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (23:2-3, 15, 27)

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<sup>7</sup> Brown and Meir speak of a “left wing” and “right wing” (1983, 79).

<sup>8</sup> See the opposing views of Hagner 1995 and Saldarini 1995, and the standard treatment of Dunn et al. 1999.

<sup>9</sup> **Utterly absurd:** so Holmes 2007. A softer translation is “improper.”

<sup>10</sup> **The seat of Moses** was an honorary place in the local synagogue given to the authoritative interpreter of Scripture: Kenneth G. C. Newport, “A Note on The ‘Seat of Moses’ (Matthew 23:2),” *AUSS* 28 (1999): 53-58.

<sup>11</sup> Jesus previously acknowledged the authority of Scripture (5:17-20). D. Hagner notes: “as the custodians of Moses’ teaching they share in his authority and accordingly are to be respected”: *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33a-b; Dallas: Word Books, 1993, 1995), 2:659; see also W. Reinbold, “Das Matthäusevangelium, die Pharisäer und die Tora,” *BibZeit* 50 (2006): 51-73.

<sup>12</sup> In Palestine, tombs were whitewashed to prevent accidental corpse impurity, which could be contracted by walking over a grave: E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (London / Philadelphia: SCM Press / Trinity Press International, 1992, 72). The land abutting Roman highways was ownerless. So people buried their dead along streets on the outskirts of the city.

Although Judaism did not have formal missionaries, evidence in Diaspora Jewish apologetics (*Ant.* 20:17, 34-36; *Apion* 2:210) and Gentile polemics against conversion (Tacitus, *Annals* 5:5; Dio Cassius *R. H.* 57.18.5; 60.6.7; Horace, *Sat.* 1.4.141-44) suggest evangelistic zeal.<sup>13</sup> Sociologists note how boundaries are often clarified, if not coarsened, in this environment. Ignatius describes converts who “no longer keep the Sabbath,” but the “Lord’s day” (*Letter to Mag.* 9.1).

## DOCETISM

Most scholars feel it is anachronistic to speak of Gnosticism as a coherent movement at this time.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Antioch would become a major Gnostic center. Saturninus, a native of the city, taught that Christ was not truly incarnated, but merely appeared as a man.<sup>15</sup> Apparently, this was tied to a low view of the course of nature: his asceticism included vegetarianism and celibacy.<sup>16</sup> Ignatius attacks those who claim Jesus “suffered only in appearance,” quoting the resurrected Jesus against them: “Take hold of me; handle me and see that I am not a disembodied demon.”<sup>17</sup>

Ignatius also sends letters back to two churches he visited—Philadelphia and Smyrna—and to his friend Polycarp. They go on to Neapolis and then Philippi, where he is warmly received by the church (Polycarp, *Phil.* 1.1; 9.1). Presumably, they go on to Rome where he was thrown to the wild beasts in the Coliseum.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Polycarp, we lack a narrative of his martyrdom.

## WRITINGS

We have seven genuine letters from Ignatius.<sup>19</sup> They reflect the florid style of what has been called “Asianism.”<sup>20</sup> The language is often mystical and transcendent.<sup>21</sup> We follow the middle recension.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 548.

<sup>14</sup> Brown and Meir 1983, 74-79.

<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.24.1-2; Justin Martyr; *Dialogue with Trypho* 35; see Eusebius, *Church History* 4.7.3

<sup>16</sup> Tradition claims he was the disciple of Menander, who, in turn, was the disciple of Simon Magus. If reliable, then he was probably teaching during the reign of Hadrian (117-138), some years after Ignatius’ martyrdom (c. 110).

<sup>17</sup> *Letter to Trall.* 10.1. The agraphon is in *Letter to Smyrn.* 3.2. Either the same or a similar saying is purported to have been in the now lost *Gospel According to the Hebrews* and *Teaching (Preaching) of Peter*.

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius, *Church History* 3.36.3; see also Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 9.2; 13.2.

<sup>19</sup> Trebilco notes: “There is no reason to doubt that Ignatius was aware of the differing situations of the churches in Asia. He is clearly addressing local problems and writing letters that are tailored to individual needs rather than simply offering a uniform message to each of the churches” (2004, 633).

<sup>20</sup> Holmes 2006, 174.

## PROVENANCE

Ignatius was bishop of Antioch of the Orontes.<sup>23</sup> The city is about 300 miles north of Jerusalem in the province of Syria and was the third largest city in the Roman empire with a population between quarter and half million.<sup>24</sup> Antioch, part of the silk route, was at a major junction for roads coming from the north (Tarsus and all of Anatolia), east (Aleppo), and south (the Lebanon, Damascus, and Palestine). Syria had been a Roman province since 64 BC, which eventually included Judea and Galilee (AD 6/7). For *halakik* (legal) purposes, Syria was considered by the Rabbis to be part of Israel.<sup>25</sup> The Legate of Syria was the most powerful man in the region.<sup>26</sup>

Many Gentiles had become followers of Jesus in the city, because of the evangelism of Jewish believers, who fled Jerusalem after Stephen’s martyrdom (Acts 11:19-21). Luke was probably from Antioch.<sup>27</sup> The initial leadership of the church was primarily Jewish (Acts 13:1). The church supported the Pauline mission. If the Southern Galatia hypothesis is correct, Paul probably wrote Galatians in Antioch.

## UNION WITH CHRIST

“Christian” is derived from a Greek word (Χριστιανός) that combines “Christ” with a Latin suffix (*-ianus*) that identifies allegiance or party affiliation. Similar words are *Herodianoi* (Ἡρωδιανοί), and *Kaisarianoi* (Καίσαριανοί)—those who follow Herod or Caesar.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> S. Zañartu notes: “Ignacio es un autor de difícil penetración” (37). One significant rhetorical device is *ascribing fulfillment of a command in advance* (Trebilco 2004, 634-635). The orator is “to see things getting a foothold, to foresee what is coming, and to forewarn others” (Demosthenes, *Coron.* 246).

<sup>22</sup> The long recension consists of an expanded version of the original letters, which was probably created in the 4<sup>th</sup> cent., along with six spurious letters. The short recension is a Syriac abridgment of the letters to the Ephesians, the Romans, and Polycarp (Holmes 2006, 171). The Greek text of the middle recension was first published in 1646, long after the Reformation had begun in the West.

<sup>23</sup> The Orontes River flowed through the city.

<sup>24</sup> Strabo, *Geog.* 16.2.5; see Diodorus Siculus 17.52 and Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 6.122.

<sup>25</sup> Jews came down from Syria to be healed by Jesus (Matt 4:24). See Freyne 2006, 76. Josephus similarly describes the mixing of the two peoples because of the proximity of their countries (*War* 7.43)

<sup>26</sup> Most of the frontier districts of the Roman Empire were “imperial” provinces assigned to the proconsular *imperium* of the ruler, who sent out legates of the senatorial class to serve as governors (Starr 1965, 553). Luke mentions Quirinius, although he has no immediate role in the narrative (Luke 2:2). Because of Pilate’s propensity to violence throughout the decade of his rule, especially his slaughter of many Samaritans, Vitellius, the Legate of Syria, deposed him (*Ant.* 18.89).

<sup>27</sup> See my introductions to Luke and Acts.

<sup>28</sup> BDAG s.v. Χριστιανός. Tacitus does not present the name as politically subversive (*Annals* 15.44).

“In Antioch the disciples were first called Christians,” writes Luke (Acts 11:26 ESV). The translation may imply the name was given by outsiders, not the disciples. But the verb *χρηματίζω* may describe what is prophesied, which is consistent with the author’s usage:

It was disclosed (*κεχρηματισμένον*) to him by the Holy Spirit [that] he would not see death before he should see the Messiah of the Lord. (Luke 2:26)

The Holy Spirit probably mediated this epithet through a prophet in the church at Antioch. Luke also suggests this by immediately describing a prophet from Jerusalem, Agabus, who speaks by the Holy Spirit, foretelling a famine (vv. 27-28).

Ignatius provides a context for prophetic activity, presenting himself as *theophoros* or one who bears the divine spirit.<sup>29</sup> Echoing Paul’s procedure for the Corinthians, after worshipping with the Philadelphians, he reminds them of a prophecy he gave them:<sup>30</sup>

**Revelation Formula:**

“I cried out while I was with you; I spoke with a great voice, with the voice of God.”

**Admonition:**

“Pay attention to the bishop and to the elders and deacons.”

**Rebuttal:**

“To be sure, there were those who suspected that I said these things because I knew in advance about the division caused by certain people. But he for whose sake I am in chains is my witness, that I did not learn this from any human being. No, the Spirit itself was preaching, saying these words:

**Admonitions:**

“Do nothing without the bishop. Guard your bodies as the temple of God. Love unity. Flee from divisions. Become imitators of Jesus Christ, just as he is of his Father.” (7.1-2; Aune 1991, 291-292)

Christian is a natural complement to what might have been the earliest confession, “Jesus is Lord,” and Paul’s insistence that he be known as Christ’s slave (*δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ*).<sup>31</sup> A Christian, then, is one who identifies with and yields to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, their King and Master, but also their resignification by the Holy Spirit. The new name flows from redemption, being purchased off the slave block, and baptism, laying aside the old person, putting on the new.

Ignatius, the third (or second) bishop of Antioch, writes: “It is fitting that we not just be called (*καλέω*) Christians, but that we actually are (*εἰμί*) Christians” (*Letter to Mag.* 4.1). The different verb emphasizes the summoning part of the action: *we are summoned to this word, and must now be its definition*. The bishop engages in what Confucius (551-479 BC) calls the rectification

<sup>29</sup> BDAG s.v. Θεοφόρος. A similar epithet is attributed to John the *theologos* (Papias, Irenaeus, Eusebius).

<sup>30</sup> 1 Cor 12, 14. Moerschini et al. note: “Un aspect important de la personnalité d’Ignace est sa spiritualité mystique” (2000, 140).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Rom 1:1; 10:9.

of names (正名)—conforming language to reality. Although Jesus did not use the word Christian in the Gospels, he warned disciples about the breach:

Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter into the Kingdom of the heavens, but the one who does the will of my Father in the heavens. Many will say to me on that day: ‘Lord, Lord! By your name did we not prophesy? And by your name did we not cast out demons? And by your name did we not do many powerful (things)?’ [23] And then I will confess to them: ‘I never knew you. *Depart from me, the ones who work lawlessness*” [Ps 6:9].” (Matt 7:21-23).

Jesus focuses on his role as Lord. Identifying with him means obeying his teaching. Yet Ignatius acknowledges the process of becoming as well. After arrest, he speaks of “beginning” to be a disciple (*Letter to Eph.* 3.1; *Rom.* 6.3; 5.3).

Jesus also warned about the shame and suffering of discipleship:

And summoning the crowd, with his disciples, he said to them: “If anyone desires to follow behind me, he must deny himself—take up his cross and follow me. For whoever desires to save oneself (*psuchē*)<sup>32</sup> will lose it. But whoever loses oneself (*psuchē*) because of me and the gospel will save it. For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world but his self (*psuchē*) is lost? For what can a human being give in exchange for himself (*psuchē*)? For whoever is ashamed of me and my [words]<sup>33</sup> in this adulterous and sinful generation, *the son of man* will also be ashamed of him when *he comes* in the *glory* of his father with the holy angels.” [Dan 7:13-14] (Mark 8:34-38)

**Tacitus** (c. 60 - c. 120), writing at the time of Ignatius’s martyrdom, describes the popular hostility:

Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. (*Annals* 15.45)<sup>34</sup>

Christians were in, but no longer of the Greco-Roman world. 1 Peter describes the social backlash:

For sufficient is the time that has passed for producing the will of the Nations (Gentiles), having journeyed [= lived] by [thoughts and actions] without self-control, by lusts, by getting drunk, by eating too much, by

<sup>32</sup> The Greek word has a broad semantic range—life, soul, and self—and is difficult to translate.

<sup>33</sup> Absent in a few manuscripts but probably original.

<sup>34</sup> The translation is from *The Complete Works of Tacitus* by Alfred John Church and William Jackson (ed. Moses Hadas; U.S.A.: Modern Library, 1942), 380-81, slightly updated.

disgusting [practices] of idolatry—concerning whom, they are bewildered when you do not join in the same excessive lack of self-control, [and therefore] ridicule [you].<sup>35</sup> (4:3-4)

Ignatius, who is being brought in chains to the city and about to be thrown to the lions, reminds the Romans: “Christianity is greatest when it is hated by the world” (3.3). The paradoxes are remarkable: *the bishop embraces the hatred, although it is the world, not the church, which practices abomination.*<sup>36</sup> Christians are co-suffering with Christ, who was executed because of slander. Ignatius writes, “It is good to be setting from the world to God, in order that I may rise to him,” grounding, as Michael Holmes notes, “the meaning and reality of his own circumstances on the reality of what Jesus himself experienced.”<sup>37</sup>

### JESUS, OUR ONLY TEACHER

Ignatius refers to Jesus as our “only teacher”—again echoing Matthew:

But *you* may not be called ‘Rabbi,’ because there is one teacher for you, but *you* are all brothers. And do not call (anyone) on earth your father, because there is one father who is in heaven for you. Neither be called ‘teacher,’ because there is one teacher for you—the Christ. But the greatest among you will be your servant. But whoever will exalt himself will be humbled; and whoever will humble himself, will be exalted. (23:8-12)<sup>38</sup>

### UNSELFING & HUMILITY

Ignatius claims the life of Jesus Christ “is not in us unless we voluntarily choose to die into his suffering” (*Letter to Mag.* 5.2) and embrace his humility: “I know that you are not conceited, for you have Jesus Christ within you” (*Letter to Mag.* 12). This identification is purgative: “I am God’s wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, so that I might prove to be pure bread” (*Letter to Rom.* 4.1).

### MEDITATION (*THEORIA*) & QUIETNESS

To the Trallians, he writes: “Many things I meditate in God, but I measure myself, lest I perish by boasting” (4.1), echoing Paul’s thorn in the flesh passage. The word translated “meditate”

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<sup>35</sup> Or “blaspheme [God].”

<sup>36</sup> Tertullian will make much of this.

<sup>37</sup> See *Letter to Rom.* 2.2; see also *Trall.* 10; *Smyrn.* 4.2; Holmes 2007, 168. This union is manifested individually and corporately. Susan Harvey notes: “The body both individual and collective could be forged anew, healed, and restored as Christ’s own body in its resurrected reality. In the pure prayer taught by the mystics, the body of the ascetic became the church sanctuary, the heart of the altar, the tears of the incense offered upon the altar. The ascetic body and the ecclesial body could be seen to be one and the same”: “Creation and Asceticism: Syriac Christian Thought,” in *Christian Thought: A Brief History* (eds. Adrian Hastings, Alison Masin, and Hugh Pyper; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Letter to Eph.* 15.1; *Mag.* 9.1. His concern for order has some parallels with Matthew, although the Gospel reflects more of a communal model of authority (Brown and Meir 1983, 74).



(φρονέω) signifies “a comprehensive pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.”<sup>39</sup> He is given the divine point of view, which necessarily is the ultimate paradigm and determiner of meaning. The Holy Spirit helps us look to Christ.

#### SILENCE

Ignatius writes, “The one who truly possesses the word of Jesus is also able to hear his silence (ήσυχία), that he may be perfect (τέλειος), that he may act through what he says and be known through his silence” (*Letter to Eph.* 15.2). Jesus came from the “silence of God,” dispensed wisdom, then returned (*Letter to Eph.* 17, 19). We find this value among Jewish and Greco-Roman teachers. Like the neo-Pythagoreans, Apollonius of Tyana (fl. 1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD) kept a five year period of silence.<sup>40</sup> Simeon ben Gamaliel, a Jewish contemporary, is remembered saying: “All my days I have grown up among the Sages, and I have found nothing better for man than silence” (*m. Abot* 1:17).<sup>41</sup> Rambam (1135 - 1204) notes: “One should always assume the habit of silence, and speak only on subjects of wisdom or on matters of vital importance to one’s physical being” (*Mishneh Torah* 13). The Fathers use the word to signify a state of being prior to divine revelation or contemplation (*theōria*). *The Philokalia* warns: “Even and idle word can make the intellect forget God, the demons enforcing this with the compliance of the senses.”<sup>42</sup>

#### JESUS, OUR ONLY PHYSICIAN

Ignatius writes, “There is only one physician, flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in a human being, true life in death, and from Mary and from God, first given-to-suffering and then un-suffering”<sup>43</sup> (*Letter to Eph.* 7.2). Diogenes Laertius (prob. fl. 1<sup>st</sup> half of 3<sup>rd</sup> cent.) claims Apollo gave the power to heal bodies to Asclepius, but the care of souls to Plato.<sup>44</sup> The bishop presents Jesus as the perfect physician—able to heal body and soul—in keeping with the Gospels.

Jesus appropriates the Hippocratic insistence upon bedside care and trust-based clinical relations. The physician had to *know* the patient. Diagnosis involved creating a profile of the patient’s way of life, including habitation, work, and dietary habits.

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<sup>39</sup> See my commentary on Philipians. J. Kleist claims the sense is “If I take God’s view of things, many thoughts pass through my mind” (1946, 58).

<sup>40</sup> Leonid Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans* (tr. Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 163.

<sup>41</sup> Discussing sins that damn a person—idolatry, incest, murder, and gossip—the rabbis single out the latter as “worse than all of them together” (*t. Peah* 1:2).

<sup>42</sup> Cited in McGinn 2006, 127.

<sup>43</sup> Papias uses the same term to describe Barsabbas (Justus) drinking poison, but remaining unharmed.

<sup>44</sup> *Lives* 3.45; Greenman et al. 2007, 24.

The bishop presents the Eucharist as “the medicine of immortality” (*Letter to the Ephesians* 20.2). Ignatius may juxtapose the health benefits of the Eucharist with medicine, but perhaps magic is his primary target: “Partake only of Christian food, and keep away from every strange plant, which is heresy” (*Letter to Trall.* 6.1).

## THE LETTER OF IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP<sup>45</sup>

Ignatius, who is also God-bearer<sup>46</sup>, to Polycarp, Bishop of the Church of the Smyrnaeans, or rather who has, as his bishop, God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ: heartiest greetings.

### I—COMMENDATION AND EXHORTATION

Having obtained good proof that your mind is fixed in God as upon an immoveable rock, I loudly glorify [His name] that I have been thought worthy [to behold] your blameless face, which may I ever enjoy in God! I exhort you, by the grace with which you are clothed, to press forward in your course, and to exhort all that they may be saved. Maintain your position with all care, both in the flesh and spirit. Have a regard to preserve unity, than which nothing is better. Bear with all, even as the Lord does with you. Support all in love, as also you do. Give yourself to prayer without ceasing. Implore additional understanding to what you already have. Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit. Speak to every man separately, as God enables you. Bear the infirmities of all, as being a perfect athlete: where the labor is great, the gain is all the more.

### II—EXHORTATIONS

If you love the good disciples, no thanks are due to you on that account; but rather seek by meekness to subdue the more troublesome. Every kind of wound is not healed with the same treatment; relieve inflammations with cold compresses. Be in all things *wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove* [Matt 10:16]. For this purpose you are composed of both flesh and spirit, that you may deal tenderly with those [evils] that present themselves visibly before you. And as respects those that are not seen, pray that [God] would reveal them to you, so that you may be wanting in nothing, but may abound in every gift. The times call for you, as pilots do for the winds, and as on tossed with tempest seeks for the haven, so that both you [and those under thy care] may attain to God. Be sober as an athlete of God: the prize set before you is immortality and eternal life, of which you are also persuaded. In all things may my soul be for thing, and my bonds also, which thou hast loved.

### III—EXHORTATIONS.

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<sup>45</sup> Translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. (eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.). Revised and edited by John DelHousaye.

<sup>46</sup> Θεοφόρος.

Let not those who seem worthy of credit, but teach strange doctrines, fill you with apprehension. Stand firm, as does an anvil which is beaten. It is the part of a noble athlete to be wounded and yet to conquer. And especially, we ought to bear all things for the sake of God, so that he also may bear with us. Be ever becoming more zealous than what you are. Weigh carefully the times. Look for him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes; impalpable and impassible, yet who became passible on our account; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes.

#### IV—EXHORTATIONS.

Let not widows be neglected. Be, after the Lord, their protector and friend. Let nothing be done without your consent; neither do anything without the approval of God, which indeed you do not, inasmuch as you are steadfast. Let your assembling together be of frequent occurrence: seek after all by name. Do not despise male or female slaves, yet neither let them be puffed up with conceit, but rather let them submit themselves the more, for the glory of God, that they may obtain from God a better liberty. Let them not long to be set free [from slavery] at the public expense, that they be not found slaves to their own desires.

#### V—THE DUTIES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES.

Flee wicked practices; but all the more discourse in public regarding them. Speak to my sisters, that they love the Lord, and be satisfied with their husbands both in the flesh and spirit. In like manner also, exhort my brethren, in the name of Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, even as the Lord the Church [Eph 5:25, 29]. If anyone can continue in a state of purity, to the honor of him who is Lord of the flesh, let him so remain without boasting. If he begins to boast, he is undone; and if he reckons himself greater than the bishop, he is ruined. But it becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop, so that their marriage may be according to God and not after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honor of God.

#### VI—THE DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN FLOCK.

Pay attention to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. My soul be for theirs that are submissive to the bishop, to the presbyters, and to the deacons, and may my portion be along with them in God! Labor together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together; sleep together; and awake together, as the stewards and associates and servants of God. Please Him under whom you fight, and from whom you receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism endure as your arms; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as a complete panoply. Let your works be the charge assigned to you, that you may receive a worthy recompense. Be long-suffering, therefore, with one another, in meekness, as God is towards you. May I have joy of you forever!

#### VII—REQUEST THAT POLYCARP WOULD SEND A MESSENGER TO ANTIOCH.

Seeing that the Church which is at Antioch in Syria is, as report has informed me, at peace, through your prayers, I also am the more encouraged, resting without anxiety in God, if indeed by means of suffering I may attain to God, so that, through your prayers, I may be found a disciple. It is fitting, O Polycarp, most blessed in God, to assemble a very solemn council, and to elect one whom you greatly love, and know to be a man of activity, who may be designated the messenger of God; and to bestow on him this honor that he may go into Syria, and glorify your ever active love to the praise of Christ. A Christian has not power over himself, but must always be ready for the service of God. Now, this work is God's and yours, when you shall have completed it to His glory. For I trust that, through grace, you are prepared for every good work pertaining to God. Knowing, therefore, your energetic love of the truth, I have exhorted you by this brief Epistle.

#### VIII—LET OTHER CHURCHES ALSO SEND TO ANTIOCH.

Inasmuch as I have not been able to write to all the Churches, because I must suddenly sail from Troas to Neapolis, as the will [of the emperor] enjoins, [I beg that] you, as being acquainted with the purpose of God, will write to the adjacent Churches, that they also may act in like manner, such as are able to do so sending messengers, and the others transmitting letters through those persons who are sent by thee, that you may be glorified by a work which shall be remembered for ever, as indeed you art worthy to be. I salute all by name, and in particular the wife of Epitropus, with all her house and children. I salute Attalus, my beloved. I salute him who shall be deemed worthy to go [from you] into Syria. Grace shall be with him forever, and with Polycarp that sends him. I pray for your happiness forever in our God, Jesus Christ, by whom continue in the unity and under the protection of God, I salute Alce, my dearly beloved. Farewell in the Lord.

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