The Bishop of Antioch and the Heretics: A Study of a Primitive Christology

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Mr. Saliba, who is involved in lay ministry in Stoney Creek, Ontario, tells us that the following study arose from some research into early church christology for the benefit of lay people. His essay is of particular interest at a time when the place of the doctrine of the incarnation in early Christianity — and in modern — is the subject of lively debate.

Our knowledge of Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch is confined almost exclusively to the seven letters he wrote on his way to martyrdom in Rome early in the second century AD.[1] Those letters were addressed to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia, Rome and Smyrna and to Polycarp, the Bishop of that city. With the exception of the last two, the christology contained in those letters was spelled out to a great extent in the course of a polemic against heretical groups that were active in those ancient churches. The writer's intent was to confirm the Christians in their faith and to express his gratitude for those who sent delegates to meet him on his way from Antioch to Rome, but most importantly, to sound a warning against the errors of Docetism whose advocates were seeking followers among the believers and, in many cases, causing division amongst them.[2] Interestingly enough, it is from his persistent attacks against the teachings of the Docetists that we learn the major characteristics of the Bishop's theology, a theology which is decidedly christological in its orientation. Docetism, typically characterizing Gnosticism in the days of the early church and later in its elaborate developments, revealed its most dreadful errors when focusing on the person of Jesus Christ.[3] Attacking and defying the advocates of

[1] There is no space in this short article for the details surrounding the literary controversy over the genuineness of the Ignatian Epistles. For an excellent and comprehensive study of the whole question see J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1885), Vol. II, Sect. 1, 1-360. For a short and useful treatment see Milton Perry Brown, *The Authentic Writings of Ignatius: A Study of Linguistic Criteria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1962). The consensus of scholars is in favour of the authenticity of the seven letters. The English text followed in this paper is that which appears in C. C. Richardson, *et. al.*, eds. and trans., *The Early Church Fathers*, Vol. I (London: S.C.M. Press, 1953).

[2] See Phil. 7:2; Trall. 11:1,2; Smyr. 8:1; *cf.* also Rom. 3:2.

[3] There are many excellent accounts of the rise of Gnosticism in the early church. Such is Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. N. Buchanan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1901), Vol. I, 222-317, and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd ed. rev. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963). For a short treatment see Rudolf Bultmann,

this doctrine formed the basis of a polemic which in turn set forth a christology of an important father of the primitive church.

The Ignatian letters contain other important matters of concern to the writer such as the unity of the church, obedience to the bishop, the holy sacraments, martyrdom, discipleship, church order and others. However, it is significant that a considerable portion of these writings deals with the human and divine aspects of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems that a fresh consideration of these two aspects of the life of the Lord might prove rewarding in the light of persistent inquiries into the nature of early Christianity and its beliefs about its founder. This is especially true since the Bishop of Antioch is considered to be a witness of the highest standing to the actual teachings of the apostles and the primitive church.

In a manner characteristic of Hellenistic civilization, the controversial groups Ignatius encountered were influenced by both Greek and Jewish thinking.[4] We know that the earliest converts to Christianity came predominantly from a Jewish background. But as the infant church grew and spread in the Hellenistic world, it began to attract men
66 of Greek culture who sought to incorporate their new faith into a comprehensive view of the world.

It is not clear exactly how the notion developed among the intel-

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Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 162-174. Much of our knowledge of the Gnostics used to come from the early church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Clement, Epiphanius and Tertullian who in the process of refuting them gave us a detailed account of their different sects and what they believed. But now we know a great deal more from the Gnostics themselves through the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi. An excellent assessment of these texts is given by Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion*, trans. Phillip Mairet (London: Hollins and Carter, 1960), and by James M. Robinson, 'The Gnostic Library Today', *NTS*, 14 (1967-68), 356-401. Robinson has lately edited the expanded book, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977).

4 There has always been a diversity of opinion as to the number of heretical groups Ignatius was combating (or more accurately the number of the different heretical tendencies since obviously there were several groups as mentioned by Ignatius himself, e.g. Trall. 11). Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, 55ff. and 173 says there was only one. C. C. Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 51-54 and 79-85, says there were two distinct groups. Virginia Corwin in her scholarly work, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 52-87, says there were three and probably more. Einar Molland, 'The Heretics Combated by Ignatius of Antioch', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 5 (1954) argues, in agreement with Lightfoot, that there was only one group namely the Docetists but who had Judaising tendencies. We favour this opinion in view of Mag. 8:1; 10:3; and 11.

lectual believers that evil is an inherent quality of the material world except for us to surmise that the dualistic view which prevailed among them forbade them from attributing the creation of the material world, standing in contrast to the spiritual world, to the ultimate God of goodness. The subject of the origin and nature of evil, hardly avoidable in any theological formulation, must have engaged their thinking early, and led them to seek the aid of philosophy to account for it. Hippolytus, the early third-century heresiologist explains that this was the philosophy advocated by the ancient Greek sophists.[5] Sometimes this position is referred to as Middle Platonism. These intellectuals proceeded from this premise but were soon confronted with the serious problem regarding the divine nature of Jesus Christ. From their perspective the question was: 'How could the Holy Saviour enter the realm of evil matter and possess a physical body?' No doubt their elevated view of the founder of their faith prohibited them from entertaining such a possibility. The problem was resolved by drawing a sharp distinction between the man Jesus and the divine Christ and denying that the latter did in fact enter the realm of the material world. According to their understanding he had done so only in appearance (*dokein*, hence the name Docetism). Such a conclusion reached by people who presumably were earnestly trying to work out their views of the human and divine aspects of the life of the Lord seemed plausible and sincere enough but the church was soon to condemn such thinking as heretical.

Although many of the early Gnostic leaders came from a Samaritan background, it is commonly accepted that Judaism contributed to the development of their thinking.[6] Also, it is likely that the Gnostics in Asia Minor with whom Ignatius came in close contact knew Judaism mainly through the Christian Church. In the Jewish Bible, which was the scripture of the early church, they found much support for their hypotheses. Their hermeneutic, indicative of their temperament, was as daring as their free imaginations growing out of a fascination in transforming the

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[5] Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies*, Bk. VIII, 4 (trans. W. T. Macmahon, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 120. Hippolytus traced the origins of Gnosticism and we have no reason to doubt the accuracy of his account. He was a disciple of Polycarp the contemporary of Ignatius.

[6] Jewish thought might be more related to Greek Gnosticism than is commonly acknowledged or than needs to be demonstrated here. Jean Daniélou has established the connection quite firmly in *The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, Vol. I, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. and ed. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964). In its late and developed forms Gnosticism was greatly indebted to Jewish mystic thought. See Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960). Note 65ff.

concrete figures of the biblical narratives, especially in the book of Genesis, into philosophic speculations or psychological phenomena.[7] The sin of Adam was taken to symbolize the downcast of the divine principle into the material world. The account of the creation, the giving of the Mosaic law and the conquest of Canaan were considered to contain mysteries hidden from the ordinary Christians but revealed through the imparting of *Gnosis*. This *Gnosis*, they claimed, provided release and freedom from the flesh and the material world.[8] The milk and honey of Canaan were regarded as symbols of the privileges bestowed upon the initiates. From Messianic passages in the Old Testament such as Isaiah 53:2 which the early Christians applied to Jesus, they concluded that the Saviour must be an intangible, unbegotten, heavenly being free from the limitations of humanity.

From the extensive accounts left us by early Christian apologists, we see that almost every Gnostic sect had made desperate attempts to support its convictions not only from the Old Testament but also from the teachings of Jesus. Irenaeus sums it up this way:

> They endeavour to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support.[9]

Although it is generally agreed now that Gnosticism as a definite phenomenon does not predate Christianity, it is certain that from its earliest days it was open to a variety of influences, and at best represents an attempt to assimilate elements of mythology, philosophy, science and religion. Syrian Gnosticism certainly sought to bring together Gentile and Jewish traditions even as early as the time of Ignatius. The schools of Menander, Saturninus, Cerdo and Basilides flourished in the bishop's cosmopolitan home-town and it is only reasonable to assume that he was familiar with them. Except perhaps for the Basilideans, it is probable that in the city where the believers were called 'Christians' first, those groups preferred to be known as 'Gnostic Christians' or perhaps just Gnostics deleting the name of Christ altogether (Mag. 10:1). This would have been convenient at times of persecution since they saw no virtue in

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[7] Esoteric interpretations of Genesis were found even in Orthodox Judaism, not to mention Philo of Alexandria. See R. McL. Wilson, 'Gnostic Origins Again', *Vigil. Christ.*, 2 (1957), 93-110.

[8] See R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 12ff.

[9] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Chapter VIII, 1, *A.N.F.*, 326.

suffering and, we are told, it was 'impossible that they should suffer on account of a mere name'.[10]

Against the docetic tendencies of Gnosticism Ignatius sets forth the incarnation as a central tenet of the Christian faith and asserts the coming of Jesus in the flesh. In his letter to the Trallians (9:1-2) he warns: 'Be deaf, then, to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David's lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate and drank . . .' To deny this is to deny the whole of the Christian faith. According to Irenaeus, Saturninus had '. . . laid it down as truth, that the Saviour was without birth, without body, and without figure, but was, by supposition, a visible man . . .'[11] But for Ignatius Christ appeared on the scene of human history as man and his ancestry could be documented. He was truly born of a mother like all human babies and needed nourishment to grow. The Ignatian term 'really', *alethos*, is clearly polemical, which J. B. Lightfoot calls 'the watch-word against Docetism'.[12] It is interesting that Ignatius brings together antithetical qualities in a way not dissimilar to that of the Gnostics and speaks of Christ, as here being 'born' and in another place as 'unbegotten' (Eph. 20:2). It was in God's time that Jesus Christ, the One who is 'above time, the Timeless, the Unseen . . . became visible . . .' (Poly. 3:2; Smyr. 2-5; Trall. 10; Eph. 7:2; etc.). Surely anyone who refuses to acknowledge that Christ 'carried around live flesh' is utterly misled; unworthy of the fellowship of the church and he himself 'carries a corpse around' (Smyr. 5:2).[13]

Although the coming of Jesus into the world was a unique event in itself, yet it is an event not dissociated with the past. At this point, Ignatius invokes the traditional apostolic preaching which proclaimed that the life of Jesus was a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. The Hebrew prophets lived in anticipation of Christ (Mag. 8:2), he says, and were his spiritual disciples (Mag. 9:2). For his sake they were persecuted 'to convince the unbelievers' (Mag. 8:2). Jesus was the door to the Father through whom 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' entered (Phil. 9:1). The prophets even 'anticipated the gospel in their preaching and hoped for and awaited him, and were saved by believing on him' (Phil. 9:2).

These references might not be altogether clear especially as to how did the prophets 'anticipate' Christ and his gospel but they do serve to underline a fundamental concern of the bishop. To him the life of Jesus

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[10] *Ibid.*, 350.

[11] *Ibid.*, 349.

[12] J. B. Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, 173. Notice also Mag. 11; Smyr. 1:2.

[13] Hippolytus, *op. cit.*, VIII, 4, p.120, mocks them in the same way when he states the teachings of the 'Docete': 'Now we consider that some of these are acting foolishly we will not say in appearance, but in reality.'

was not an event in isolation; it was a continuation of what is sometimes called Salvation History: Jesus Christ is linked to the past because he was of David's lineage and came according to the prophets. These assertions would not have been necessary had the Gnostics not derived peculiar notions from the Hebrew prophets. St. Ignatius declares the traditional orthodox teachings of the church about Christ,[14] and, further, as noted by Einar Molland,[15] he exercises an apologetic device of using similar arguments to those used by the heretics while reaching exactly opposite conclusions. According to Hippolytus, Saturninus and Basilides taught that the Saviour was 'supposed to be unbegotten and incorporeal, and devoid of figure'.[16] Differentiating between the man Jesus and the heavenly Christ they denied that the latter had a history. To Ignatius this is a false distinction because Jesus Christ is but One (Mag. 7:2).[17] Unfortunately, as we might surmise, Ignatius writing under very difficult circumstances did not have the time to present us with a developed explanation of the events in the life of Jesus as they relate to the future, nor of the mystery of the incarnation. The latter is stated as a fact that took place in human history on the human level. He simply affirms the
70 Gospel which he defines as 'the coming of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, his Passion and resurrection' (Phil. 9:2), in contrast to the definition of Basilides that the Gospel is the 'knowledge' of 'supermundane entities'.[18] No doctrine of the heavenly Christ could be formulated if not based on the historical Jesus and therefore any Gnostic system that denied that Jesus Christ truly was flesh and blood is defective and heretical.

There is no doubt in the mind of Ignatius of the reality and importance of the death and resurrection of our Lord. It is through his death that we obtain salvation and not through the imparting of *Gnosis*. The reality of Christ's suffering was, of course, denied by the Docetists and

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14 Some scholars deny that there was a well defined 'orthodox faith' at the time of Ignatius. Such are the positions of F. C. Burkitt, *Church and Gnosis: A Study of Christian Thought and Speculation in the Second Century* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1932) and Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ET (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). They argue that the christology of the church had not as yet been cast in a definite form. This position is hard to accept in view of the definite elements that constitute the Apostolic traditions about Jesus preserved in the New Testament. There is little doubt that Ignatius' faith fully and consciously perpetuates the Apostolic tradition.

15 E. Molland, *op. cit.*, 6.

16 Hippolytus, *op. cit.*, VII, 16 (p.109). He writes 'Saturnilus'.

17 V. Corwin, *op. cit.*, 94, 95 draws a substantial list of the facts pertaining to the historical life of Jesus thus indicating clearly the importance Ignatius assigned to them.

18 Hippolytus, *op. cit.*, VII, 15 (p.108).

doubted by some of the Christians who were in contact with them. He warns the Christians:

> . . . those people mingle Jesus Christ with their teachings just to gain your confidence under false pretences. 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 (Trall. 6:2).

The fact that Jesus had a divine origin does not contradict the reality of his sufferings and resurrection. Jesus Christ 'who was beyond touch and passion . . . became subject to suffering . . .' (Poly. 3:2) and 'was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died' (Trall. 9:1). Or, in another place, 'actually crucified for us in the flesh, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch' (Smyr. 1:1).[19] The purpose of his suffering was for our sake and for our redemption.

> For it was for our sakes that He suffered all this, to save us . . . 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 (Smyr. 2).

The idea of a suffering Messiah was unthinkable to the Jewish mind,[20] and if among those Docetists there were converts of a Jewish background then by maintaining that the body of Christ was illusionary they would get over such a stumbling block. Like Paul, Ignatius speaks of the cross as an offence to the unbelievers but to those who believe it is 'salvation and eternal life' (Eph. 8:4).

The death of Jesus, along with the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing, are considered three mysteries hidden from the devil. This is almost the extent of Ignatius' incarnation theology, a theology which must have seemed like kindergarten lessons compared to the elaborate conjectures of Saturninus or later the 'immense development(s)'[21] conceived by Basilides. According to the latter, for example,

> . . . (Jesus) did not himself suffer death, but Simon, a certain man of Cyrene, being compelled, bore the cross in his stead; so that this latter being transfigured by him, that he might be thought to be Jesus, was crucified, through ignorance and error, while Jesus himself received the form of Simon, and, standing by, laughed at them.[22]

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19 The English words 'actually' (Trall. 9:1) and 'really' (Smyr. 1:1) translate the same word, *alethos*.

20 See Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, ET (London: S.C.M. Press, 1959), 52-60.

21 Irenaeus, Chap. XXIV, 2, *A.N.F.*, 349.

22 *Ibid.* Among the books of Nag Hammadi in 'The Second Treatise of the Great Seth', *Nag Hammadi in English*, 332 we read: 'It was another, Simon, who bore the cross on

Ignatius rejects such fanciful explanations of the event of the Crucifixion. By constantly referring to the suffering and death of Christ he accumulates a cluster of declarations intended to verify the reality of Christ's human experiences. Like all humans Jesus Christ was real and he was vulnerable.

The reality of Christ's humanity is further expressed in the bishop's eagerness to imitate his Lord's suffering. To the Magnesians he says 'if we do not willingly die in union with his Passion, we do not have his life in us' (5:2). To be willing to sacrifice one's own life in imitation of Christ's Passion constitutes the ultimate demonstration of one's faith in the reality of that Passion. This Ignatius was willing to do. He anxiously awaited the end of his journey when he would have an occasion to do exactly that. He urges the Christians to rest in the assurance that Christ's death was the guarantee of their resurrection. Through his death we have life but 'without him we have not true life' (Trall. 9:2). This attitude was in sharp contrast to that of the Gnostic leaders, none of whom, as far as we know, died other than a natural death.[23]

James Moffatt considers this determinant personal devotion to Christ
72 to be the force behind the Ignatian theology especially with reference to the bishop's desire for martyrdom as a way of expressing and experiencing the reality of Christ. 'There is not a page of his letters which does not dwell on Jesus in some form or another.'[24] To identify with Christ in his suffering was considered nonsense and absurd by the Docetists since they denied he ever experienced suffering. To admit that he suffered is to admit that he sinned. Such a heresy, to Ignatius, surely invokes punishment on its adherents no matter who they are. 'Let no one be misled: heavenly beings, the splendour of angels, and principalities, visible and invisible, if they fail to believe in Christ's blood, they too are doomed' (Smyr. 6:1). To the believers the benefits derived from the cross are to be enjoyed like the fruit of a good tree (Trall. 11:2). The cross is 'salvation and eternal life' (Eph. 18:2). On it the body of Christ was sacrificed 'for us' and 'for our sins' (Smyr. 7:1). These references to the Passion no doubt echo the apostles' preaching of the means of redemption and were stated not incidentally but intentionally in direct

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his shoulder. It was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorns . . . And I was laughing at their ignorance.' Notice also 'The Apocalypse of Peter', 344ff.

23 See W. H. C. Frend, 'The Gnostic Sects and the Roman Empire', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 5 (1954), 28. Note Ignatius' reference in Smyr. 3:11.

24 Ignatius' soteriology is radically different from that of the Gnostics who claimed Jesus saves the world through *gnosis*. Although he urges the Christians to seek revelations from above (Trall. 5:1-2) yet these are never regarded as the means of salvation. For a typical Gnostic hymn of salvation see Hippolytus, *op. cit.*, V (p.58).

opposition to the false teachers who were unnecessarily undermining the Passion and explaining the cross away.[25]

'Moreover,' the bishop persists, 'after the resurrection (Jesus) ate and drank with them (his disciples) as a real human being although in spirit he was united with the Father' (Smyr. 3:2). This was possible because in his person true unity of flesh and spirit is accomplished.[26] This the Docetists strongly denied. They said the greatest error that prevailed among Jesus' disciples was their thinking that 'he had risen in a mundane body, not knowing "flesh and blood do not attain to the Kingdom of God." '[27] But for Ignatius that was the more reason to affirm the humanity of Jesus even after the resurrection thus providing us with a vivid illustration of his tendency to combine antithetical elements in speaking of Jesus and shows how strong his opposition to the Docetists was. It was this anti-Docetic fervour which gave expression and shape to his christology — a christology most repugnant to his enemies who advocated deliverance from the flesh. On the contrary, for Ignatius the flesh is the natural expression of humanity and the believers are a real visible body made alive through 'God's blood' (Eph. 1:1).[28] He calls those adversaries 'wild beasts in human shapes' (Smyr. 4). Against this background of asserting the physical reality of Christ's death in opposition to those who denied it, we can understand the Ignatian emphasis on the physical resurrection, an emphasis surpassing that found in the New Testament itself.[29] Unlike the Docetists, Ignatius has no difficulty in speaking of Christ in terms of a perfect union of flesh and spirit after both the incarnation and the resurrection.

As for the appearances of Christ after the Resurrection they too comprise a further attack on the Docetists. He says Christ appeared to Peter and said, 'Take hold of me, touch me, and see that I am not a bodiless ghost' (Smyr. 3:2). It is not clear here if Ignatius was actually quoting

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[25] For a careful expansion of this idea of the 'unity of flesh and spirit' see Helmut Koester, 'History and Cult in the Gospel of John and in Ignatius of Antioch', *The Bultmann School of Biblical Interpretation: New Directions?*, ed., Robert Funk, *et al.* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 111-123. For a distinction between 'unity' and 'union' of flesh and spirit see Corwin, *op. cit.*, 247-271.

[26] Irenaeus, Chapter XXX, 13, *A.N.F.*, 357.

[27] See V. Corwin, *op. cit.*, 161.

[28] *Cf.* Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27.

[29] 24:39. Peter himself gives us a definite testimony of Christ's physical appearances in Acts 10:39,40.

the words of Jesus, the closest record of which is given by Luke.[30] It is very likely that, again, to the irritation of the Docetists, he was using their language or something similar to it, to refute them and affirm the necessity and reality of Christ's passion and death. Some scholars would go as far as L. W. Barnard who points out that Ignatius 'took over *the terminology* of contemporary speculation' and adopted 'Gnostic vocabulary' but 'gave it a new content by his grasp of the reality of the Incarnation and the centrality of the work of Christ accomplished on the Cross.'[31] If Christ had been a mere phantom who only 'seemed' to have suffered and died, as the Docetists claimed, why should he, Ignatius, be in bonds and willing to fight with wild beasts? Or was he bound in appearance only (Smyr. 4:2; 6:2)?

Although the Docetists had no problem with the deity of Christ, they denied the fact of his humanity. Nevertheless, Ignatius would not falter by overlooking the Lord's deity in the process of stressing his humanity. In his letter to the Magnesians he speaks of Jesus Christ as having been 'with the Father from eternity' (6:1), constantly living in the harmony of 'one will' with him (7:1). The word *theos* is applied to the Father and
74 Jesus alike (in Greek mostly with the definite article). Jesus is portrayed as eternally different from the Father as a person (*cf.* Smyr. 8:1 and Mag. 13:2) yet they are closely united together so that 'the Father' and 'Jesus Christ' often become inseparable but never indistinguishable. To the Ephesians, Ignatius speaks directly of Christ as 'God incarnate', 'born yet unbegotten', and 'Son of God' (20:2). Such references are numerous in the letters and are not confined to the portions dealing with Christ's deity. This observation, clear from any quick reading of the letters, is confirmed by Milton Brown in his masterly analysis of the

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30 L. W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (New York: Shocken Books, Inc., 1966), 27. Italics his. This seems to be a more valid explanation of Ignatius' language than that suggested by Harnack, *op. cit.*, 227-8 who sees a 'striking affinity' between Ignatius' 'fragmentary' and the Gnostics' 'complete' system of theology thereby suggesting theological and literary dependence on 'the theologians of the first century'. The radical difference between Ignatius' soteriology and that of the Gnostics' clearly indicates that the development of his christology was independent of theirs. The fact that he and the Gnostics used a common language does not mean he shared with them their meaning. As noted above he uses their language for his polemical purposes.

31 Regrettably Brown, *op. cit.*, 23ff. sees no special emphasis on the deity of Jesus as if this aspect of Christ's nature was touched upon only incidentally. The furthest he would go is this: '. . . *if* any special emphasis is intended, it is probably just to heighten for the Hellenistic mind the effect of the title *Christos*, which had lost much of its force and was rapidly becoming just a part of Jesus' name.' Italics his. This is contrary to the impression one gets from such references as Smyr. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 7:2; 15:3; 19:3.

Ignatian vocabulary.[52] In at least eight places Jesus is called 'Lord' or 'The Lord' *(ho) kurios* and the word 'God' *(ho) theos* is applied at least six times as a descriptive title of Jesus.

Besides such direct references Ignatius is at ease in assigning to Christ divine functions which are traditionally preserved for God such as forgiving sins (Phil. 8:1), and receiving our prayers (Smyr. 4:1, Eph. 20:1). Jesus Christ also reveals God. He is the 'mouth of the Father' (Rom. 8:2) and 'His Word' (Mag. 8:2). He is always showing us God and in him is 'really' the revelation that God makes of himself. Neither is the unity of God neglected. God, who has 'revealed Himself in His son Jesus Christ Who is His Word' is 'One God' (Mag. 8:2) and he 'stands for unity'. 'It is His nature' (Trall. 11:2). However, Christ and God are not to be confused. They are different yet they are One.

Presumably, as we mentioned earlier, because of the nature of the circumstances under which the letters were written, Ignatius could not have formulated a systematic theology explaining the mystery of Christ's humanity and filial union with his Father. Christ's divine titles, attributes and functions are presented to us in a scattered unorganized fashion. Paradoxical phrases such as 'God incarnate', 'Son of man and Son of God' and 'the blood of God' abound in the letters. The same could be said about the close association between 'the Lord Jesus Christ' and 'God the Father'. It seems evident enough that this was at the core of the faith and preaching of the bishop and that he was unaware of, or perhaps better, unconcerned with the theological problems that might arise from these associations. Future theologians of the church were to wrestle with the task of explaining the metaphysical and historical elements in its christology. Ignatius simply affirms their unity. In doing so he provides us with a testimony regarding the teachings of the church about its founder — a testimony that is of the utmost importance because it was precisely in those terms that the early church expressed its doctrine of the 'God-man'.

To summarize then, the christology of Ignatius as stated in his letters rests on the divine and human elements manifested in the life of Jesus Christ. These are as inseparable as the two sides of a coin; and he is

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[52] Burnett Streeter, *The Primitive Church* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1929), 165ff. conducts an interesting and to a certain extent a legitimate psychological analysis of Ignatius, but goes overboard when implying that the judgement of the bishop cannot be trusted in fine matters of distinction such as between God and Christ. He concludes that the bishop's extreme passion for martyrdom, unknown among the Gnostic leaders, makes him a neurotic personality! Such a conclusion is really unfair in view of the limited material with which we have to work and the circumstances under which it was composed; *cf.* Smyr. 8:1 with Mag. 13:2.

Jesus, 'Son of Man and Son of God' (Eph. 20:2). According to Ignatius, the whole purpose of God is expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. In passages clearly directed to the heretics and in scattered references throughout the letters, the bishop provides us with a striking testimony to the primitive church's belief in Jesus Christ. To him Christianity is Christ — and Christ in his full humanity as well as in his divinity, is the Saviour and hope of mankind.