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*Edited by*

CYRIL C. RICHARDSON

# Early Christian Fathers

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# Early Christian Fathers

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# *The Letter of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch*

## TO THE EPHESIANS

*Written from Smyrna, where Ignatius and his military guard made a halt on their way to Rome via the northern road to Troas, this is the longest of his letters. Four delegates, including the modest and retiring bishop Onesimus, had been sent by the neighboring Ephesian church to greet and encourage the martyr. One of them, the deacon Burrhus, later accompanied Ignatius as far as Troas, and perhaps acted as his amanuensis (Philad. 11:2).*

*Ignatius takes the occasion to thank the Ephesians for their kindness. While praising them for their unity and orthodoxy, he proceeds to warn them against schism and the prevalent Docetic heresy which was being disseminated by itinerant teachers.*

## THE TEXT

Heartiest greetings of pure joy in Jesus Christ from Ignatius, the “God-inspired,”<sup>8</sup> to the church at Ephesus in Asia.<sup>9</sup> Out of the fullness<sup>10</sup> of God the Father you have been blessed with large numbers and are predestined from eternity to enjoy forever continual and unfading glory. The source of your unity and election is genuine suffering which you undergo by

<sup>8</sup> “Theophorus,” literally “God-bearer.” It is probably not a proper name but an epithet indicating his prophetic gifts. He is “full of God” (cf. Mag., ch. 14). Perhaps the church at Antioch dubbed him thus.

<sup>9</sup> Ephesus, the scene of Paul’s mission and traditionally of John’s later activity, was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. It was, too, the central port of the trade route which joined the Aegean with the East. Hence the reference in ch. 12:2.

<sup>10</sup> The term has a Gnostic ring, *plērōma* referring in later Gnostic systems to the sphere of the divine.

the will of the Father and of Jesus Christ, our God. Hence you deserve to be considered happy.

- 1 I gave a godly welcome to your church which has so endeared itself to us by reason of your upright nature, marked as it is by faith in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and by love of him. You are imitators of God; and it was God's blood that stirred you up once more to do the sort of thing you do naturally and have  
2 now done to perfection. For you were all zeal to visit me when you heard that I was being shipped as a prisoner from Syria for the sake of our common Name<sup>11</sup> and hope. I hope, indeed, by your prayers to have the good fortune to fight with wild beasts  
3 in Rome, so that by doing this I can be a real disciple. In God's name, therefore, I received your large congregation in the person of Onesimus,<sup>12</sup> your bishop in this world,<sup>13</sup> a man whose love is beyond words. My prayer is that you should love him in the spirit of Jesus Christ and all be like him. Blessed is He who let you have such a bishop. You deserved it.
- 2 Now about my fellow slave<sup>14</sup> Burrhus, your godly deacon, who has been richly blessed. I very much want him to stay with me. He will thus bring honor on you and the bishop. Crocus too, who is a credit both to God and to you, and whom I received as a model of your love, altogether raised my spirits (May the Father of Jesus Christ grant him a similar comfort!), as did Onesimus, Burrhus, Euplus, and Fronto. In them I saw and  
2 loved you all. May I always be glad about you, that is, if I deserve to be! It is right, then, for you to render all glory to Jesus Christ, seeing he has glorified you. Thus, united in your submission, and subject to the bishop and the presbytery, you will be real saints.
- 3 I do not give you orders as if I were somebody important. For even if I am a prisoner for the Name, I have not yet reached Christian perfection. I am only beginning to be a disciple, so I address you as my fellow students. I needed your coaching in faith, encouragement, endurance, and patience.  
2 But since love forbids me to keep silent about you, I hasten to urge you to harmonize your actions with God's mind. For Jesus Christ—that life from which we can't be torn—is the Father's mind, as the bishops too, appointed the world over, reflect the mind of Jesus Christ.

<sup>11</sup> I.e., the name of "Christian."

<sup>12</sup> In welcoming Onesimus, Ignatius felt that he received the whole Ephesian church which the bishop represented.

<sup>13</sup> In contrast to their heavenly bishop, Christ.

<sup>14</sup> A Pauline reminiscence. All Christians are slaves of Christ.

Hence you should act in accord with the bishop's mind, as 4  
 you surely do. Your presbytery, indeed, which deserves its  
 name and is a credit to God, is as closely tied to the bishop  
 as the strings to a harp. Wherefore your accord and harmonious  
 love is a hymn to Jesus Christ. Yes, one and all, you should 2  
 form yourselves into a choir,<sup>15</sup> so that, in perfect harmony  
 and taking your pitch from God, you may sing in unison and  
 with one voice to the Father through Jesus Christ. Thus he will  
 heed you, and by your good deeds he will recognize you are  
 members of his Son. Therefore you need to abide in irreproach-  
 able unity if you really want to be God's members forever.

If in so short a time I could get so close to your bishop— 5  
 I do not mean in a natural way, but in a spiritual—how much  
 more do I congratulate you on having such intimacy with  
 him as the Church enjoys with Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ  
 with the Father. That is how unity and harmony come to  
 prevail everywhere. Make no mistake about it. If anyone is 2  
 not inside the sanctuary,<sup>16</sup> he lacks God's bread.<sup>17</sup> And if the  
 prayer of one or two has great avail, how much more that of  
 the bishop and the total Church. He who fails to join in your 3  
 worship shows his arrogance by the very fact of becoming a  
 schismatic. It is written, moreover, "God resists the proud."<sup>18</sup>  
 Let us, then, heartily avoid resisting the bishop so that we may  
 be subject to God.

The more anyone sees the bishop modestly silent, the more 6  
 he should revere him. For everyone the Master of the house  
 sends on his business, we ought to receive as the One who sent  
 him. It is clear, then, that we should regard the bishop as the  
 Lord himself. Indeed, Onesimus spoke very highly of your 2  
 godly conduct, that you were all living by the truth and harbor-  
 ing no sectarianism. Nay, you heed nobody beyond what he  
 has to say truthfully about Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Some, indeed, have a wicked and deceitful habit of flaunting 7  
 the Name about, while acting in a way unworthy of God. You  
 must avoid them like wild beasts. For they are mad dogs which

<sup>15</sup> The many musical metaphors in Ignatius led to the later legend that he had introduced antiphonal singing into the Church (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.*, VI, ch. 8.

<sup>16</sup> The metaphor is taken from that area of the Temple in which faithful Jews gathered for the usual sacrifices. It is contrasted with the outer Court of the Gentiles. The point here is that the true Holy Place is the faithful congregation regularly assembled under its bishop.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. John 6:33.

<sup>18</sup> Prov. 3:34.

<sup>19</sup> Adopting the reading of Lightfoot.

bite on the sly. You must be on your guard against them, for it is hard to heal their bite. There is only one physician—of flesh yet spiritual, born yet unbegotten, God incarnate, genuine life in the midst of death, sprung from Mary as well as God, first subject to suffering then beyond it—Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>20</sup>

- 8 Let no one mislead you, as, indeed, you are not misled, being wholly God's. For when you harbor no dissension that can harass you, then you are indeed living in God's way. A cheap sacrifice<sup>21</sup> I am, but I dedicate myself to you Ephesians—a church forever famous. Carnal people cannot act spiritually,<sup>22</sup> or spiritual people carnally, just as faith cannot act like unbelief, or unbelief like faith. But even what you do in the flesh you do spiritually. For you do everything under Christ's control.<sup>23</sup>
- 9 I have heard that some strangers came your way with a wicked teaching. But you did not let them sow it among you. You stopped up your ears to prevent admitting what they disseminated. Like stones of God's Temple, ready for a building of God the Father, you are being hoisted up by Jesus Christ, as with a crane (that's the cross!), while the rope you use is the Holy Spirit. Your faith is what lifts you up, while love is the way you ascend to God.
- 2 You are all taking part in a religious procession,<sup>24</sup> carrying along with you your God, shrine, Christ, and your holy objects, and decked out from tip to toe in the commandments of Jesus Christ. I too am enjoying it all, because I can talk with you in a letter, and congratulate you on changing your old way of life and setting your love on God alone.

<sup>20</sup> The first of several compact credal statements in Ignatius. While they are stamped with his originality, they doubtless draw upon primitive formulas used in catechetical instruction and baptism.

<sup>21</sup> The term *peripsēma* (scum, filth), which occurs several times in Ignatius, was used of common criminals who were sacrificed in times of adversity to avert the wrath of the gods. Ignatius uses it as an expression of humility and devotion, to refer to his anticipated martyrdom.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:5, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Literally "in Christ," a phrase which has a wide variety of meaning in Ignatius and is derived from Saint Paul. In the latter, as probably here in Ignatius, the underlying idea parallels that of demon possession (cf. Mark 1:23, "in an unclean spirit"). The Christian is "possessed by Christ," is "under his control" and "influence."

<sup>24</sup> An abrupt change of metaphor, suggested by the building of a temple. This time the reference is to a heathen procession—perhaps in honor of the Ephesian Artemis. The devotees would be in festive attire and would carry small shrines and amulets of the goddess.

“Keep on praying”<sup>25</sup> for others too, for there is a chance 10 of their being converted and getting to God. Let them, then, learn from you at least by your actions. Return their bad 2 temper with gentleness; their boasts with humility; their abuse with prayer. In the face of their error, be “steadfast in the faith.”<sup>26</sup> Return their violence with mildness and do not be intent on getting your own back. By our patience let us show 3 we are their brothers, intent on imitating the Lord, seeing which of us can be the more wronged, robbed, and despised. Thus no devil’s weed will be found among you; but thoroughly pure and self-controlled, you will remain body and soul united to Jesus Christ.

The last days are here. So let us abase ourselves and stand in 11 awe of God’s patience, lest it turn out to be our condemnation. Either let us fear the wrath to come or let us value the grace we have: one or the other. Only let our lot be genuine life in Jesus Christ. Do not let anything catch your eye besides him, 2 for whom I carry around these chains—my spiritual pearls! Through them I want to rise from the dead by your prayers. May I ever share in these, so that I may be numbered among the Ephesian Christians who, by the might of Jesus Christ, have always been of one mind with the very apostles. I realize 12 who I am and to whom I am writing. I am a convict; you have been freed. I am in danger; you are safe. You are the route for 2 God’s victims.<sup>27</sup> You have been initiated into the [Christian] mysteries with Paul, a real saint and martyr, who deserves to be congratulated. When I come to meet God may I follow in his footsteps, who in all his letters<sup>28</sup> mentions your union with Christ Jesus.

Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God’s 13 Eucharist and to praise him. For when you meet with frequency, Satan’s powers are overthrown and his destructiveness is undone by the unanimity of your faith. There is nothing better 2 than peace, by which all strife in heaven and earth is done away.

You will not overlook any of this if you have a thorough 14 belief in Jesus Christ and love him. That is the beginning and end of life: faith the beginning and love the end.<sup>29</sup> And

<sup>25</sup> I Thess. 5:17.

<sup>26</sup> Col. 1:23.

<sup>27</sup> Ephesus lay on the route by which criminals from the provinces would be brought to Rome to supply victims for the amphitheater.

<sup>28</sup> An exaggeration of the fact that in several of Paul’s letters he refers to Ephesus and Ephesians.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. I Tim. 1:5.

when the two are united you have God, and everything else that has to do with real goodness is dependent on them. No one who professes faith falls into sin, nor does one who has learned to love, hate. "The tree is known by its fruit."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, those who profess to be Christ's will be recognized by their actions. For what matters is not a momentary act of professing, but being persistently motivated by faith.

15 It is better to keep quiet and be real, than to chatter and be unreal. It is a good thing to teach if, that is, the teacher practices what he preaches. There was one such Teacher, who "spoke and it was done"<sup>31</sup>; and what he did in silence<sup>32</sup> is worthy of the Father. He who has really grasped what Jesus said can appreciate his silence. Thus he will be perfect: his words will mean action, and his very silence will reveal his character.

3 The Lord overlooks nothing. Even secrets are open to him. Let us, then, do everything as if he were dwelling in us. Thus we shall be his temples<sup>33</sup> and he will be within us as our God—as he actually is. This will be clear to us just to the extent that we love him rightly.

16 Make no mistake, my brothers: adulterers will not inherit God's Kingdom.<sup>34</sup> If, then, those who act carnally suffer death, how much more shall those who by wicked teaching corrupt God's faith for which Jesus Christ was crucified. Such a vile creature will go to the unquenchable fire along with anyone who listens to him.

17 The reason the Lord let the ointment be poured on his head was that he might pass on the aroma of incorruption to the Church. Do not be anointed with the foul smell of the teaching of the prince of this world, lest he capture you and rob you of the life ahead of you. Why do we not all come to our senses by accepting God's knowledge, which is Jesus Christ? Why do we stupidly perish, ignoring the gift which the Lord has really sent?

18 I am giving my life (not that it's worth much!)<sup>35</sup> for the cross, which unbelievers find a stumbling block, but which means to us salvation and eternal life. "Where is the wise man? Where is the debater?"<sup>36</sup> Where are the boasts of those supposedly intelligent? For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary, in God's plan being sprung both from the

<sup>30</sup> Matt. 12:33.

<sup>31</sup> Ps. 33:9.

<sup>32</sup> I.e., unobtrusively, and with special reference to his silence at his trial.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. I Cor. 3:16.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. I Cor. 6:9, 10.

<sup>35</sup> See note 21.

<sup>36</sup> I Cor. 1:20.

seed of David<sup>37</sup> and from the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptized that by his Passion he might hallow water.

Now, Mary's virginity and her giving birth escaped the **19** notice of the prince of this world, as did the Lord's death—those three secrets crying to be told, but wrought in God's silence.<sup>38</sup> How, then, were they revealed to the ages? A star<sup>39</sup> **2** shone in heaven brighter than all the stars. Its light was indescribable and its novelty caused amazement. The rest of the stars, along with the sun and the moon, formed a ring around it; yet it outshone them all, and there was bewilderment whence this unique novelty had arisen. As a result all magic **3** lost its power and all witchcraft ceased. Ignorance was done away with, and the ancient kingdom [of evil] was utterly destroyed, for God was revealing himself as a man, to bring newness of eternal life.<sup>40</sup> What God had prepared was now beginning. Hence everything was in confusion as the destruction of death was being taken in hand.

If Jesus Christ allows me, in answer to your prayers, and it **20** is his will, I will explain to you more about [God's] plan in a second letter I intend to write. I have only touched on this plan in reference to the New Man Jesus Christ, and how it involves believing in him and loving him, and entails his Passion and resurrection. I will do this especially if the Lord shows me that **2** you are all, every one of you, meeting together under the influence of the grace that we owe to the Name,<sup>41</sup> in one faith and in union with Christ, who was "descended from David according to the flesh"<sup>42</sup> and is Son of man and Son of God. At these meetings you should heed the bishop and presbytery attentively, and break one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields continuous life in union with Jesus Christ.

I am giving my life for you and for those whom you, to God's **21** honor, sent to Smyrna. I am writing to you from there, giving the Lord thanks and embracing Polycarp and you too in my love. Bear me in mind, as Jesus Christ does you. Pray for the **2** church in Syria, whence I am being sent off to Rome as a prisoner. I am the least of the faithful there—yet I have been privileged to serve God's honor. Farewell in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, our common hope.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Rom. 1:3.

<sup>38</sup> God's modesty and reserve in the incarnation were something for which Satan was unprepared.

<sup>39</sup> An expansion of the story in Matt. 2:2, and influenced by Gen. 37:9.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Rom. 6:4.

<sup>41</sup> I.e., the name of "Christian."

<sup>42</sup> Rom. 1:3.

## TO THE MAGNESIANS

*Like the Ephesians, the Christians at Magnesia (a town some fifteen miles from Ephesus) sent delegates to greet Ignatius in Smyrna. Among them was their youthful bishop, Damas. In his letter to them Ignatius instructs them on not presuming on the youthfulness of their bishop, emphasizes the importance of unity and subjection to the Church officers, and warns them against Judaistic errors.*

### THE TEXT

Every good wish in God the Father and in Jesus Christ from Ignatius, the “God-inspired,” to the church at Magnesia on the Maeander. In Christ Jesus, our Saviour, I greet your church which, by reason of its union with him, is blessed with the favor of God the Father.

1 I was delighted to hear of your well-disciplined and godly love; and hence, impelled by faith in Jesus Christ, I decided  
2 to write to you. Privileged as I am to have this distinguished and godly name,<sup>43</sup> I sing the praises of the churches, even while I am a prisoner. I want them to confess that Jesus Christ, our perpetual Life, united flesh with spirit. I want them, too, to unite their faith with love—there is nothing better than that. Above all, I want them to confess the union of Jesus with the Father. If, with him to support us, we put up with all the spite of the prince of this world and manage to escape, we shall get to God.

2 Yes, I had the good fortune to see you, in the persons of Damas

<sup>43</sup> I.e., Theophorus, “God-inspired.” The point would seem to be that, despite his status as a convict, he makes prophetic utterances in praise of the churches.

your bishop (he's a credit to God!), and of your worthy presbyters, Bassus and Apollonius, and of my fellow slave, the deacon Zotion. I am delighted with him, because he submits to the bishop as to God's grace, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ.

Now, it is not right to presume on the youthfulness of your **3** bishop. You ought to respect him as fully as you respect the authority of God the Father. Your holy presbyters, I know, have not taken unfair advantage of his apparent youthfulness, but in their godly wisdom have deferred to him—nay, rather, not so much to him as to the Father of Jesus Christ, who is everybody's bishop. For the honor, then, of him who loved us, **2** we ought to obey without any dissembling, since the real issue is not that a man misleads a bishop whom he can see, but that he defrauds the One who is invisible. In such a case he must reckon, not with a human being, but with God who knows his secrets.

We have not only to be called Christians, but to *be* Christians. **4** It is the same thing as calling a man a bishop and then doing everything in disregard of him. Such people seem to me to be acting against their conscience, since they do not come to the valid and authorized services.

Yes, everything is coming to an end, and we stand before **5** this choice—death or life—and everyone will go “to his own place.”<sup>44</sup> One might say similarly, there are two coinages, one God's, the other the world's. Each bears its own stamp—unbelievers that of this world; believers, who are spurred by love, the stamp of God the Father through Jesus Christ. And if we do not willingly die in union with his Passion, we do not have his life in us.

I believed, then, that I saw your whole congregation in these **6** people I have mentioned, and I loved you all. Hence I urge you to aim to do everything in godly agreement. Let the bishop preside in God's place, and the presbyters take the place of the apostolic council, and let the deacons (my special favorites) be entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ who was with the Father from eternity and appeared at the end [of the world].

Taking, then, the same attitude as God, you should all **2** respect one another. Let no one think of his neighbor in a carnal way; but always love one another in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Do not let there be anything to divide you, but be in

<sup>44</sup> Acts 1:25.

accord with the bishop and your leaders. Thus you will be an example and a lesson of incorruptibility.

7 As, then, the Lord did nothing without the Father<sup>45</sup> (either on his own or by the apostles) because he was at one with him, so you must not do anything without the bishop and presbyters. Do not, moreover, try to convince yourselves that anything done on your own is commendable. Only what you do together is right. Hence you must have one prayer, one petition, one mind, one hope, dominated by love and unsullied joy—that means you must have Jesus Christ. You cannot have anything better than that.

2 Run off—all of you—to one temple of God, as it were, to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father, while still remaining one with him, and returned to him.

8 Do not be led astray by wrong views or by outmoded tales<sup>46</sup> that count for nothing. For if we still go on observing Judaism, 2 we admit we never received grace. The divine prophets themselves lived Christ Jesus' way. That is why they were persecuted, for they were inspired by his grace to convince unbelievers that God is one, and that he has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ, who is his Word issuing from the silence<sup>47</sup> and who won the complete approval of him who sent him.

9 Those, then, who lived by ancient practices arrived at a new hope. They ceased to keep the Sabbath and lived by the Lord's Day, on which our life as well as theirs shone forth, thanks to Him and his death, though some deny this.<sup>48</sup> Through this mystery we got our faith, and because of it we stand our ground 2 so as to become disciples of Jesus Christ, our sole teacher. How, then, can we live without him when even the prophets, who were his disciples by the Spirit, awaited him as their teacher? He, then, whom they were rightly expecting, raised them from the dead, when he came.<sup>49</sup>

10 We must not, then, be impervious to his kindness. Indeed, were he to act as we do, we should at once be done for. Hence, now we are his disciples, we must learn to live like Christians—to be sure, whoever bears any other name does not belong to 2 God. Get rid, then, of the bad yeast<sup>50</sup>—it has grown stale and

<sup>45</sup> Cf. John 5:19, 30; 8:28.

<sup>46</sup> The reference is to apocryphal Jewish legends and allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament (cf. I Tim. 1:4).

<sup>47</sup> The idea is that by the incarnation God broke his silence, cf. Ignatius, Eph., ch. 19.

<sup>48</sup> A passing allusion to the other current heresy, Docetism.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Matt. 27:52.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. I Cor. 5:7.

sour—and be changed into new yeast, that is, into Jesus Christ. Be salted in him, so that none of you go bad, for your smell will give you away. It is monstrous to talk Jesus Christ 3 and to live like a Jew. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity. People of every tongue have come to believe in it, and so been united together in God.<sup>51</sup>

I do not write in this way, my dear friends, because I have 11 heard that any of you are like that. Rather do I, well aware of my humble position, want to caution you ahead, lest you fall a prey to stupid ideas, and to urge you to be thoroughly convinced of the birth, Passion, and resurrection, which occurred while Pontius Pilate was governor. Yes, all that was actually and assuredly done by Jesus Christ, our Hope. God forbid that any of you should lose it!

I want to be glad about you ever so much, if, that is, I 12 deserve to be. For though I am a prisoner, I cannot compare with one of you who are free. I realize that you are not conceited, for you have Jesus Christ within you. And more, I know you are self-conscious when I praise you, just as Scripture says, “The upright man is his own accuser.”<sup>52</sup>

Make a real effort, then, to stand firmly by the orders of 13 the Lord and the apostles, so that “whatever you do, you may succeed”<sup>53</sup> in body and soul, in faith and love, in Son, Father, and Spirit, from first to last, along with your most distinguished bishop, your presbytery (that neatly plaited spiritual wreath!), and your godly deacons. Defer to the bishop and to one another 2 as Jesus Christ did to the Father in the days of his flesh, and as the apostles did to Christ, to the Father, and to the Spirit. In that way we shall achieve complete unity.

I realize you are full of God. Hence I have counseled you 14 but briefly. Remember me in your prayers, that I may get to God. Remember too the church in Syria—I do not deserve to be called a member of it. To be sure, I need your united and holy prayers and your love, so that the church in Syria may have the privilege of being refreshed by means of your church.

The Ephesians greet you from Smyrna. I am writing to you 15 from there. Like you, they came here for God’s glory and have revived me considerably, as has Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna. The other churches also send their greetings to you in honor of Jesus Christ. Farewell—be at one with God, for you possess an unbreakable spirit, which is what Jesus Christ had.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Isa. 66:18.

<sup>52</sup> Prov. 18:17, LXX. The Hebrew is quite different.

<sup>53</sup> Ps. 1:3, LXX.

## TO THE TRALLIANS

*The Christians at Tralles (a town some seventeen miles east of Magnesia) had sent their bishop, Polybius, to greet Ignatius in Smyrna. His letter in response is characteristic. Its leading themes are unity and obedience to the Church officials—themes provoked by the spreading danger of the Docetic heresy. It contains, too, several flashes that reveal Ignatius' character. Particularly striking is ch. 4, where he discloses his own impetuous and fervent nature which contrasts with the calm gentleness of Polybius.*

### THE TEXT

Full hearty greetings in apostolic style,<sup>54</sup> and every good wish from Ignatius, the “God-inspired,” to the holy church at Tralles in Asia. You are dear to God, the Father of Jesus Christ, elect and a real credit to him, being completely at peace by reason of the Passion of Jesus Christ, who is our Hope, since we shall rise in union with him.

- 1 Well do I realize what a character you have—above reproach and steady under strain. It is not just affected, but it comes naturally to you, as I gathered from Polybius, your bishop. By God's will and that of Jesus Christ, he came to me in Smyrna, and so heartily congratulated me on being a prisoner for Jesus
- 2 Christ that in him I saw your whole congregation. I welcomed, then, your godly good will, which reached me by him, and I gave thanks that I found you, as I heard, to be following God.
- 2 For when you obey the bishop as if he were Jesus Christ, you are (as I see it) living not in a merely human fashion but in Jesus Christ's way, who for our sakes suffered death that you

<sup>54</sup> I.e., in imitation of Paul's inscriptions.

might believe in his death and so escape dying yourselves. It 2 is essential, therefore, to act in no way without the bishop, just as you are doing. Rather submit even to the presbytery as to the apostles of Jesus Christ. He is our Hope,<sup>55</sup> and if we live in union with him now, we shall gain eternal life. Those too who 3 are deacons of Jesus Christ's "mysteries"<sup>56</sup> must give complete satisfaction to everyone. For they do not serve mere food and drink,<sup>57</sup> but minister to God's Church. They must therefore avoid leaving themselves open to criticism, as they would shun fire.

Correspondingly, everyone must show the deacons respect. 3 They represent Jesus Christ, just as the bishop has the role of the Father, and the presbyters are like God's council and an apostolic band. You cannot have a church without these. I am 2 sure that you agree with me in this.

In your bishop I received the very model of your love, and I have him with me. His very bearing is a great lesson, while his gentleness is most forceful. I imagine even the godless respect him.

While I could write about this matter more sharply, I spare 3 you out of love. Since, too, I am a convict, I have not thought it my place to give you orders like an apostle. God has granted 4 me many an inspiration, but I keep my limits, lest boasting should be my undoing. For what I need most at this point is to be on my guard and not to heed flatterers. Those who tell me . . . they are my scourge.<sup>58</sup> To be sure, I am ever so eager 2 to be a martyr, but I do not know if I deserve to be. Many people have no notion of my impetuous ambition. Yet it is all the more a struggle for me. What I need is gentleness by which the prince of this world is overthrown.

Am I incapable of writing to you of heavenly things?<sup>59</sup> 5 No, indeed; but I am afraid to harm you, seeing you are mere babes. You must forgive me, but the chances are you could not accept what I have to say and would choke yourselves. Even in my own case; it is not because I am a prisoner and can 2

<sup>55</sup> Cf. I Tim. 1:1.

<sup>56</sup> I Cor. 4:1.

<sup>57</sup> The reference is primarily to the Eucharist. In Ignatius' time this was still a supper meal, which the deacons served. There is also an allusion to the distribution of charity for which the deacons, under the bishop, were responsible.

<sup>58</sup> What his flatterers said to him is either suppressed by Ignatius from fear of boasting or has fallen out of the text. We might supply, "You are a true martyr."

<sup>59</sup> Cf. I Cor. 3:1, 2.

grasp heavenly mysteries, the ranks of the angels, the array of principalities, things visible and invisible<sup>60</sup>—it is not because of all that that I am a genuine disciple as yet. There is plenty missing, if we are not going to be forsaken by God.

- 6 I urge you, therefore—not I, but Jesus Christ's love—use only Christian food. Keep off foreign fare, by which I mean 2 heresy. For those people mingle Jesus Christ with their teachings just to gain your confidence under false pretenses. It is as if they were giving a deadly poison mixed with honey and wine, with the result that the unsuspecting victim gladly accepts it and drinks down death with fatal pleasure.
- 7 Be on your guard, then, against such people. This you will do by not being puffed up and by keeping very close to [our]<sup>61</sup> God, Jesus Christ, and the bishop and the apostles' precepts. 2 Inside the sanctuary a man is pure; outside he is impure. That means: whoever does anything without bishop, presbytery, and deacons does not have a clear conscience.
- 8 It is not because I have heard of any such thing in your case that I write thus. No, in my love for you I am warning you ahead, since I foresee the devil's wiles. Recapture, then, your gentleness, and by faith (that's the Lord's flesh) and by love (that's Jesus Christ's blood) make yourselves new creatures. 2 Let none of you hold anything against his neighbor. Do not give the heathen opportunities whereby God's people should be scoffed at through the stupidity of a few. For, "Woe to him by whose folly my name is scoffed at before any."<sup>62</sup>
- 9 Be deaf, then, to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David's lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate, and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and 2 died, in the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead, for his Father raised him, just as his Father will raise us, who believe on him, through Christ Jesus, apart from whom we have no genuine life.
- 10 And if, as some atheists (I mean unbelievers) say, his suffering was a sham (it's really *they* who are a sham!), why, then, am I a prisoner? Why do I want to fight with wild beasts? In that case I shall die to no purpose. Yes, and I am maligning the Lord too!
- 11 Flee, then, these wicked offshoots which produce deadly fruit. If a man taste of it, he dies outright. They are none of the 2 Father's planting.<sup>63</sup> For had they been, they would have shown

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Col. 1:16.

<sup>62</sup> Isa. 52:5.

<sup>61</sup> Text uncertain.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Matt. 15:13.

themselves as branches of the cross, and borne immortal fruit. It is through the cross, by his suffering, that he summons you who are his members. A head cannot be born without limbs, since God stands for unity. It is his nature.

From Smyrna I send you my greetings in which the churches **12** of God that are here with me join. They have altogether raised my spirits—yes, completely. My very chains which I carry **2** around for Jesus Christ's sake, in my desire to get to God, exhort you, "Stay united and pray for one another!"

It is right that each one of you and especially the presbyters should encourage the bishop, in honor of the Father, Jesus Christ, and the apostles.

Out of love I want you to heed me, so that my letter will not **3** tell against you. Moreover, pray for me. By God's mercy I need your love if I am going to deserve the fate I long for,<sup>64</sup> and not prove a "castaway."<sup>65</sup>

The Smyrnaeans and Ephesians send their greetings with **13** love. Remember the church of Syria in your prayers. I am not worthy to be a member of it: I am the least of their number. Farewell in Jesus Christ. Submit to the bishop as to [God's] **2** law, and to the presbytery too. All of you, love one another with an undivided heart. My life is given for you, not only now but **3** especially when I shall get to God.<sup>66</sup> I am still in danger. But the Father is faithful: he will answer my prayer and yours because of Jesus Christ. Under his influence may you prove to be spotless.

<sup>64</sup> Text and meaning uncertain.

<sup>65</sup> I Cor. 9:27.

<sup>66</sup> I.e., when I am martyred.

## TO THE ROMANS

*His final letter from Smyrna, Ignatius writes to the church of Rome. Unlike his other letters, this one is not concerned with questions of heresy and Church unity. Rather is it an intensely personal document. In it he reveals most clearly the spirit of the Oriental martyr; and in a double way it is a letter to prepare his martyrdom. It is, on the one hand, a plea to the Romans not to interfere with the fate in store for him; and on the other hand it is, as it were, a letter to himself to brace him for the coming ordeal. It betrays an excess of zeal which is strange to most of us, and even repugnant to some. It must, however, be read in the light of the fact that Ignatius was tormented by the brutality of his Roman guard (his "ten leopards" as he calls them, ch. 5:1), and reacted with the intemperance of a man who had already given his life away. Some will find in the letter a perverted masochism; others will discern in it all the splendor of the martyr spirit. No one, however, will miss its burning sincerity or the courageous zeal of a disciple to suffer with his Lord.*

*The significant place that the Roman church held in the imagination of Ignatius is clear from the flattering inscription, with its emphasis on the extensiveness of that church's charity, and from the mention of Peter and Paul (in that order!) in ch. 4:3.*

## THE TEXT

Greetings in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, from Ignatius, the "God-inspired," to the church that is in charge of affairs in Roman quarters<sup>67</sup> and that the Most High Father

<sup>67</sup> Bizarre as some of Ignatius' expressions are, this one is most perplexing, and has exercised commentators not a little. The Greek is: *prokathētai en topō chōriou Rōmaion*. The words *en topō* might conceivably be taken as

and Jesus Christ, his only Son, have magnificently embraced in mercy and love. You have been granted light both by the will of Him who willed all that is, and by virtue of your believing in Jesus Christ, our God, and of loving him. You are a credit to God: you deserve your renown and are to be congratulated. You deserve praise and success and are privileged to be without blemish. Yes, you rank first in love,<sup>68</sup> being true to Christ's law and stamped with the Father's name.<sup>69</sup> To you, then, sincerest greetings in Jesus Christ, our God, for you cleave to his every commandment—observing not only their letter but their spirit—being permanently filled with God's grace and purged of every stain alien to it.

Since God has answered my prayer to see you godly people, **1** I have gone on to ask for more. I mean, it is as a prisoner for Christ Jesus that I hope to greet you, if indeed it be [God's] will that I should deserve to meet my end.<sup>70</sup> Things are off **2** to a good start. May I have the good fortune to meet my fate without interference! What I fear is your generosity which may prove detrimental to me. For you can easily do what you want to, whereas it is hard for me to get to God unless you let me alone. I do not want you to please men, but to please God,<sup>71</sup> **2** just as you are doing. For I shall never again have such a chance to get to God, nor can you, if you keep quiet, get credit for a finer deed. For if you quietly let me alone, people will see in me God's Word. But if you are enamored of my mere body, I shall, on the contrary, be a meaningless noise. Grant me no **2** more than to be a sacrifice for God while there is an altar at hand. Then you can form yourselves into a choir and sing

"in dignity," and the whole clause rendered: "Which has a precedence of dignity over the district of the Romans." Another suggestion has been to read *Christou for chōriou*: "Which presides over the district of the Romans in the place of Christ." The most usual rendering has been: "Which presides [has the chief seat] in the district of the region of the Romans." This is somewhat barbarous. It also presents an ambiguity: is the presidency exercised over the *whole* Church or only over the district in which the Roman church has its seat? My own rendering is modeled on the phrase *ho topos tēs chōras*, which means "the local circumstances of the district." If, then, the Greek text is correct and *topos* has the sense of "local circumstances," the expression, literally rendered, would be: "Which has the chief seat in the local circumstances of the district of the Romans."

<sup>68</sup> The Roman church was early renowned for its extensive acts of charity.

<sup>69</sup> A reference to the invocation of the Father's name over the Christian in baptism. The implication is that the Christian by sharing the Father's name shares too the Father's generous nature.

<sup>70</sup> I.e., martyrdom.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. I Thess. 2:4.

praises to the Father in Jesus Christ that God gave the bishop of Syria the privilege of reaching the sun's setting when he summoned him from its rising. It is a grand thing for my life to set on the world, and for me to be on my way to God, so that I may rise in his presence.

3 You never grugged anyone. You taught others.<sup>72</sup> So I want you to substantiate the lessons that you bid them heed.

2 Just pray that I may have strength of soul and body so that I may not only talk [about martyrdom], but really want it. It is not that I want merely to be called a Christian, but actually to *be* one. Yes, if I prove to be one, then I can have the name. Then, too, I shall be a convincing Christian only when the

3 world sees me no more. Nothing you can see has real value. Our God Jesus Christ, indeed, has revealed himself more clearly by returning to the Father. The greatness of Christianity lies in its being hated by the world, not in its being convincing to it.

4 I am corresponding with all the churches and bidding them all realize that I am voluntarily dying for God—if, that is, you do not interfere. I plead with you, do not do me an unseasonable kindness. Let me be fodder for wild beasts—that is how I can get to God. I am God's wheat and I am being ground

2 by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ. I would rather that you fawn on the beasts so that they may be my tomb and no scrap of my body be left. Thus, when I have fallen asleep, I shall be a burden to no one. Then I shall be a real disciple of Jesus Christ when the world sees my body no more. Pray Christ for me that by these means I may become

3 God's sacrifice. I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles: I am a convict. They were at liberty: I am still a slave.<sup>73</sup> But if I suffer, I shall be emancipated by Jesus Christ; and united to him, I shall rise to freedom.

Even now as a prisoner, I am learning to forgo my own

5 wishes. All the way from Syria to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, by land and sea, night and day, chained as I am to ten leopards (I mean to a detachment of soldiers), who only get worse the better you treat them. But by their injustices I am becoming a better disciple, "though not for that reason am

2 I acquitted."<sup>74</sup> What a thrill I shall have from the wild beasts that are ready for me! I hope they will make short work of me.

<sup>72</sup> I.e., about martyrdom, Rome being renowned for the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. I Cor. 7:22.

<sup>74</sup> I Cor. 4:4.

I shall coax them on to eat me up at once and not to hold off, as sometimes happens, through fear. And if they are reluctant, I shall force them to it. Forgive me—I know what is good for 3 me. Now is the moment I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing seen or unseen begrudge me making my way to Jesus Christ. Come fire, cross, battling with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil—only let me get to Jesus Christ! Not the 6 wide bounds of earth nor the kingdoms of this world will avail me anything. “I would rather die”<sup>75</sup> and get to Jesus Christ, than reign over the ends of the earth. That is whom I am looking for—the One who died for us. That is whom I want—the One who rose for us. I am going through the pangs of being 2 born. Sympathize with me, my brothers! Do not stand in the way of my coming to life—do not wish death on me. Do not give back to the world one who wants to be God’s; do not trick him with material things. Let me get into the clear light and manhood will be mine. Let me imitate the Passion of my God. 3 If anyone has Him in him, let him appreciate what I am longing for, and sympathize with me, realizing what I am going through.

The prince of this world wants to kidnap me and pervert my 7 godly purpose. None of you, then, who will be there, must abet him. Rather be on my side—that is, on God’s. Do not talk Jesus Christ and set your heart on the world. Harbor no envy. If, 2 when I arrive, I make a different plea, pay no attention to me. Rather heed what I am now writing to you. For though alive, it is with a passion for death that I am writing to you. My Desire<sup>76</sup> has been crucified and there burns in me no passion for material things. There is living water<sup>77</sup> in me, which speaks and says inside me, “Come to the Father.” I take no 3 delight in corruptible food or in the dainties of this life. What I want is God’s bread,<sup>78</sup> which is the flesh of Christ, who came from David’s line<sup>79</sup>; and for drink I want his blood: an immortal love feast indeed!

I do not want to live any more on a human plane. And so it 8 shall be, if you want it to. Want it to, so that you will be wanted! Despite the brevity of my letter, trust my request. Yes, Jesus 2

<sup>75</sup> I Cor. 9:15.

<sup>76</sup> A deliberate pun. Ignatius means both that Christ (on whom his love is set) is crucified, and that all earthly passion has been quelled within himself.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. John 4:10; 7:38.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. John 6:33.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Rom. 1:3.

Christ will clarify it for you and make you see I am really in earnest. He is the guileless mouth by which the Father has spoken truthfully. Pray for me that I reach my goal. I have written prompted, not by human passion, but by God's will. If I suffer, it will be because you favored me. If I am rejected, it will be because you hated me.

9 Remember the church of Syria in your prayers. In my place they have God for their shepherd. Jesus Christ alone will look after them<sup>80</sup>—he, and your love. I blush to be reckoned among them, for I do not deserve it, being the least of them and an afterthought.<sup>81</sup> Yet by his mercy I shall be something, if that is, I get to God.

3 With my heart I greet you; and the churches which have welcomed me, not as a chance passer-by, but in the name of Jesus Christ, send their love. Indeed, even those that did not naturally lie on my route went ahead to prepare my welcome  
10 in the different towns. I am sending this letter to you from Smyrna by those praiseworthy Ephesians.<sup>82</sup> With me, along  
2 with many others, is Crocus—a person very dear to me. I trust you have had word about those who went ahead of me from Syria to Rome for God's glory. Tell them I am nearly there. They are all a credit to God and to you; so you should  
3 give them every assistance. I am writing this to you on the twenty-fourth of August. Farewell, and hold out to the end with the patience of Jesus Christ.

<sup>80</sup> I.e., be their "overseer" or "bishop."

<sup>81</sup> Literally, an "untimely birth," an "abortion," suggested by I Cor. 15:8.

<sup>82</sup> I.e., who will act as postman. It would seem that some of the Ephesian delegation went ahead of Ignatius to Rome.

## TO THE PHILADELPHIANS

*After leaving Smyrna, Ignatius and his guard pressed on to Troas, where they made a halt before crossing by sea to Neapolis. It was from Troas that Ignatius wrote his last three letters. While their themes are the familiar ones of Church unity and heresy, their special importance lies in the fact that they are directed to churches that Ignatius had actually visited. (Philadelphia lay on the route he took from Laodicea to Smyrna.) They, therefore, reflect the issues of false teaching in more detail. The letter to the Philadelphians indicates the nature of the Judaistic errors which had been touched upon in the letter to the Magnesians; while that to the Smyrnaeans enlarges on Docetism.*

*Two friends of Ignatius, the deacons Philo and Rheus Agathopus, seem to have joined him in Troas after a stay in Philadelphia. They brought news of the church there and of the fact that the dissident element had slighted them and also attacked the martyr (chs. 6:3; 11). To answer these charges and to unmask the errors of his opponents, Ignatius wrote his letter. An interesting feature of it is his account of an actual debate he had with the Judaizers (ch. 8:2).*

## THE TEXT

Greetings in the blood of Jesus Christ from Ignatius, the "God-inspired," to the church of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, which is at Philadelphia in Asia—an object of the divine mercy and firmly knit in godly unity. Yours is a deep, abiding joy in the Passion of our Lord; and by his overflowing mercy you are thoroughly convinced of his resurrection. You are the very personification of eternal and perpetual joy. This is especially true if you are at one with the bishop, and with

the presbyters and deacons, who are on his side<sup>83</sup> and who have been appointed by the will of Jesus Christ. By his Holy Spirit and in accordance with his own will he validated their appointment.

- 1 I well realize that this bishop of yours does not owe his ministry to his own efforts or to men. Nor is it to flatter his vanity that he holds this office which serves the common good. Rather does he owe it to the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I have been struck by his charming manner.
- 2 By being silent he can do more than those who chatter. For he is in tune with the commandments as a harp is with its strings.<sup>84</sup> For this reason I bless his godly mind, recognizing its virtue and perfection, and the way he lives in altogether godly composure, free from fitfulness and anger.
- 2 Since you are children of the light of truth, flee from schism and false doctrine. Where the Shepherd is, there follow like 2 sheep.<sup>85</sup> For there are many specious wolves who, by means of wicked pleasures, capture those who run God's race. In the 3 face of your unity, however, they will not have a chance. Keep away from bad pasturage. Jesus Christ does not cultivate it since the Father did not plant it.<sup>86</sup> Not that I found schism 2 among you—rather had you been sifted.<sup>87</sup> As many as are God's and Jesus Christ's, they are on the bishop's side; and as many as repent and enter the unity of the church, they shall be 3 God's, and thus they shall live in Jesus Christ's way. Make no mistake, my brothers, if anyone joins a schismatic he will not inherit God's Kingdom.<sup>88</sup> If anyone walks in the way of heresy, he is out of sympathy with the Passion.
- 4 Be careful, then, to observe a single Eucharist.<sup>89</sup> For there is one flesh of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and one cup of his blood that makes *us* one, and one altar,<sup>90</sup> just as there is one bishop along with the presbytery and the deacons, my

<sup>83</sup> The phrase seems to imply a schism, and that there were some presbyters and deacons who resisted the bishop.

<sup>84</sup> The meaning is not altogether clear.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. John 10:7 ff.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Matt. 15:13.

<sup>87</sup> Literally, "Rather did I find filtering." The idea is that the church had gone through a purge, the heretical element being filtered or sifted out from the genuine Christians.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. I Cor. 6:9, 10.

<sup>89</sup> The implication is that the group of Judaizers held separate Eucharists, perhaps on Saturday instead of Sunday (cf. Mag. 9:1).

<sup>90</sup> The term "altar" implies that the Eucharistic meal had a sacrificial meaning.

fellow slaves. In that way whatever you do is in line with God's will.

My brothers, in my abounding love for you I am overjoyed <sup>5</sup> to put you on your guard—though it is not I, but Jesus Christ. Being a prisoner for his cause makes me the more fearful that I am still far from being perfect.<sup>91</sup> Yet your prayers to God will make me perfect so that I may gain that fate which I have mercifully been allotted, by taking refuge in the "Gospel," as in Jesus' flesh, and in the "Apostles," as in the presbytery of the Church.<sup>92</sup> And the "Prophets," let us love them too,<sup>93</sup> <sup>2</sup> because they anticipated the gospel in their preaching and hoped for and awaited Him, and were saved by believing on him. Thus they were in Jesus Christ's unity. Saints they were, and we should love and admire them, seeing that Jesus Christ vouched for them and they form a real part of the gospel of our common hope.

Now, if anyone preaches Judaism to you,<sup>94</sup> pay no attention <sup>6</sup> to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from one of the circumcision than Judaism from a Gentile.<sup>95</sup> If both, moreover, fail to talk about Jesus Christ, they are to me tombstones and graves of the dead,<sup>96</sup> on which only human names are inscribed. Flee, then, the wicked tricks and snares of the prince <sup>2</sup> of this world, lest his suggestions wear you down, and you waver in your love. Rather, meet together, all of you, with a single heart. I thank my God that in my relations with you I have <sup>3</sup> nothing to be ashamed of. No one can brag secretly or openly that I was the slightest burden to anyone. I trust, too, that none of those I talked to will need to take what I say as a criticism of them.

Some there may be who wanted in a human way to mislead <sup>7</sup> me, but the Spirit is not misled, seeing it comes from God. For "it knows whence it comes and whither it goes,"<sup>97</sup> and exposes what is secret.<sup>98</sup> When I was with you I cried out,

<sup>91</sup> I.e., proximity to martyrdom makes him afraid that his courage will fail him at the crucial hour.

<sup>92</sup> A possible reference to the "Gospel" and the "Apostles" as the two divisions of the Christian writings.

<sup>93</sup> This is an answer to the criticism of the Judaizers that Ignatius was disparaging the Old Testament.

<sup>94</sup> It may be noted that a similar Judaizing movement in Philadelphia is attacked in Rev. 3:9.

<sup>95</sup> Circumcision does not seem to have been included in this Judaizing movement as it had been in Galatia (Gal. 6:12).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Matt. 23:27.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. John 3:8.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. I Cor. 2:10, 11.

raising my voice—it was God’s voice<sup>99</sup>—“Pay heed to the 2 bishop, the presbytery, and the deacons.” Some, it is true, suspected that I spoke thus because I had been told in advance that some of you were schismatics. But I swear by Him for whose cause I am a prisoner, that from no human channels did I learn this. It was the Spirit that kept on preaching in these words: “Do nothing apart from the bishop; keep your bodies as if they were God’s temple; value unity; flee schism; imitate Jesus Christ as he imitated his Father.”

8 I, then, was doing all I could, as a man utterly devoted to unity. Where there is schism and bad feeling, God has no place. The Lord forgives all who repent—if, that is, their repentance brings them into God’s unity and to the bishop’s council. I put my confidence in the grace of Jesus Christ. He will release you from all your chains.<sup>1</sup>

2 I urge you, do not do things in cliques, but act as Christ’s disciples. When I heard some people saying, “If I don’t find it in the original documents, I don’t believe it in the gospel,” I answered them, “But it *is* written there.” They retorted, “That’s just the question.”<sup>2</sup> To my mind it is Jesus Christ who is the original documents. The inviolable archives are his cross and death and his resurrection and the faith that came by him. It is by these things and through your prayers that I want to be justified.

9 Priests are a fine thing, but better still is the High Priest<sup>3</sup> who was entrusted with the Holy of Holies. He alone was entrusted with God’s secrets. He is the door to the Father.<sup>4</sup> Through it there enter Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the prophets and apostles and the Church. All these find their place in God’s

<sup>99</sup> An instance of the “God-inspired’s” prophetic utterances.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Isa. 58:6.

<sup>2</sup> The point of the argument is that the Old Testament is the final court of appeal. It constitutes the “original documents” which validate the gospel. The New Testament, as a book of canonical authority, is still in process of formation. The Bible of the primitive Church is the Septuagint. Hence a point of doctrine turns on the interpretation of Old Testament texts which are viewed as prophetically pointing to Christianity (cf. ch. 5:2). When, however, an impasse is reached in the argument, Ignatius makes the tradition of the gospel the final authority. He thus opens himself to the criticism of disparaging the Old Testament (cf. ch. 5:2).

<sup>3</sup> I.e., Jesus Christ. This reflects the theme elaborated in The Epistle to the Hebrews, but Ignatius is not necessarily dependent on it. It must have been a Christian commonplace.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John 10:7, 9.

unity. But there is something special about the gospel—I 2 mean the coming of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, his Passion and resurrection. The beloved prophets announced his coming; but the gospel is the crowning achievement forever. All these things, taken together, have their value, provided you hold the faith in love.

Thanks to your prayers and to the love that you have for me 10 in Christ Jesus, news has reached me that the church at Antioch in Syria is at peace.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it would be a nice thing for you, as a church of God, to elect a deacon to go there on a mission, as God's representative, and at a formal service to congratulate them and glorify the Name. He who is privileged 2 to perform such a ministry will enjoy the blessing of Jesus Christ, and you too will win glory. If you really want to do this for God's honor, it is not impossible, just as some of the churches in the vicinity have already sent bishops; others presbyters and deacons.<sup>6</sup>

Now about Philo, the deacon from Cilicia. He is well spoken 11 of and right now he is helping me in God's cause, along with Rheus Agathopus—a choice person—who followed me from Syria and so has said good-by to this present life. They speak well of you, and I thank God on your account that you welcomed them, as the Lord does you. I hope that those who slighted them will be redeemed by Jesus Christ's grace. The 2 brothers in Troas send their love and greetings. It is from there that I am sending this letter to you by Burrhus.<sup>7</sup> The Ephesians and Smyrnaeans have done me the honor of sending him to be with me. They in turn will be honored by Jesus Christ, on whom they have set their hope with body, soul, spirit, faith, love, and a single mind. Farewell in Christ Jesus, our common Hope.

<sup>5</sup> The first indication that the persecution in Antioch, which led to Ignatius' condemnation, has blown over. The news seems to have reached him at Troas.

<sup>6</sup> An indication of the deep sense of solidarity that bound together the widely scattered Christian congregations.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek is ambiguous. Burrhus might be either postman or secretary.

## TO THE SMYRNAEANS

*At Smyrna Ignatius had come into personal contact with Docetism. To his mind this presented such an imminent danger to the church there that his letter plunges at once into the theme with a vigorous affirmation of the reality of Christ's Passion and resurrection. Only toward the end of his letter does he refer to the hospitality he had received during his stay. The number of greetings at the conclusion indicate the warm welcome he had been given.*

*It is worthy of notice that he adopts a harsher attitude to the Docetic heretics than to the Judaizers. The former are to be avoided altogether—he will not even mention their names (chs. 4:1; 5:3; 7:2).*

*Another interesting feature of this letter is the first appearance in Christian literature of the phrase "the Catholic Church" (ch. 8:2). It stands for the universal and transcendent Church in contrast to the local congregation.*

## THE TEXT

Heartiest greetings in all sincerity and in God's Word from Ignatius, the "God-inspired," to the church of God the Father and the beloved Jesus Christ, which is at Smyrna in Asia. By God's mercy you have received every gift; you abound in faith and love, and are lacking in no gift.<sup>8</sup> You are a wonderful credit to God and real saints.<sup>9</sup>

1 I extol Jesus Christ, the God who has granted you such wisdom. For I detected that you were fitted out with an unshak-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. I Cor. 1:7.

<sup>9</sup> The word literally means "bearer of sacred objects," and is taken from heathen ceremonial; cf. Ignatius, Eph. 9:2. The sacred objects here would be their virtues.

able faith, being nailed, as it were, body and soul to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and being rooted in love by the blood of Christ. Regarding our Lord, you are absolutely convinced that on the human side he was actually sprung from David's line,<sup>10</sup> Son of God according to God's will and power, actually born of a virgin, baptized by John, that "all righteousness might be fulfilled by him,"<sup>11</sup> and actually crucified for us in the flesh, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch. (We are part of His fruit which grew out of his most blessed Passion.)<sup>12</sup> And thus, by his resurrection, he raised a standard<sup>13</sup> to rally his saints and faithful forever—whether Jews or Gentiles—in one body of his Church.<sup>14</sup> For it was for our sakes<sup>2</sup> that he suffered all this, to save us. And he genuinely suffered, as even he genuinely raised himself. It is not as some unbelievers say, that his Passion was a sham. It's they who are a sham! Yes, and their fate will fit their fancies—they will be ghosts and apparitions.

For myself, I am convinced and believe that even after the resurrection he was in the flesh. Indeed, when he came to Peter<sup>2</sup> and his friends, he said to them, "Take hold of me, touch me and see that I am not a bodiless ghost."<sup>15</sup> And they at once touched him and were convinced, clutching his body and his very breath. For this reason they despised death itself, and proved its victors. Moreover, after the resurrection he ate and drank with them<sup>16</sup> as a real human being, although in spirit he was united with the Father.

I urge these things on you, my friends, although I am well<sup>4</sup> aware that you agree with me. But I warn you in advance against wild beasts in human shapes. You must not only refuse to receive them, but if possible, you must avoid meeting them. Just pray for them that they may somehow repent, hard as that is. Yet Jesus Christ, our genuine life, has the power to bring it about. If what our Lord did is a sham, so is my being in chains.<sup>2</sup> Why, then, have I given myself up completely to death, fire, sword, and wild beasts? For the simple reason that near the sword means near God. To be with wild beasts means to be with God. But it must all be in the name of Jesus Christ. To

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rom. 1:3.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Matt. 3:15.

<sup>12</sup> Ignatius changes his metaphors with alarming abruptness. The cross here is a tree; in the next sentence it is a military rallying standard.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Isa. 5:26; 11:12.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Eph. 2:16.

<sup>15</sup> A possible allusion to Luke 24:39. The latter part of the saying occurs in The Preaching of Peter and in The Gospel According to the Hebrews.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Acts. 10:41.

share in his Passion I go through everything, for he who became the perfect man gives me the strength.<sup>17</sup>

5 Yet in their ignorance some deny him—or rather have been denied by him, since they advocate death rather than the truth. The prophets and the law of Moses have failed to convince them—nay, to this very day the gospel and the sufferings of each one of us have also failed, for they class our sufferings with  
2 Christ's.<sup>18</sup> What good does anyone do me by praising me and then reviling my Lord by refusing to acknowledge that he carried around live flesh? He who denies this has completely  
3 disavowed him and carries a corpse around. The names of these people, seeing they are unbelievers, I am not going to write down. No, far be it from me even to recall them until they repent and acknowledge the Passion, which means our resurrection.

6 Let no one be misled: heavenly beings, the splendor of angels, and principalities, visible and invisible, if they fail to believe in Christ's blood, they too are doomed. "Let him accept it who can."<sup>19</sup> Let no one's position swell his head, for faith and love are everything—there is nothing preferable to them.

2 Pay close attention to those who have wrong notions about the grace of Jesus Christ, which has come to us, and note how at variance they are with God's mind. They care nothing about love: they have no concern for widows or orphans, for the oppressed, for those in prison or released, for the hungry or the  
7 thirsty. They hold aloof from the Eucharist and from services of prayer, because they refuse to admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ,<sup>20</sup> which suffered for our sins and which, in his goodness, the Father raised [from the dead]. Consequently those who wrangle and dispute God's gift face death. They would have done better to love and so share  
2 in the resurrection. The right thing to do, then, is to avoid such people and to talk about them neither in private nor in public. Rather pay attention to the prophets and above all to the gospel. There we get a clear picture of the Passion and see that the resurrection has really happened.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Phil. 4:13.

<sup>18</sup> Literally, "They have the same idea about us." The sense would seem to be that Christian martyrdom is meaningless as an imitation of the Christ if he never really suffered.

<sup>19</sup> Matt. 19:12.

<sup>20</sup> It is not clear whether the Docetics abandoned the Eucharistic rite altogether, or whether they held separate Eucharists, giving them a different meaning to suit their views.

Flee from schism as the source of mischief. You should all **8** follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father. Follow, too, the presbytery as you would the apostles; and respect the deacons as you would God's law. Nobody must do anything that has to do with the Church without the bishop's approval. You should regard that Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Where the **2** bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. Without the bishop's supervision, no baptisms or love feasts are permitted. On the other hand, whatever he approves pleases God as well. In that way everything you do will be on the safe side and valid. It is well for us to come to our senses at last, while **9** we still have a chance to repent and turn to God. It is a fine thing to acknowledge God and the bishop. He who pays the bishop honor has been honored by God. But he who acts without the bishop's knowledge is in the devil's service.

By God's grace may you have an abundance of everything! **2** You deserve it. You have brought me no end of comfort; may Jesus Christ do the same for you! Whether I was absent or present, you gave me your love. May God requite you! If for his sake you endure everything, you will get to him.

It was good of you to welcome Philo and Rheus Agathopus **10** as deacons of the Christ God. They accompanied me in God's cause, and they thank the Lord on your behalf that you provided them every comfort. I can assure you you will lose nothing by it. Prisoner as I am, I am giving my life for you— **2** not that it's worth much! You did not scorn my chains and were not ashamed of them.<sup>21</sup> Neither will Jesus Christ be ashamed of you. You can trust him implicitly!

Your prayers have reached out as far as the church at Antioch **11** in Syria. From there I have come, chained with these magnificent chains, and I send you all greetings. I do not, of course, deserve to be a member of that church, seeing I am the least among them. Yet it was [God's] will to give me the privilege—not, indeed, for anything I had done of my own accord, but by his grace. Oh, I want that grace to be given me in full measure, that by your prayers I may get to God! Well, then, so that your **2** own conduct may be perfect on earth and in heaven, it is right that your church should honor God by sending a delegate in his name to go to Syria and to congratulate them on being at peace, on recovering their original numbers, and on having

<sup>21</sup> Cf. II Tim. 1:16.

3 their own corporate life restored to them. To my mind that is what God would want you to do: to send one of your number with a letter, and thus join with them in extolling the calm which God has granted them, and the fact that they have already reached a haven, thanks to your prayers. Seeing you are perfect, your intentions must be perfect as well.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, if you want to do what is right, God stands ready to give you his help.

12 The brothers in Troas send their love to you. From there I am sending this letter to you by Burrhus. You joined with your Ephesian brothers in sending him to be with me, and he has altogether raised my spirits. I wish everyone would be like him, since he is a model of what God's ministry should be. God's 2 grace will repay him for all he has done for me. Greetings to your bishop <sup>23</sup> (he is such a credit to God!), and to your splendid presbytery and to my fellow slaves the deacons, and to you all, every one of you, in Jesus Christ's name, in his flesh and blood, in his Passion and resurrection, both bodily and spiritual, and in unity—both God's and yours. Grace be yours, and mercy, peace, and endurance, forever.

13 Greetings to the families of my brothers, along with their wives and children, and to the virgins enrolled with the widows.<sup>24</sup> I bid you farewell in the Father's power. Philo, 2 who is with me, sends you greetings. Greetings to Tavia's family. I want her to be firmly and thoroughly grounded in faith and love. Greetings to Alce, who means a great deal to me, and to the inimitable Daphnus and to Eutecnus and to each one of you. Farewell in God's grace.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Phil. 3:15.

<sup>23</sup> I.e., Polycarp, to whom the following letter is addressed.

<sup>24</sup> The meaning is not altogether clear. It appears, however, that the order of widows, established for works of charity (cf. I Tim. 5:9), sometimes included virgins.

## TO POLYCARP

*Along with the letter to the church of Smyrna, Ignatius wrote to its bishop, Polycarp. One of the most distinguished figures of the Early Church, who crowned his old age with martyrdom, Polycarp had given Ignatius a generous welcome which the latter mentions in other letters (Eph., ch. 21; Mag., ch. 15). This is an intimate and personal letter—the shortest of them all. Polycarp was the younger of the two men, perhaps in his early forties, and Ignatius is characteristically forthright in his advice. That the latter was most highly regarded by the bishop of Smyrna is clear from his own letter to the Philippians and from his making a collection of Ignatius' correspondence (Polycarp, Phil., ch. 13).*

*The sense of Christian solidarity which bound together the local churches is evident from the various delegations which Ignatius received in Smyrna. The suggestion, however, in the letter to the Philadelphians and repeated in this one to Polycarp, that the churches should send delegates as far as Syrian Antioch to congratulate the Christians on the cessation of persecution, is a telling witness to the universal consciousness of the local congregations. In a day when travel was neither easy nor free from danger, the dispatching of such messengers reflects the deep unity of the Christian brotherhood.*

## THE TEXT

Heartiest greetings from Ignatius, the “God-inspired,” to Polycarp, who is bishop of the church at Smyrna—or rather who has God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ for his bishop.

While I was impressed with your godly mind, which is fixed, 1  
as it were, on an immovable rock, I am more than grateful  
that I was granted the sight of your holy face. God grant I may 2

never forget it! By the grace which you have put on, I urge you to press forward in your race and to urge everybody to be saved. Vindicate your position by giving your whole attention to its material and spiritual sides.<sup>25</sup> Make unity your concern—there is nothing better than that. Lend everybody a hand, as the Lord does you. “Out of love be patient”<sup>26</sup> with everyone, as indeed you are. Devote yourself to continual prayer. Ask for increasing insight. Be ever on the watch by keeping your spirit alert. Take a personal interest in those you talk to, just as God does. “Bear the diseases”<sup>27</sup> of everyone, like an athlete in perfect form. The greater the toil, the greater the gain.

2 It is no credit to you if you are fond of good pupils. Rather by your gentleness subdue those who are annoying. Not every wound is healed by the same plaster. Relieve spasms of pain with poultices. In all circumstances be “wise as a serpent,” and perpetually “harmless as a dove.”<sup>28</sup> The reason you have a body as well as a soul is that you may win the favor of the visible world.<sup>29</sup> But ask that you may have revelations of what is unseen. In that way you will lack nothing and have an abundance of every gift.

3 Just as pilots demand winds and a storm-tossed sailor a harbor, so times like these demand a person like you. With your help we will get to God. As God’s athlete, be sober. The prize, as you very well know, is immortality and eternal life. Bound as I am with chains that you kissed,<sup>30</sup> I give my whole self for you—cheap sacrifice though it is!

3 You must not be panic-stricken by those who have an air of credibility but who teach heresy.<sup>31</sup> Stand your ground like an anvil under the hammer. A great athlete must suffer blows to conquer. And especially for God’s sake must we put up with everything, so that he will put up with us. Show more enthusiasm than you do. Mark the times. Be on the alert for him who is above time, the Timeless, the Unseen, the One who became

<sup>25</sup> The reference is to the double nature of the episcopal office in the Early Church. The bishop was at once the guardian of the common chest fund for the needy and the spiritual father of his congregation.

<sup>26</sup> Eph. 4:2.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 8:17.

<sup>28</sup> Matt. 10:16.

<sup>29</sup> The idea would seem to be that having a body leads one to seek a proper harmony with all persons and things belonging to the material world. This sentiment is the opposite of the Docetic, which saw in matter the source of evil.

<sup>30</sup> It is possible that the faithful kissed the chains of the martyr, though a more general sense (“the chains which you did not despise and in which you delighted”) may be intended.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. I Tim. 1:3; 6:3.

visible for our sakes, who was beyond touch and passion, yet who for our sakes became subject to suffering, and endured everything for us.

Widows must not be neglected. After the Lord you must be 4 their protector. Do not let anything be done without your consent; and do not do anything without God's, as indeed you do not. Stand firm. Hold services more often. Seek out every- 2 body by name. Do not treat slaves and slave girls contempt- 3 tuously.<sup>32</sup> Neither must they grow insolent. But for God's glory they must give more devoted service, so that they may obtain from God a better freedom. Moreover, they must not be over- anxious to gain their freedom at the community's expense, lest they prove to be slaves of selfish passion. Flee from such 5 wicked practices—nay, rather, preach against them.

Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be altogether contented with their husbands. Similarly urge my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ "to love their wives as the Lord loves the Church."<sup>33</sup> If anyone can live in chastity for the honor of 2 the Lord's flesh, let him do so without ever boasting. If he boasts of it, he is lost; and if he is more highly honored than the bishop, his chastity is as good as forfeited. It is right for men and women who marry to be united with the bishop's approval. In that way their marriage will follow God's will and not the promptings of lust. Let everything be done so as to advance God's honor.

Pay attention to the bishop so that God will pay attention 6 to you. I give my life as a sacrifice. (poor as it is) for those who are obedient to the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons. Along with them may I get my share of God's reward! Share your hard training together—wrestle together, run together, suffer together, go to bed together, get up together, as God's stewards, assessors, and assistants. Give satisfaction to Him in 2 whose ranks you serve and from whom you get your pay.<sup>34</sup> Let none of you prove a deserter. Let your baptism be your arms; your faith, your helmet; your love, your spear; your endurance, your armor.<sup>35</sup> Let your deeds be your deposits, so that you will eventually get back considerable savings.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cf. I Tim. 6:2.

<sup>33</sup> Eph. 5:25, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. II Tim. 2:4.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Eph. 6:11-17.

<sup>36</sup> The metaphor is taken from the custom of withholding from soldiers a part of their wages and depositing it in a savings bank, from which they were paid on their discharge. The military metaphors in this passage, and the curious number of Latin words, are due to the fact that Ignatius had a guard of ten Roman soldiers.

Be patient, then, and gentle with each other, as God is with you. May I always be happy about you!

7 News has reached me that, thanks to your prayers, the church at Antioch in Syria is now at peace. At this I have taken new courage and, relying on God, I have set my mind at rest—assuming, that is, I may get to God through suffering, and at the resurrection prove to be your disciple. So, my dear Polycarp (and how richly God has blessed you!), you ought to call a most religious council and appoint somebody whom you regard as especially dear and diligent, and who can act as God's messenger. You should give him the privilege of going to Syria and of advancing God's glory by extolling your untiring generosity. A Christian does not control his own life, but gives his whole time to God. This is God's work, and when you have completed it, it will be yours as well. For God's grace gives me confidence that you are ready to act generously when it comes to his business. It is because I am well aware of your earnest sincerity that I limit my appeal to so few words.

8 I have been unable to write to all the churches because I am sailing at once (so God has willed it) from Troas to Neapolis. I want you, therefore, as one who has the mind of God, to write to the churches ahead and to bid them to do the same. Those who can should send representatives, while the others should send letters by your own delegates. In that way you will win renown, such as you deserve, by an act that will be remembered forever.

2 Greetings to every one of you personally, and to the widow of Epitropus<sup>37</sup> with her children and her whole family. Greetings to my dear Attalus. Greetings to the one who is to be chosen to go to Syria. Grace will ever be with him and with Polycarp who sends him. I bid you farewell as always in our God, Jesus Christ. May you abide in him and so share in the divine unity and be under God's care. Greetings to Alce, who means a great deal to me. Farewell in the Lord.

<sup>37</sup> It is possible that Epitropus is not a proper name but a title, so that the phrase means "the widow of the procurator."