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The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch (Part 2)

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Ignatius of Antioch, bishop, martyr and letter writer, provides what is perhaps the clearest snapshot of the diverse expressions of Christianity that existed in part of the eastern Mediterranean world in the early second century, although, admittedly, he himself was not a supporter of such diversity. His writings reflect tensions within Christianity as it struggled to become a more organized and structured movement. Moreover, in these epistles, it is possible to see some highly significant doctrines emerging in embryonic form. Part 2 explores theological concepts and ideas in the letters.

KEYWORDS
Apostolic Fathers, Ignatius, Antioch, second century

What made the letters of Ignatius so controversial in the seventeenth century were the ideas they contained. To employ an overused term, they can be viewed as promoting 'early-catholicism'. Such a designation can too easily be misunderstood, so it is important to look in detail at the actual ideas that Ignatius puts forward about church order, core theological beliefs and his attitude to his opponents.

1. *Ecclesiology, Episcopacy and Eucharist*

Ignatius espouses the threefold pattern of ministry in his letters, consisting of deacons, presbyters and bishops. The vigorous manner in which Ignatius advocates this system may well suggest that this pattern was somewhat of an innovation, at least in terms of the hierarchical structure being described, or that it had come under attack. However, it is important to bear in mind Grant's note of caution, 'Before we draw too sharp a line between the various orders, however, we should note that all the ministers are viewed as apostolic.'[1] The model that Ignatius deems as normative is leadership in the form of a single ἐπισκόπος (bishop) supported by a presbytery (eldership) along with those filling the role of deacon. This pattern recurs in a number of his letters. All three titles are seen in the epistle to the *Ephesians*. Onesimus is described as the one 'whose love passes utterance and who is moreover your bishop in the flesh'. Following on from this the congregation are exhorted to 'pray that you may love him according to Jesus Christ and that you all may be like him; for blessed is He that granted unto you according to your deserving to have such a bishop' (*I.Eph.* 1.2). A little later in the same epistle the offices of deacon and the presbytery are also mentioned. A certain Burrhus is described as 'your godly deacon who is blessed in all things' (*I.Eph.* 2.1). Then the eldership is mentioned in conjunction with the bishop when Ignatius exhorts Ephesian believers to adopt a sanctified lifestyle: 'be holy in all respects, being made complete through a single subjection, being subject to the bishop and presbytery' (*I.Eph.* 2.2). Similarly, the pattern is repeated in *Magnesians* where the bishop Damas is named. In *Trallians* the three offices are discussed in even closer connection, being viewed as a focal point for establishing Church unity.[2]

> And so – as is already the case – you should do nothing without the bishop; but be subject also to the presbytery, as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope; for if we live in Him, we shall also be found in Him. And those likewise who are deacons of the

[1] Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary. Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch*, 21.

[2] W. R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 140.

> mysteries of Jesus Christ must also be pleasing in every way to all people. For they are not deacons of foods and drinks, but servants of the Church of God. And so they must guard themselves against accusations as against fire (*I.Trall.* 2.2–3).

Furthermore Ignatius gives a spiritual comparison between these figures and divine and heavenly beings. 'In like manner let all men respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, even as they should respect the bishop as being a type of the Father and the presbyters as the council of God and as the college of Apostles. Apart from these there is not even the name of a church' (*I.Trall.* 3.1).

Ignatius focuses on the office of bishop more than the roles of deacon or the presbytery. The relationship of believers to the bishop reflects the union between the church and Jesus, and that of Jesus to the Father (*I.Eph.* 5.1). Moreover, according to Ignatius, opposition to the bishop is a sign that one is not subservient to God (*I.Eph.* 5.3; *I.Trall.* 2.1). It is necessary to defer to a bishop as a possessor of the wisdom of God (*I.Mag.* 3.1), and nothing should be done by members of the congregation without the consent of the bishop (*I.Mag.* 4.1; 7.1). In relation to *I.Mag.* 4.1, Schoedel comments that 'obedience to the bishop is of such decisive importance to Ignatius that he goes on virtually to define being Christian in terms of it'.[3] Ignatius declares that he has received the embodiment of the love that exists among the Trallian community in the person of Polybius their bishop (*I.Trall.* 3.2). Only those who remain in fellowship with their bishop belong to God and Jesus Christ (*I.Phil.* 3.2), and the only valid eucharist is that presided over, or sanctioned by, the local bishop (*I.Phil.* 4.1; *I.Smyr.* 8.1). In fact the passage contained in *I.Smyr.* 8–9 gives the most fulsome description of authority and status of bishops provided by Ignatius. Nothing involving the church can be done without episcopal permission; both baptism and eucharist are invalid without the bishop's presence or oversight;[4] and whatever he approves is acceptable to God. Furthermore, by honouring the bishop one honours God. Finally, in the piece of correspondence addressed to Polycarp, but intended to be heard by the whole congregation, Ignatius makes it clear that he views his death as vicarious, but not as an efficacious offering for those who renounce episcopal authority. He writes, 'I am giving my life in exchange for those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters and the deacons' (*I.Poly.* 6.1).

What is to be made of the repeated, highly laudatory and theologically significant comments about bishops? First, the fact Ignatius has to insist on the primacy of the episcopacy and its authority suggests that this was not a universally held view even in the cities where the various named bishops held office. In fact the epistles bear witness to the phenomenon of those who oppose the authority of the bishop. Grant notes that the clear implication of *I.Smyr.* 8.1–2 is 'that the heterodox had their own Eucharist'.[5] The response Ignatius presents to those who refuse the authority of Polycarp in Smyrna is to refute the validity of the opponents' cultic rituals. As Schoedel states, 'Ignatius wishes to make it doubly clear that only the bishop can give approval to such meals.'[6] Thus, Ignatius seeks to impose a standardization of structure upon the various churches he comes across during his journey. Sociologically, the epistles may be reflecting a transition and the resultant tension between the evolution of early Christian communities from a pattern of charismatic leadership to that of a more structured and clearly defined system of authority. Such routinization of the charisma is a common phenomenon in later generations of New Religious movements.[7] In fact, Maier argues that 'Ignatius' authority is best understood as charismatic'[8], however he uses his authority to promulgate a more regulated pattern of leadership that led to the emergence of a single episcopal figure in each geographical centre.[9]

[3] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 109.

[4] Sullivan observes that 'the new note introduced here is that the bishop can also delegate someone else to preside'. F. A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of Episcopacy in the Early Church* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 2001), 119.

[5] Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch*, 120.

[6] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 243.

[7] W. S. Bainbridge, *The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (New York/London: Routledge, 1997), 220–22.

[8] H. O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (ESCJ 11; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier, 2002), 170.

[9] Trebilco's study of early Christianity in Ephesus draws attention to competing strands functioning within that city. In relation to Ignatius' description of those who 'resist the bishop' (*I.Eph.* 5.1–6.1), Trebilco attempts to identify those who are opposing the model of authority resting with a single episcopal figure. 'Those who oppose these developments may well have included some who favoured a greater emphasis on the forms of authority which John the Seer made use

Prior to the arrest and deportation of Ignatius, his own church in Antioch appears to have been suffering considerable upheaval and he writes about the return of peace that has been communicated to him while he was travelling to Rome (*I.Phil.* 10.1; *I.Smyr.* 11.2–3; *I.Pol.* 7.1–2; 8.1). It is likely that Ignatius himself was the major source of such discord and this could have been due to his attempt to impose a more hierarchical leadership model on the church in Antioch. This may perhaps have created internal divisions within the community, especially among members who wished to retain a more traditional charismatic leadership structure. It is not impossible, however, that Ignatius' attempts to suppress alternative forms of church structure and leadership resulted in his opponents betraying him to Roman authorities in Antioch.

Second, it is interesting to note that the only church where Ignatius does not name the bishop, is the Roman church. Although he has not arrived in the imperial capital at the time of writing to the community, his lack of disclousure about a named leader may suggest that the office of bishop had not yet assumed significance in Rome, or even that there was not a single figure at this stage who was the leader of the Christians in Rome.[10] The latter alternative is supported by Lampe, who puts forward the thesis that,

> the fractionation in Rome favoured a collegial presbyterial system of governance and prevented for a long time, until the second half of the second century, the development of a monarchical episcopacy in the city ... Before the second half of the second century there was in Rome no monarchical episcopacy for circles mutually bound by friendship.[11]

By 'fractionation' Lampe is referring to the scattered and largely discrete house congregations that operated in Rome. The lack of centralization may reflect both the geography of the imperial capital and also the desire of believers to remain inconspicuous.

Third, there is debate surrounding the correct use of terminology, and whether it is appropriate to label the system being advocated by Ignatius as 'monarchical episcopacy', or if 'monepiscopacy' should be used as a more neutral term. Obviously the system proposed by Ignatius does not equate to the full-blown monarchical episcopacy of the late antique or early medieval periods. For this reason, scholars such as Sullivan prefer the term monepiscopal to refer to the single bishop leadership structure that is being advocated in the seven genuine epistles.[12] While this may be a helpful neutral term, it perhaps fails to adequately acknowledge the immense privileges and theological significance that Ignatius attributes to this office, and perhaps his thinking is best understood as proto-monarchical episcopacy, because of its obvious resonances with the system that emerged over the course of the ensuing centuries. Schoedel notes that 'Ignatius' high view of the authority of the bishop is probably still the single most important reason for doubting the authenticity of the middle recension'.[13] In fact, this is one of Joly's fundamental reasons for rejecting the genuineness of the seven letters.[14] However, if, as has been suggested above, the letters were written in the second quarter of the second century by Ignatius, they can still be affirmed as authentic and the developed episcopal doctrine becomes less problematic. Notwithstanding all the complexities surrounding Ignatius' view of the office of bishop, it must be acknowledged that considerable development has occurred in terms of the leadership structure envisaged, especially in comparison to that suggested in the Pauline letters and other early Christian documents. Perhaps one may justifiably feel that the ideas put forward by Ignatius would have a little more integrity if he himself were not a holder of episcopal office, with his own authority being threatened by dissenting voices. His high view of bishops appears somewhat self-aggrandizing, and perhaps was even an attempt to silence those voices in Antioch who wished to retain a more spontaneous or charismatic form of leadership.

The understanding of the eucharist is another highly significant and controversial theological

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of in Revelation and others who were from the Johannine community and so favoured a much more collegial church structure.' Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 647.

[10] In order to try and counter this implication Sullivan notes that Ignatius does not mention presbyters in his *Epistle to the Romans*, yet most scholars would still argue for the existence of a presbytery. While this is true, it does not account for the overwhelming attention that Ignatius devotes to the office of bishop in his letters and its remarkable absence from the *Epistle to the Romans*.

[11] P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 397.

[12] Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops*, 104.

[13] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 22.

[14] Joly, *Le Dossier d'Ignace d'Antioch*, 75–85.

development in the thinking of Ignatius. Yet again care is required in relation to the terminology employed. It would be anachronistic to discuss his ideas in the light of later debates about transubstantiation. Perhaps a more appropriate way to discuss his understanding is in light of the place of cultic meals in the wider milieu of Graeco-Roman religions. Just as Paul can describe eating idol meat as partaking in idols (1 Cor 10:20), Ignatius sees the consumption of the eucharistic elements as a participatory event. Thus Schoedel summarizes the perspective of the epistles in the following manner: 'The eucharist is the centre of worship for Ignatius (cf. *Eph.* 5.2; 13.1; *Phd.* 4; *Sm.* 7.1; 8.1) and serves as the focus for a sense of the presence of saving power in the Christian community (cf. *Eph.* 20.2).'[15] A close association between the elements of bread and wine and the physical body of Christ does emerge in *I.Smyr.* 7.1, where Ignatius attacks the opponents' absence from the cultic meal performed under the authority of the bishop. 'They abstain from the eucharist and prayer, since they do not confess the eucharist is the flesh of our saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered on behalf of our sins and which the Father raised in his kindness' (*I.Smyr.* 7.1). Yet even here the formulation is so tied up with refuting the opponents' denial of the reality of the sufferings of Christ that it is perhaps best to exercise caution rather than to overload this single reference with too much theological freight. Rather, Ignatius is happier to describe the eucharist as the 'medicine of immortality', which in some sense denotes the real salvific presence of Christ in the elements, and affirms the significance of the eucharist as a participatory event for the community both as a demonstration of their fellowship with Christ and their fealty to the bishop.[16]

2. *Christology*

Traditionally an analysis of an author's beliefs concerning the nature of Jesus has been undertaken by investigating the titles that are employed as descriptions of status. One of the classical exponents of this approach is Oscar Cullmann. Describing his desire to be analytical in his methodology for deriving the Christological concepts of the New Testament, Cullmann provided the following explanation.

> This does not mean that we shall investigate in turn each New Testament writing with all the different titles that appear in it, but rather that we shall examine in its precise meaning each Christological title for itself as it appears throughout all the New Testament books.[17]

Although privileging this titular approach, Cullmann acknowledges that in some ways it creates a false dichotomy between the person and the work of Christ. He states, 'The New Testament hardly ever speaks of the person of Christ without at the same time speaking of his work.'[18] Thus in discussing the Christology that Ignatius implicitly presents, it is necessary to consider both the titles used and the significance he attributes to the work of Christ. Tuckett notes the protest made by a number of scholars against the overuse of titles, but cautions against throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Thus he comments that, 'we cannot ignore key christological terms or "titles" completely. In any case, many of these key terms or titles became important in subsequent Christian history when they were adapted and used as key descriptions of who Jesus was'.[19]

Discussing the names Ignatius uses to refer to Jesus, Grant observes that the favoured term employed 'is the double name "Jesus Christ" (112 times)'.[20] This compares with 'Christ Jesus' (13 times); 'Jesus' (3 times); and 'Christ' (4 times). Often the name 'Jesus Christ' is conjoined to other Christological titles.[21] Ignatius is not shy about calling Jesus 'God'. In the inscriptions of *Ephesians* and *Romans* he speaks confidently of 'Jesus Christ our God'. In one of his credal affirmations he declares that Jesus is 'God come in the flesh' (*I.Eph.* 7.2), and in addressing the Romans, he speaks of 'the passion of my God' (*I.Rom.* 6.3). Further examples could be given where Ignatius freely identifies Jesus as God, in a manner that assumes this is a natural and uncontested designation, at

[15] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 21.

[16] Further on these points see Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 21.

[17] O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (trans. by S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall; London: SCM, 1959), 6.

[18] Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 3.

[19] C. M. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2001), 11.

[20] Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch*, 7.

[21] Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch*, 7.

least among the recipients of his letters.[22] From this data Grant concludes that 'Ignatius is insisting upon the divine function, and also upon the divine nature, of the incarnate Lord'.[23] Yet, in the face of docetic opposition, Ignatius is equally strong in his affirmations of the humanity of Jesus,[24] and in a number of the credal statements he utilises carefully balanced pairings that support the divine/human duality of Christ.[25] Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this occurs in *I.Eph.* 7.2, where Ignatius describes Jesus as the 'one physician' who is 'both fleshly and spiritual, begotton and unbegotten, God come in the flesh'. While both sides of Jesus' nature are confessed, no attempt is made to explain how these twin aspects are held together in union.

Hurtado comments on the purpose of these formulae which function as both doxological and doctrinal declarations. That is, while they may reflect the language of praise employed by Ignatius, they also represent intellectually formulated beliefs about the nature of Jesus. Hurtado states,

> Of course, these all directly reflect Ignatius's deeply felt piety, but they are not simply emotionally tinged rhetoric. In the context of all that Ignatius attributes to Jesus, his application of the epithet *theos* to him surely signals that Jesus is genuinely divine.[26]

There is much distance to travel between the primitive Christological statements articulated by Ignatius and the more detailed and reflective creeds and discussions of the fourth and fifth centuries, which were formulated as responses to the Christological controversies of their own times. Notwithstanding this caveat, Ignatius can be seen as one who, at least in embryonic form, resonates with key features of those later 'orthodox' statements. He relentlessly declares the humanity and divinity of Christ, and his views of divinity incarnated in human form reveal that he does not hold to adoptionistic interpretations of Christ being clothed with divinity at either his baptism or resurrection. The resurrection, however, does represent a stative change as Jesus is transformed from a passible to an impassible being (*I.Eph.* 7.2).

3. *The Virgin Mary*

Another area in which Ignatius appears to show some noticeable development in thinking is in regard to the way in which he depicts Mary, the mother of Jesus. It should be noted, however, that the epistles evidence none of the Marian devotion that became so prominent, especially in the Middle Ages. Instead, references to Mary serve the related purposes of affirming the real humanity of Jesus and consequently are employed as a helpful vehicle for rebutting those who deny that he came and suffered in the flesh. It is interesting to observe that Mary is only referenced in three epistles, those which have been seen as refuting docetic adversaries, namely the epistles to the *Ephesians*, *Trallians* and *Smyrneans*. In the former, Mary is mentioned on three separate occasions. First, in what may be an early credal or hymnic formulation that celebrates the duality of Jesus' nature as 'both fleshly and spiritual, begotten and unbegotten' (*I.Eph.* 7.2), Ignatius continues by affirming Christ as deriving from 'both of Mary and of God', yet without clarifying how this occurs. Schoedel's observation that Ignatius 'emphasized the historical side of Christ's being here in opposition to what he regarded as the heart of the false teaching of the opponents – namely doceticism',[27] correctly places the comment in the context of the controversy it is addressing.

In another carefully structured sequence of affirmations, Jesus is described as being 'conceived by Mary according to the plan of God' (*I.Eph.* 18.2). This again presents the physical reality of the incarnation, even if this statement is not used in a context which is explicitly polemical.[28] The final

[22] Cf. 'the blood of God' (*I.Eph.* 1.1); 'our God in us' (*I.Eph.* 15.3); 'our God, Jesus Christ was conceived by the virgin Mary' (*I.Eph.* 18.2); 'God became manifest in human form' (*I.Eph.* 19.3); our God, Jesus Christ' (*I.Rom.* 3.3); 'Jesus Christ, the God who made you so wise' (*I.Smyr.* 1.1); 'farewell in our God, Jesus Christ' (*I.Poly.* 8.3).

[23] Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch*, 8.

[24] This point is noted by Hurtado. He states, 'For his part, Ignatius, too, certainly affirms Jesus' divinity. Indeed, he is as noticeable for the way he does this as he is for his emphasis on Jesus' humanity.' L. W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 637.

[25] See *I.Eph.* 7.2; *I.Smyr.* 1.1–2; *I.Poly.* 3.1.

[26] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, 639.

[27] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 61.

[28] This formulation is a seen as being traditional by Schoedel 'since the verb (κυοφορεῖν) does not appear elsewhere in Ignatius'. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 84–85.

reference to Mary in *Ephesians* occurs as part of a triad of cosmological events that remained hidden from the 'ruler of this age'. The first two elements in the triad refer to Mary: 'the virginity of Mary and her giving birth eluded the ruler of this age' (*I.Eph.* 19.1). These affirmations form the introduction to the so-called 'Hymn of the Star' that follows, which Ignatius employs to illustrate the salvific implications of the incarnation at a cosmic level. The outlook here is markedly different from that of Revelation 12:13–17, where the dragon is fully cognisant of the woman and her male child and actively seeks to destroy both of them. According to Grant, here 'Ignatius is amplifying a Pauline statement [1 Cor 2:8] by relating it specifically to Jesus' birth and death'.[29] While Ignatius' knowledge of 1 Corinthians makes this possible, it is not necessarily the most likely explanation.

The remaining two references to Mary again both affirm the reality of incarnation. The first states, 'Jesus Christ, of the family of David, of Mary, who was truly born, both ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died ...' (*I.Trall.* 9.1). Schoedel describes this as a 'quasi-credal form'[30] and notes that it is formulated to counter the teachings of the false teachers. Finally, although not directly mentioned by name, Jesus is described is a further series of affirmations concerning the reality of his fleshly existence as 'truly born of a virgin' (*I.Smyr.* 1.1). With the possible exception of the cosmological triad in *I.Eph.* 19.1, Mary forms an important part of Ignatius' theological understanding of the incarnation. There is no interest exhibited in her apart from the support that her role provides in declaring the physical reality of the birth of Christ from a human woman, albeit through a miraculous virginal conception. Ignatius does not show any knowledge of the ideas of the perpetual virginity of Mary, or see her as an object of piety and devotion. Such concepts were to emerge at a later stage.

4. *Martyrdom*

Was Ignatius a stoic believer facing death in the full confidence of his own faith, or was he a somewhat twisted individual seeking his own destruction and exhibiting all the classic signs of a martyr-complex? Either formulation is loaded by the presuppositions one brings to the text, but there can be little doubt that the prospect of death in Rome shaped Ignatius' thinking and the rhetoric employed throughout all seven epistles. However, it is in the epistle to the Romans that Ignatius provides his fullest reflection on martyrdom. Perhaps the reason for this stems from the fact that he was not concerned to refute opponents in that letter, nor to establish episcopal authority, rather as he turns his face to Rome in writing, he has space to consider the significance of the events that await him.[31]

Ignatius provides his readers with the location, Smyrna, and the date of the writing of his letter to the Christians in Rome, the 24th of August,[32] but unfortunately no year is given. Some of the language used by Ignatius to describe his impending martyrdom echoes that supposedly employed by Paul in 2 Timothy. Ignatius refers to his death as being 'poured out as a libation for God [σπονδισθῆναι]' (*I.Rom.* 2.1) which may intentionally pick up the phrase 'for I am already being poured out as a drink-offering [σπένδομαι]' (2 Tim 4:6). Thus, for Ignatius there may be a certain resonance between the fate he is about to face and that endured by prominent Christians before him, although he is careful to distinguish certain differences. He writes, 'I am not enjoining you as Peter and Paul did. They were apostles, I am condemned; they were free, until now I have been a slave' (*I.Rom.* 4.3). The final phrase illustrates that Ignatius saw his impending death as the means by which he would attain to true freedom.

Frend, however, is correct when he observes that Ignatius' 'letters display a state of exultation bordering on mania'.[33] The images he uses to anticipate his martyrdom have a certain morbidity: 'I am the wheat of God and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts' (*I.Rom.* 4.1); 'coax the wild beasts, that they may become a tomb for me and leave no part of my body behind' (*I.Rom.* 4.2). While such an outlook may sound somewhat discordant, it finds its antecedents in the New Testament although many of the images of death have been domesticated to such

[29] Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch*, 103.

[30] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 152.

[31] In particular see *I.Rom.* 4–5.

[32] Here Ignatius employs the typical Roman system of dating, describing the day as 'the ninth day before the calends of September' (*I.Rom.* 10.3).

[33] W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 197.

a degree that they are not recognized for what they are. Ignatius is doing no more than following Jesus' example of taking up his cross. In many ways, early Christianity, or at least certain strands in it, may accurately be described as a martyr-cult. Ignatius represents the belief in a reversal, or inversion, of worldly values and attachments. In his bondage he has become free, in his death he will be made alive. By 'learning to desire nothing while in chains' (*I.Rom.* 4.3) he is learning to desire Christ more completely. Thus he understands the destruction of the flesh as producing the perfection of the disciple.

> Fire and cross and packs of wild beasts, cuttings and limbs being torn apart, the grinding of the whole body, the evil torments of the devil – let them come upon me, only that I may attain to Jesus Christ (*I.Rom.* 5.3).

Such an attitude, although unpalatable to certain minds,[34] reflects the counter-cultural attitudes exhibited in early Christianity whereby acts of martyrdom became world negating events that served to rob the empire and the dominion of the Satan of their power, and in an uncompromising way demonstrated the victory of Christ over the world. Therefore Ignatius can say 'it is better for me to die in Jesus Christ than to rule the ends of the earth' (*I.Rom.* 6.1). These divergent cosmological outlooks confronted each other in the imperial edicts that sought to make Christians conform to acts of socio-religious piety such as reverencing the emperor, and the stubborn refusal of followers of Jesus to comply. As a consequence, the arena was not viewed as a place of defeat for the fledging Christian faith, rather, it was it was seen as the venue where one attained to Christ and received true illumination.[35]

5. *Ignatius' Use of the New Testament*

The ongoing debate concerning the emergence of the canon, has sought some clarification by consulting the practices of Ignatius in citing the writings that later became collected as the New Testament. Only one citation of scripture is prefaced with an introductory formula and that is from the Old Testament, when Ignatius draws upon Proverbs 3.34, 'For it is written, "God opposes the haughty"' (*I.Eph.* 5.3). The use of the New Testament is more problematic, and it needs to be remembered that as Ignatius composed his epistles during transportation to Rome it was extremely unlikely that he had direct access to written copies of documents that were later included in the canonical New Testament. Notwithstanding these physical circumstances, it is interesting to note the accuracy and range of texts cited by Ignatius while writing his seven epistles. A thorough analysis of this topic was undertaken in 1905 by W. R. Inge, who adopted a maximalist position declaring even faint echoes to be evidence that Ignatius knew certain New Testament writings.[36] Others have revisited this question, especially in relation to the use of the Gospels by Ignatius. Koester adopts an extremely hard line for proving the use of a Gospel by a later writer. He maintains that one must be able to demonstrate the clear use of redactional material to ensure that the actual Gospel in question is being quoted, and not just some Gospel-like tradition.[37] Hence he claims that at no point in the seven epistles is it demonstrable that Ignatius was citing material drawn from any of the four canonical gospels. By contrast, Massaux finds clear and repeated evidence of the use of Matthew's Gospel in the writings of Ignatius.[38] In part, these divergent findings represent alternative methodological presuppositions. Koester avoids the problem of allowing a few shared words or the faintest echo to become the basis of asserting that an author knew a text that was later deemed canonical. However, when there appears to be a clear case of Ignatius citing a piece of redactional material from Matthew's Gospel, Koester finds a less likely explanation to exclude what appears to be the obvious conclusion, namely that Ignatius knew and cited the first Gospel.[39] The text in question is drawn from Matthew 3.15 and cited in *I.Smyr.* 1.1. Discussing Jesus' baptism Ignatius states that it was done 'in order to fulfil all righteousness', a comment made only by Matthew. It should be noted

[34] Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch*, 13.

[35] See *I.Rom.* 5.3; 6.3.

[36] W. R. Inge, 'Ignatius' in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, 61–83.

[37] H. Koester, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den Apostolischen Vätern* (TU 65; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), 24–61.

[38] É. Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, Book 1: The First Ecclesiastical Writers (NGS 5/1, Eng. trans.; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990), esp. 85–122.

[39] See Koester's discussion of *I.Smyr.* 1.1, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den Apostolischen Vätern*, 57–59.

that Matthean scholars have long recognized the term 'righteousness' as being part of the preferred vocabulary of the first gospel.[40] This is the clearest example for demonstrating Ignatius' use of Matthew, all other examples cited by scholars show far fewer points of contact, but they are of value for building a cumulative case for Ignatius' use of the first Gospel.[41]

While Matthew may be the only Gospel for which it is possible to suggest that Ignatius is citing the text, more fruitful results can be determined for the Pauline epistles. The wide-ranging use of 1 Corinthians is apparent at various points through the seven letters of Ignatius.[42] Inge was so impressed by the use of 1 Corinthians that he stated, 'Ignatius must have known this Epistle almost by heart.'[43] There is no reason to dissent from this assessment. If the case for Ignatius knowing and citing 1 Corinthians is beyond doubt, his use of the Pauline letter to the Ephesians is almost as certain. Again the comment made by Inge is apposite. 'Though the correspondences between Ignatius and this Epistle [i.e. Ephesians] are not nearly so numerous as in the case of 1 Corinthians, it may be considered almost certain that they are not accidental.'[44] Perhaps the two most compelling examples are the parallels between Ignatius' introduction to his own epistle to the *Ephesians* and Ephesians 1:3–14, as well as *I.Poly.* 5.1b and Ephesians 5:25. Perhaps only two other epistles can be shown to be used by Ignatius with any certainty, 1 and 2 Timothy.[45] Interestingly, Ignatius makes a comment in his own writings concerning the scribal habits of the apostle Paul. He states, while addressing the Christian community in Ephesus, that 'you are fellow initiates with Paul ... who mentions you in every epistle in Christ Jesus' (*I.Eph.* 12.2). The majority of commentators, if they have discussed the issue at all, have taken the statement that Paul remembers the Ephesians in every letter as mere 'hyperbole'.[46] Schoedel states, 'the whole passage is highly idealized and tends to make sweeping claims on the basis of a few instances'.[47] Similarly, Lightfoot mentions the various hermeneutical devices that have been attempted to remove the apparent difficulty, including the alteration by the person responsible for the longer recension, 'who always in his prayers makes mention of you' (ὅς πάντοτε ἐν ταῖς δεήσεσιν αὐτοῦ μνημονεύει ὑμῶν). Yet Lightfoot himself uses the term 'hyperbole' to describe Ignatius' claim.[48] The tension arises since Paul does not in fact mention the Ephesians 'in every letter', but references them only in four of the epistles that form the Pauline corpus.[49] These are 1 Corinthians,[50] Ephesians,[51] 1 Timothy[52] and 2 Timothy.[53] What has not been considered until recently[54] is the possibility that Ignatius' rhetoric

[40] Davies and Allison note 'righteousness' as being a 'special favourite of our evangelist' and observe that Matthew uses the term seven times, whereas it is absent in Mark and only used once in Luke. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Vol. I (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 325.

[41] Further on this see my recent discussion, P. Foster, 'The Use of the Writings that Later Formed the New Testament in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch', in A. Gregory and C. M. Tuckett (eds.), *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

[42] Some of the most obvious examples are: *I.Eph.* 16:1//1 Cor 6:9–10; *I.Eph.* 18.1//1 Cor 1:18, 20; *I.Mag.* 10.2//1 Cor 5.7–8; *I.Rom.* 5:1//1 Cor 4:4.

[43] Inge, 'Ignatius', 67.

[44] Inge, 'Ignatius', 69.

[45] See my discussion in Foster, 'The Use of the Writings that Later Formed the New Testament in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch'.

[46] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 73, n. 7.

[47] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 73.

[48] Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2, Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 2, 65–66.

[49] Lightfoot sees references to the Ephesians contained also in Romans 16:5 ἀσπάσασθε Ἐπαίνετον τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου, ὅς ἐστιν ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀσίς εἰς Χριστόν and 2 Corinthians 1:8 Οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν τῆς γενομένης ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ. These references to 'Asia' obviously are not explicitly mentioning the Ephesians, although, as Revelations 1–3 makes clear, Ephesus was undoubtedly considered part of the Roman province of Asia by Christian writers.

[50] In 1 Corinthians, Ephesus is mentioned twice towards the end of the epistle: in 15:32 where Paul mentions fighting with wild beasts; and, in 16:8 as a disclosure of the plan to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost.

[51] In Ephesians, Ephesus in mentioned in the majority of manuscripts in the opening verse, τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, significantly, however, the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ are omitted in the three earliest manuscripts which are extant for Eph 1.1 P^{46}, $\aleph^*$, B. Although later scribes inserted the reference to Ephesus into both $\aleph^2$, B^2. Moreover, the *subscriptio* which is included after 6.24 in many manuscripts including the original hand of both $\aleph$ and B describes the epistle as being πρὸς Ἐφέσιους.

[52] 1 Timothy 1:3, Timothy being urged to remain in Ephesus.

[53] 2 Timothy 1:18; 4.12; and some forms of the *subscriptio* that occurs after 4:22.

[54] Foster, 'The Use of the Writings that Later Formed the New Testament in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch'.

at this point was not hyperbolic, but was in fact accurate, at least as far as he knew the facts. An examination of the text of the seven letters appears to support the hypothesis that Ignatius knew the very four Pauline letters which explicitly make mention of the Ephesians. Thus to reiterate a statement I have made elsewhere,

> One must, therefore, be content with the conclusion that a strong case can be mounted for Ignatius' knowledge of four Pauline epistles and the Gospel of Matthew. An interesting 'canon' for those who wish to draw wider implications from these findings![55]

Conclusions

When one opens the pages of the seven epistles of Ignatius, one is struck by the force of the author's personality, perhaps more than any other writer in the corpus of the Apostolic Fathers. Thus, his impending death in Rome was surely not the only way in which Ignatius imitated his apostolic hero Paul. His certainty in the face of approaching martyrdom may be described in the epistles in somewhat mawkish terms, but it has also acted as an inspiration to countless members among the band of martyrs throughout the centuries. Yet when one leaves admiration of this early church figure to one side and critically assesses the epistles, one is confronted by a plethora of contested and controversial issues.

In summary the positions espoused in this two-part article are as follows. The seven epistles known as the Middle Recension are authentically Ignatian. The dating suggested by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* and *Chronicon* is extremely tenuous and may represent little more than his own guess at when the martyrdom of Ignatius took place. The theological tendencies in the epistles appear to make better sense in the second quarter of the second century, and this may be a more appropriate period to date the epistles. The support of a system of centralized episcopal leadership appears to be a significant innovation which was being opposed by those who favoured a more traditional charismatic structure within the Christian communities of Asia Minor. In his epistles Ignatius tackles two groups of opponents: those with proclivities towards Jewish practices – although not requiring circumcision; and another group who deny the reality of Christ's physical incarnation, suffering and redemption. This latter group may be labelled 'docetic' in the wide sense,[56] as long as it is acknowledged that this term encompasses a spectrum of beliefs and can be evidenced among later groups who also marry docetism with gnostic speculations. For Ignatius it is not even appropriate to call such people Christians. Ignatius shows a limited knowledge of some of the writings that were later part of the New Testament canon. It can only be determined with certainty that he knew the Gospel of Matthew and four Pauline epistles: 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy.

Regardless of whether he is viewed as the suppressor of diversity or the upholder of Christian truth, whether the instigator of a rigid hierarchy or advocate of ordered communities, whether a self-interested power hungry individual or a self-sacrificing humble servant of his master, Ignatius remains the most significant figure from the first half of the second century in the early Christian movement and without grappling with the issues raised in his writings one can never fully understand the development in theology and ecclesial thinking that helped localized charismatic communities transform themselves into a universal church with a vision of their own significance and permanence.

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[55] Foster, 'The Use of the Writings that Later Formed the New Testament in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch'.

[56] See M. Slusser, 'Docetism: A Historical Definition', *Second Century* 1 (1981): 163–72.

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THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CHRISTIANITY

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This massive project, edited by Erwin Fahlbusch, Jan Milic Lochman, John Mbiti, Jaroslav Pelikan and Lukas Fischer, translated by G. W. Bromiley, with statistics by D. B. Barrett (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge UK/Leiden; Boston: W. B. Eerdmans/E. J. Brill), continues its steady biennial progress and has now reached volume 4: P-Sh (2005. £59.95. pp. 984. ISBN 0–8028–2416–1). The previous volumes were reviewed in *Expository Times* (vol. 1 by the then editor, Cyril Rodd in 1999–2000; vol. 2 by John Kent; and vol. 3 by myself as Book of the Month in January 2005).

The coverage is impressively comprehensive, in this volume approximately from Pacifism through to Shiites, but the assessment of strengths and weaknesses, as expressed in my previous review, does still apply. In continuing to sample the present volume from a biblical perspective, there is a rich diet to be enjoyed, from Paul and the Pastoral Epistles to accounts of the Passion, the Sermon on the Mount, and the book of Revelation. Jurgen Roloff's treatment of Paul accepts the authenticity of just seven letters and the historical difficulties that may be caused by Acts, but emphasizes justification by faith rather than any newer perspectives on Paul. Martin Karrer on the Book of Revelation stresses 'the struggle for the present and the future of the saving lordship of God in the face of the current afflictions' (p. 678). Then for the Old Testament there is E. W. Nicholson from Oxford on Pentateuchal Research and Robert Robinson from Philadelphia on the Primeval History and the Patriarchal Narrative. To take a wider view of Christian theory and practice, there are substantial treatments of Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care, Sexuality (including same-sex marriage), as well as Roger Gustavsson on Philosophy of Religion and Stephen Sykes on the theological aspects of the concept of Revelation.

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