Spurious Letters Ascribed to Ignatius

Pseudo-Ignatius (4th–5th century)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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Authorship. These letters are not by Ignatius of Antioch. They were written in his name in the fourth or fifth century, and the genuine letters of Ignatius are the seven shorter ones on this site.

A Second Epistle to St. John

His friend Ignatius to John the holy presbyter. If thou wilt give me leave, I desire to go up to Jerusalem, and see the faithful saints who are there, especially Mary the mother, whom they report to be an object of admiration and of affection to all. For who would not rejoice to behold and to address her who bore the true God from her own womb, provided he is a friend of our faith and religion? And in like manner [I desire to see] the venerable James, who is surnamed Just, whom they relate to be very like Christ Jesus in appearance, in life, and in method of conduct, as if he were a twin-brother of the same womb. They say that, if I see him, I see also Jesus Himself, as to all the features and aspect of His body. Moreover, [I desire to see] the other saints, both male and female. Alas! why do I delay? Why am I kept back? Kind teacher, bid me hasten [to fulfil my wish], and fare thou well. Amen.

Introduction

Mary of Cassobelae to Ignatius
Maria, a proselyte of Jesus Christ, to Ignatius Theophorus, most blessed bishop of the apostolic Church which is at Antioch, beloved in God the Father, and Jesus: Happiness and safety. We all beg for thee joy and health in Him.

Chapter I.-Occasion of the Epistle.

Since Christ has, to our wonder, been made known among us to be the Son of the living God, and to have become man in these last times by means of the Virgin Mary, of the seed of David and Abraham, according to the announcements previously made regarding Him and through Him by the company of the prophets, we therefore beseech and entreat that, by thy wisdom, Maris our friend, bishop of our native Neapolis, which is near Zarbus, and Eulogius, and Sobelus the presbyter, be sent to us, that we be not destitute of such as preside over the divine word as Moses also says, ”Let the Lord God look out a man who shall guide this people, and the congregation of the Lord shall not be as sheep which have no shepherd.”

Chapter II.-Youth May Be Allied with Piety and Discretion.

But as to those whom we have named being young men, do not, thou blessed one, have any apprehension. For I would have you know that they are wise about the flesh, and are insensible to its passions, they themselves glowing with all the glory of a hoary head through their our intrinsic merits, and though but recently called as young men to the priesthood. Now, call thou into exercise thy thoughts through the Spirit that God has given to thee by Christ, and thou wilt remember that Samuel, while yet a little child, was called a seer, and was reckoned in the company of the prophets, that he reproved the aged Eli for transgression, since he had honoured his infatuated sons above God the author of all things, and bad allowed them to go unpunished, when they turned the office of the priesthood into ridicule, and acted violently towards thy people.

Chapter III.-Examples of Youthful Devotedness.

Moreover, the wise Daniel, while he was a young man, passed judgment on certain vigorous old man, showing them that they were abandoned wretches, and not [worthy to be reckoned] elders, and that, though Jews by extraction, they were Canaanites in practice. And Jeremiah, when on account of his youth he declined the office of a prophet entrusted to him by God, was addressed in these words: "Say not, I am a youth; for thou shalt go to all those to whom I send thee, and thou shalt speak according to all that I command thee; because I am with thee." And the wise Solomon, when only in the twelfth year of his age, had wisdom to decide the important question concerning the children of the two women, when it was unknown to whom these respectively belonged; so that the whole people were astonished at such wisdom in a child, and venerated him as being not a mere youth, but a full-grown man. And he solved the hard questions of the queen of the Ethiopians, which had profit in them as the streams of the Nile [have fertility], in such a manner that that woman, though herself so wise, was beyond measure astonished.

Chapter IV.-The Same Subject Continued.

Josiah also, beloved of God, when as yet he could scarcely speak articulately, convicts those who were possessed of a wicked spirit as being false in their speech, and deceivers of the people. He also reveals the deceit of the demons, and openly exposes those that are no gods; yea, while yet an infant he slays their priests, and overturns their altars, and defiles the place where sacrifices were offered with dead bodies, and throws down the temples, and cuts down the groves, and breaks in pieces the pillars, and breaks open the tombs of the ungodly, that not a relic of the wicked might any longer exist. To such an extent did he display zeal in the cause of godliness, and prove himself a punisher of the ungodly, while he as yet faltered in speech like a child. David, too, who was at once a prophet and a king, and the root of our Saviour according to the flesh, while yet a youth is anointed by Samuel to be king. For he himself says in a certain place, "I was small among my brethren, and the youngest in the house of my father."

Chapter V.-Expressions of Respect for Ignatius.

But time would fail me if I should endeavour to enumerate all those that pleased God in their youth, having been entrusted by God with either the prophetical, the priestly, or the kingly office. And those which have been mentioned may suffice, by way of bringing the subject to thy remembrance. But I entreat thee not to reckon me presumptuous or ostentatious [in writing as I have done]. For I have set forth these statements, not as instructing thee, but simply as suggesting the matter to the remembrance of my father in God. For I know my own place, and do not compare myself with such as you. I salute thy holy clergy, and thy Christ-loving people who are ruled under thy care as their pastor. All the faithful with us salute thee. Pray, blessed shepherd, that I may be in health as respects God.

Introduction

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church which is at Tarsus, saved in Christ, worthy of praise, worthy of remembrance, and worthy of love: Mercy and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, be ever multiplied.

Chapter I.-His Own Sufferings; Exhortation to Stedfastness.

From Syria even unto Rome I fight with beasts not that I am devoured by brute beasts, for these, as ye know, by the will of God, spared Daniel, but by beasts in the shape of men, in whom the merciless wild beast himself lies hid, and pricks and wounds me day by day. But none of these hardships ”move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself,” in such a way as to love it better than the Lord. Wherefore I am prepared for [encountering] fire, wild beasts, the sword or the cross, so that only I may see Christ my Saviour and God, who died for me. I therefore, the prisoner of Christ, who am driven along by land and sea, exhort you: ”stand fast in the faith,” and be ye steadfast, ”for the just shall live by faith; ” be ye unwavering, for ”the Lord causes those to dwell in a house who are of one and the same character.”

Chapter II.-Cautions Against False Doctrine.

I have learned that certain of the ministers of Satan have wished to disturb you, some of them asserting that Jesus was born [only] in appearance, was crucified in appearance, and died in appearance; others that He is not the Son the Creator, and others that He is Himself God over all. Others, again, hold that He is a mere man, and others that this flesh is not to rise again, so that our proper course is to live and partake of a life of pleasure, for that this is the chief good to beings who are in a little while to perish. A swarm of such evils has burst in upon us. But ye have not ”given place by subjection to them, no, not for one hour.” For ye are the fellow-citizens as well as the disciples of Paul, who ”fully preached the Gospel from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum,” and bare about ”the marks of Christ” in his flesh.

Chapter III.-The True Doctrine Respecting Christ.

Mindful of him, do ye by all means know that Jesus the Lord was truly born of Mary, being made of a woman; and was as truly crucified. For, says he, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus." And He really suffered, and died, and rose again. For says [Paul], "If Christ should become passible, and should be the first to rise again from the dead." And again, "In that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God." Otherwise, what advantage would there be in [becoming subject to] bonds, if Christ has not died? what advantage in patience? what advantage in [enduring] stripes? And why such facts as the following: Peter was crucified; Paul and James were slain with the sword; John was banished to Patmos; Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews who killed the Lord? But, [in truth,] none of these sufferings were in vain; for the Lord was really crucified by the ungodly.

Chapter IV.-Continuation.

And [know ye, moreover], that He who was born of a woman was the Son of God, and He that was crucified was "the first-born of every creature," and God the Word, who also created all things. For says the apostle, "There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things." And again, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; " and, "By Him were all things created that are in heaven, and on earth, visible and invisible; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."

Chapter V.-Refutation of the Previously Mentioned Errors.

And that He Himself is not God over all, and the Father, but His Son, He [shows when He] says, ”I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” And again, ”When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall He also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.” Wherefore it is one [Person] who put all things under, and who is all in all, and another [Person] to whom they were subdued, who also Himself, along with all other things, becomes subject [to the former].

Chapter VI.-Continuation.

Nor is He a mere man, by whom and in whom all things were made; for ”all things were made by Him.” ”When He made the heaven, I was present with Him; and I was there with Him, forming [the world along with Him], and He rejoiced in me daily.” And how could a mere man be addressed in such words as these: ”Sit Thou at My right hand? ” And how, again, could such an one declare: ”Before Abraham was, I am? ” And, ”Glorify Me with Thy glory which I had before the world was? ” What man could ever say, ”I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me? ” And of what man could it be said, ”He was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world: He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not? ” How could such a one be a mere man, receiving the beginning of His existence from Mary, and not rather God the Word, and the only-begotten Son? For ”in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And in another place, ”The Lord created Me, the beginning of His ways, for His ways, for His works. Before the world did He found Me, and before all the hills did He beget Me.”

Chapter VII.-Continuation.

And that our bodies are to rise again, He shows when He says, "Verily I say unto you, that the hour cometh, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." And [says] the apostle, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." And that we must live soberly and righteously, he [shows when he] says again, "Be not deceived: neither adulterers, nor effeminate persons, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor fornicators, nor revilers, nor drunkards, nor thieves, can inherit the kingdom of God." And again, "If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; our preaching therefore is vain, and your faith is also vain: ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But if such be our condition and feelings, wherein shall we differ from asses and dogs, who have no care about the future, but think only of eating, and of indulging such appetites as follow after eating? For they are unacquainted with any intelligence moving within them.

Chapter VIII.-Exhortations to Holiness and Good Order.

May I have joy of you in the Lord! Be ye sober. Lay aside, every one of you, all malice and beast-like fury, evil-speaking, calumny, filthy speaking, ribaldry, whispering, arrogance, drunkenness, lust, avarice, vainglory, envy, and everything akin to these. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Ye presbyters, be subject to the bishop; ye deacons, to the presbyters; and ye, the people, to the presbyters and the deacons. Let my soul be for theirs who preserve this good order; and may the Lord be with them continually!

Chapter IX.-Exhortations to the Discharge of Relative Duties.

Ye husbands, love your wives; and ye wives, your husbands. Ye children, reverence your parents. Ye parents, ”bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Honour those [who continue] in virginity, as the priestesses of Christ; and the widows [that persevere] in gravity of behaviour, as the altar of God. Ye servants, wait upon your masters with [respectful] fear. Ye masters, issue orders to your servants with tenderness. Let no one among you be idle; for idleness is the mother of want. I do not enjoin these things as being a person of any consequence, although I am in bonds [for Christ]; but as a brother, I put you in mind of them. The Lord be with you!

Chapter X.-Salutations.

May I enjoy your prayers! Pray ye that may attain to Jesus. I commend unto you the Church which is at Antioch. The Churches of Philippi, whence also I write to you, salute you. Philo, your deacon, to whom also I give thanks as one who has zealously ministered to me in all things, salutes you. Agathopus, the deacon from Syria, who follows me in Christ, salutes you. "Salute ye one another with a holy kiss." I salute you all, both male and female, who are in Christ. Fare ye well in body, and soul, and in one Spirit; and do not ye forget me. The Lord be with you!

Introduction

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to Hero, the deacon of Christ, and the servant of God, a man honoured by God, and most dearly loved as well as esteemed, who carries Christ and the Spirit within him, and who is mine own son in faith and love: Grace, mercy, and peace from Almighty God, and from Christ Jesus our Lord, His only-begotten Son, ”who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from the present evil world,” and preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom.

Chapter I.-Exhortations to Earnestness and Moderation.

I Exhort thee in God, that thou add [speed] to thy course, and that thou vindicate thy dignity. Have a care to preserve concord with the saints. Bear [the burdens of] the weak, that "thou mayest fulfil the law of Christ." Devote thyself to fasting and prayer, but not beyond measure, lest thou destroy thyself thereby. Do not altogether abstain from wine and flesh, for these things are not to be viewed with abhorrence, since [the Scripture] saith, "Ye shall eat the good things of the earth." And again, "Ye shall eat flesh even as herbs." And again, "Wine maketh glad the heart of man, and oil exhilarates, and bread strengthens him." But all are to be used with moderation, as being the gifts of God. "For who shall eat or who shall drink without Him? For if anything be beautiful, it is His; and if anything be good, it is His." Give attention to reading, that thou mayest not only thyself know the laws, but mayest also explain them to others, as the earnest servant of God. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier; and if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully." I that am in bonds pray that my soul may be in place of yours.

Chapter II.-Cautions Against False Teachers.

Every one that teaches anything beyond what is commanded, though he be [deemed] worthy of credit, though he be in the habit of fasting, though he live in continence, though he work miracles, though he have the gift of prophecy, let him be in thy sight as a wolf in sheep's clothing, labouring for the destruction of the sheep. If any one denies the cross, and is ashamed of the passion, let him be to thee as the adversary himself. "Though he gives all his goods to feed the poor, though he remove mountains, though he give his body to be burned," let him be regarded by thee as abominable. If any one makes light of the law or the prophets, which Christ fulfilled at His coming, let him be to thee as antichrist. If any one says that the Lord is a mere man, he is a Jew, a murderer of Christ.

Chapter III.-Exhortations as to Ecclesiastical Duties.

”Honour widows that are widows indeed.” Be the friend of orphans; for God is ”the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows.” Do nothing without the bishops; for they are priests, and thou a servant of the priests. They baptize, offer sacrifice, ordain, and lay on hands; but thou ministerest to them, as the holy Stephen did at Jerusalem to James and the presbyters. Do not neglect the sacred meetings [of the saints]; inquire after every one by name. ”Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example to the believers, both in word and conduct.”

Chapter IV.-Servants and Women are Not to Be Despised.

Be not ashamed of servants, for we possess the same nature in common with them. Do not hold women in abomination, for they have given thee birth, and brought thee up. It is fitting, therefore, to love those that were the authors of our birth (but only in the Lord), inasmuch as a man can produce no children without a woman. It is right, therefore, that we should honour those who have had a part in giving us birth. "Neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man," except in the case of those who were first formed. For the body of Adam was made out of the four elements, and that of Eve out of the side of Adam. And, indeed, the altogether peculiar birth of the Lord was of a virgin alone. [This took place] not as if the lawful union [of man and wife] were abominable, but such a kind of birth was fitting to God. For it became the Creator not to make use of the ordinary method of generation, but of one that was singular and strange, as being the Creator.

Chapter V.-Various Relative Duties.

Flee from haughtiness, ”for the Lord resisteth the proud.” Abhor falsehood, for says [the Scripture], ”Thou shalt destroy all them that speak lies.” Guard against envy, for its author is the devil, and his successor Cain, who envied his brother, and out of envy committed murder. Exhort my sisters to love God, and be content with their own husbands only. In like manner, exhort my brethren also to be content with their own wives. Watch over the virgins, as the precious treasures of Christ. Be long-suffering, that thou mayest be great in wisdom. Do not neglect the poor, in so far as thou art prosperous. For ”by alms and fidelity sins are purged away.”

Chapter VI-Exhortations to Purity and Caution.

Keep thyself pure as the habitation of God. Thou art the temple of Christ. Thou art the instrument of the Spirit. Thou knowest in what way I have brought thee up. Though I am the least of men, do thou seek to follow me, be thou an imitator of my conduct. I do not glory in the world, but in the Lord. I exhort Hero, my son; ”but let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord.” May I have joy of thee, my dear son, whose guardian may He be who is the only unbegotten God, and the Lord Jesus Christ! Do not believe all persons, do not place confidence in all; nor let any man get the better of thee by flattery. For many are the ministers of Satan; and ”he that is hasty to believe is light of heart.”

Chapter VII.-Solemn Charge to Hero, as Future Bishop of Antioch.

Keep God in remembrance, and thou shalt never sin. Be not double-minded in thy prayers; for blessed is he who doubteth not. For I believe in the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in His only-begotten Son, that God will show me, Hero, upon my throne. Add speed, therefore, to thy course. I charge thee before the God of the universe, and before Christ, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and of the ministering ranks [of angels], keep in safety that deposit which I and Christ have committed to thee, and do not judge thyself unworthy of those things which have been shown by God [to me] concerning thee. I hand over to thee the Church of Antioch. I have commended you to Polycarp in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter VIII.-Salutations.

The bishops, Onesimus, Bitus, Damas, Polybius, and all they of Philippi (whence also I have written to thee), salute thee in Christ. Salute the presbytery worthy of God: salute my holy fellow-deacons, of whom may I have joy in Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit. Salute the people of the Lord, from the smallest to the greatest, every one by name; whom I commit to thee as Moses did [the Israelites] to Joshua, who was their leader after him. And do not reckon this which I have said presumptuous on my part; for although we are not such as they were, yet we at least pray that we may be so, since indeed we are the children of Abraham. Be strong, therefore, O Hero, like a hero, and like a man. For from henceforth thou shalt lead in and out the people of the Lord that are in Antioch, and so ”the congregation of the Lord shall not be as sheep which have no shepherd.”

Chapter IX.-Concluding Salutations and Instructions.

Salute Cassian, my host, and his most serious-minded partner in life, and their very dear children, to whom may ”God grant that they find mercy of the Lord in that day,” on account of their ministrations to us, whom also I commend to thee in Christ. Salute by name all the faithful in Christ that are at Laodicea. Do not neglect those at Tarsus, but look after them steadily, confirming them in the Gospel. I salute in the Lord, Maris the bishop of Neapolis, near Anazarbus. Salute thou also Mary my daughter, distinguished both for gravity and erudition, as also ”the Church which is in her house.” May my soul be in place of hers: she is the very pattern of pious women. May the Father of Christ, by His only-begotten Son, preserve thee in good health, and of high repute in all things, to a very old age, for the benefit of the Church of God! Farewell in the Lord, and pray thou that I may be perfected.

Introduction

Ignatius, who is also called Theaphorus, to her who has obtained mercy through the grace of the most high God the Father, and Jesus Christ the Lord, who died for us, to Mary, my daughter, most faithful, worthy of God, and bearing Christ [in her heart], wishes abundance of happiness in God.

Chapter I.-Acknowledgment of Her Excellence and Wisdom.

Sight indeed is better than writing, inasmuch as, being one of the company of the senses, it not only, by communicating proofs of friendship, honours him who receives them, but also, by those which it in turn receives, enriches the desire for better things. But the second harbour of refuge, as the phrase runs, is the practice of writing, which we have received, as a convenient haven, by thy faith, from so great a distance, seeing that by means of a letter we have learned the excellence that is in thee. For the souls of the good, O thou wisest of women resemble fountains of the purest water; for they allure by their beauty passers-by to drink of them, even though these should not be thirsty. And thy intelligence invites us, as by a word of command, to participate in those divine draughts which gush forth so abundantly in thy soul.

Chapter II.-His Own Condition.

But I, O thou blessed woman, not being now so much my own master as in the power of others, am driven along by the varying wills of many adversaries, being in one sense in exile, in another in prison, and in a third in bonds. But I pay no regard to these things. Yea, by the injuries inflicted on me through them, I acquire all the more the character of a disciple, that I may attain to Jesus Christ. May I enjoy the torments which are prepared for me, seeing that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Chapter III.-He Had Complied with Her Request.

I have gladly acted as requested in thy letter, having no doubt respecting those persons whom thou didst prove to be men of worth. For I am sure that thou barest testimony to them in the exercise of a godly judgment, and not through the influence of carnal favour. And thy numerous quotations of Scripture passages exceedingly delighted me, which, when I had read, I had no longer a single doubtful thought respecting the matter. For I did not hold that those things were simply to be glanced over by my eyes, of which I had received from thee such an incontrovertible demonstration. May I be in place of thy soul, because thou lovest Jesus, the Son of the living God. Wherefore also He Himself says to thee, "I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me shall find peace."

Chapter IV.-Commendation and Exhortation.

Now it occurs to me to mention, that the report is true which I heard of thee whilst thou wast at Rome with the blessed father Linus, whom the deservedly-blessed Clement, a hearer of Peter and Paul, has now succeeded. And by this time thou hast added a hundred-fold to thy reputation; and may thou, O woman! still further increase it. I greatly desired to come unto you, that I might have rest with you; but "the way of man is not in himself." For the military guard [under which I am kept] hinders my purpose, and does not permit me to go further. Nor indeed, in the state I am now in, can I either do or suffer anything. Wherefore deeming the practice of writing the second resource of friends for their mutual encouragement, I salute thy sacred soul, beseeching of thee to add still further to thy vigour. For our present labour is but little, while the reward which is expected is great.

Chapter V.-Salutations and Good Wishes.

Avoid those that deny the passion of Christ, and His birth according to the flesh: and there are many at present who suffer under this disease. But it would be absurd to admonish thee on other points, seeing that thou art perfect in every good work and word, and able also to exhort others in Christ. Salute all that are like-minded with thyself, and who hold fast to their salvation in Christ. The presbyters and deacons, and above all the holy Hero, salute thee. Cassian my host salutes thee, as well as my sister, his wife, and their very dear children. May the Lord sanctify thee for evermore in the enjoyment both of bodily and spiritual health, and may I see thee in Christ obtaining the crown!

Epistle to St. John the Apostle

Ignatius, and the brethren who are with him, John the holy presbyter.

We are deeply grieved at thy delay in strengthening us by thy addresses and consolations. If thy absence be prolonged, it will disappoint many of us. Hasten then to come, for we believe that it is expedient. There are also many of our women here, who are desirous to see Mary [the mother] of Jesus, and wish day by day to run off from us to you, that they may meet with her, and touch those breasts of hers which nourished the Lord Jesus, and may inquire of her respecting some rather secret matters. But Salome also, [the daughter of Anna,] whom thou lovest, who stayed with her five months at Jerusalem, and some other well-known persons, relate that she is full of all graces and all virtues, after the manner of a virgin, fruitful in virtue and grace. And, as they report, she is cheerful in persecutions and afflictions, free from murmuring in the midst of penury and want, grateful to those that injure her, and rejoices when exposed to troubles: she sympathizes with the wretched and the afflicted as sharing in their afflictions, and is not slow to come to their assistance. Moreover, she shines forth gloriously as contending in the fight of faith against the pernicious conflicts of vicious principles or conduct. She is the lady of our new religion and repentance, and the handmaid among the faithful of all works of piety.

She is indeed devoted to the humble, and she humbles herself more devotedly than the devoted, and is wonderfully magnified by all, while at the same time she suffers detraction from the Scribes and Pharisees. Besides these points, many relate to us numerous other things regarding her. We do not, however, go so far as to believe all in every particular; nor do we mention such to thee. But, as we are informed by those who are worthy of credit, there is in Mary the mother of Jesus an angelic purity of nature allied with the nature of humanity. And such reports as these have greatly excited our emotions, and urge us eagerly to desire a sight of this (if it be lawful so to speak) heavenly prodigy and most sacred marvel. But do thou in haste comply with this our desire; and fare thou well. Amen.

Introduction

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church sojourning in Syria, which has obtained mercy from God, and been elected by Christ, and which first received the name Christ, [wishes] happiness in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter I.-Cautions Against Error.

The Lord has rendered my bonds light and easy since I learnt that you are in peace, that you live in all harmony both of the flesh and spirit. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," guarding against those heresies of the wicked one which have broken in upon us, to the deceiving and destruction of those that accept of them; but that ye give heed to the doctrine of the apostles, and believe both the law and the prophets: that ye reject every Jewish and Gentile error, and neither introduce a multiplicity of gods, nor yet deny Christ under the pretence of [maintaining] the unity of God.

Chapter II.-The True Doctrine Respecting God and Christ.

For Moses, the faithful servant of God, when he said, ”The Lord thy God is one Lord,” and thus proclaimed that there was only one God, did yet forthwith confess also our Lord when he said, ”The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone from the Lord.” And again, ”And God said, Let Us make man after our image: and so God made man, after the image of God made He him.” And further ”In the image of God made He man.” And that [the Son of God] was to be made man [Moses shows when] he says, ”A prophet shall the Lord raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me.”

Chapter III.-The Same Continued.

The prophets also, when they speak as in the person of God, [saying,] "I am God, the first [of beings], and I am also the last, and besides Me there is no God," concerning the Father of the universe, do also speak of our Lord Jesus Christ. "A Son," they say, has been given to us, on whose shoulder the government is from above; and His name is called the Angel of great counsel, Wonderful, Counsellor, the strong and mighty God." And concerning His incarnation, "Behold, a virgin shall be with Child, and shall bring forth a Son; and they shall call his name Immanuel." And concerning the passion, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before her shearers is dumb, I also was an innocent lamb led to be sacrificed."

Chapter IV.-Continuation.

The Evangelists, too, when they declared that the one Father was ”the only true God,” did not omit what concerned our Lord, but wrote: ”In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” And concerning the incarnation: ”The Word,” says [the Scripture], ”became flesh, and dwelt among us.” And again: ”The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” And those very apostles, who said ”that there is one God,” said also that ”there is one Mediator between God and men.” Nor were they ashamed of the incarnation and the passion. For what says [one]? ”The man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself” for the life and salvation of the world.

Chapter V.-Denunciation of False Teachers.

Whosoever, therefore, declares that there is but one God, only so as to take away the divinity of Christ, is a devil, and an enemy of all righteousness. He also that confesseth Christ, yet not as the Son of the Maker of the world, but of some other unknown being, different from Him whom the law and the prophets have proclaimed, this man is an instrument of the devil. And he that rejects the incarnation, and is ashamed of the cross for which I am in bonds, this man is antichrist. Moreover, he who affirms Christ to be a mere man is accursed, according to the [declaration of the] prophet, since he puts not his trust in God, but in man. Wherefore also he is unfruitful, like the wild myrtle-tree.

Chapter VI.-Renewed Cautions.

These things I write to you, thou new olive-tree of Christ, not that I am aware you hold any such opinions, but that I may put you on your guard, as a father does his children. Beware, therefore, of those that hasten to work mischief, those ”enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose glory is in their shame.” Beware of those ”dumb dogs,” those trailing serpents, those scaly dragons, those asps, and basilisks, and scorpions. For these are subtle wolves, and apes that mimic the appearance of men.

Chapter VII.-Exhortation to Consistency of Conduct.

Ye have been the disciples of Paul and Peter; do not lose what was committed to your trust. Keep in remembrance Euodias, your deservedly-blessed pastor, into whose hands the government over you was first entrusted by the apostles. Let us not bring disgrace upon our Father. Let us prove ourselves His true-born children, and not bastards. Ye know after what manner I have acted among you. The things which, when present, I spoke to you, these same, when absent, I now write to you. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema." Be ye followers of me. My soul be for yours, when I attain to Jesus. Remember my bonds.

Chapter VIII.-Exhortations to the Presbyters and Others.

Ye presbyters, "feed the flock which is among you," till God shall show who is to hold the rule over you. For "I am now ready to be offered," that I "may win Christ." Let the deacons know of what dignity they are, and let them study to be blameless, that they may be the followers of Christ. Let the people be subject to the presbyters and the deacons. Let the virgins know to whom they have consecrated themselves.

Chapter IX.-Duties of Husbands, Wives, Parents, and Children.

Let the husbands love their wives, remembering that, at the creation, one woman, and not many, was given to one man. Let the wives honour their husbands, as their own flesh; and let them not presume to address them by their names. Let them also be chaste, reckoning their husbands as their only partners, to whom indeed they have been united according to the will of God. Ye parents, impart a holy training to your children. Ye children, ”honour your parents, that it may be well with you.”

Chapter X.-Duties of Masters and Servants.

Ye masters, do not treat your servants with haughtiness, but imitate patient Job, who declares, ”I did not despise the cause of my man-servant, or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me. For what in that case shall I do when the Lord makes an inquisition regarding me? ” And you know what follows. Ye servants, do not provoke your masters to anger in anything, lest ye become the authors of incurable mischiefs to yourselves.

Chapter XI.-Inculcation of Various Moral Duties.

Let no one addicted to idleness eat, lest he become a wanderer about, and a whoremonger. Let drunkenness, anger, envy, reviling, clamour, and blasphemy "be not so much as named among you." Let not the widows live a life of pleasure, lest they wax wanton against the word. Be subject to Caesar in everything in which subjection implies no [spiritual] danger. Provoke not those that rule over you to wrath, that you may give no occasion against yourselves to those that seek for it. But as to the practice of magic, or the impure love of boys, or murder, it is superfluous to write to you, since such vices are forbidden to be committed even by the Gentiles. I do not issue commands on these points as if I were an apostle; but, as your fellow-servant, I put you in mind of them.

Chapter XII.-Salutations.

I salute the holy presbytery. I salute the sacred deacons, and that person most dear to me, whom may I behold, through the Holy Spirit, occupying my place when I shall attain to Christ. My soul be in place of his. I salute the sub-deacons, the readers, the singers, the doorkeepers, the labourers, the exorcists, the confessors. I salute the keepers of the holy gates, the deaconesses in Christ. I salute the virgins betrothed to Christ, of whom may I have joy in the Lord Jesus. I salute the people of the Lord, from the smallest to the greatest, and all my sisters in the Lord.

Chapter XIII.-Salutations Continued.

I salute Cassian and his partner in life, and their very dear children. Polycarp, that most worthy bishop, who is also deeply interested in you, salutes you; and to him I have commended you in the Lord. The whole Church of the Smyrnaeans, indeed, is mindful of you in their prayers in the Lord. Onesimus, the pastor of the Ephesians, salutes you. Damas, the bishop of Magnesia, salutes you. Polybius, bishop of the Trallians, salutes you. Philo and Agathopus, the deacons, my companions, salute you, "Salute one another with a holy kiss."

Chapter XIV.-Conclusion.

I write this letter to you from Philippi. May He who is alone unbegotten, keep you stedfast both in the spirit and in the flesh, through Him who was begotten before time began! And may I behold you in the kingdom of Christ! I salute him who is to bear rule over you in my stead: may I have joy of him in the Lord! Fare ye well in God, and in Christ, being enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church of God which is at Philippi, which has obtained mercy in faith, and patience, and love unfeigned: Mercy and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, ”who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe.”

Chapter I.-Reason for Writing the Epistle.

Being mindful of your love and of your zeal in Christ, which ye have manifested towards us, we thought it fitting to write to you, who display such a godly and spiritual love to the brethren, to put you in remembrance of your Christian course, ”that ye all speak the same thing, being of one mind, thinking the same thing, and walking by the same rule of faith,” as Paul admonished you. For if there is one God of the universe, the Father of Christ, ”of whom are all things; ” and one Lord Jesus Christ, our [Lord], ”by whom are all things; ” and also one Holy Spirit, who wrought in Moses, and in the prophets and apostles; and also one baptism, which is administered that we should have fellowship with the death of the Lord; and also one elect Church; there ought likewise to be but one faith in respect to Christ. For ”there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is through all, and in all.”

Chapter II.-Unity of the Three Divine Persons.

There is then one God and Father, and not two or three; One who is; and there is no other besides Him, the only true [God]. For "the Lord thy God," saith [the Scripture], "is one Lord." And again, "Hath not one God created us? Have we not all one Father? And there is also one Son, God the Word. For "the only-begotten Son," saith [the Scripture], "who is in the bosom of the Father." And again, "One Lord Jesus Christ." And in another place, "What is His name, or what His Son's name, that we may know? " And there is also one Paraclete. For "there is also," saith [the Scripture], "one Spirit," since "we have been called in one hope of our calling." And again, "We have drunk of one Spirit," with what follows. And it is manifest that all these gifts [possessed by believers] "worketh one and the self-same Spirit." There are not then either three Fathers, or three Sons, or three Paracletes, but one Father, and one Son, and one Paraclete. Wherefore also the Lord, when He sent forth the apostles to make disciples of all nations, commanded them to "baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," not unto one [person] having three names, nor into three [persons] who became incarnate, but into three possessed of equal honour.

Chapter III.-Christ Was Truly Born, and Died.

For there is but One that became incarnate, and that neither the Father nor the Paraclete, but the Son only, [who became so] not in appearance or imagination, but in reality. For "the Word became flesh." For "Wisdom builded for herself a house." And God the Word was born as man, with a body, of the Virgin, without any intercourse of man. For [it is written], "A virgin shall conceive in her womb, and bring forth a son." He was then truly born, truly grew up, truly ate and drank, was truly crucified, and died, and rose again. He who believes these things, as they really were, and as they really took place, is blessed. He who believeth them not is no less accursed than those who crucified the Lord. For the prince of this world rejoiceth when any one denies the cross, since he knows that the confession of the cross is his own destruction. For that is the trophy which has been raised up against his power, which when he sees, he shudders, and when he hears of, is afraid.

Chapter IV.-The Malignity and Folly of Satan.

And indeed, before the cross was erected, he (Satan) was eager that it should be so; and he ”wrought” [for this end] ”in the children of disobedience.” He wrought in Judas, in the Pharisees, in the Sadducees, in the old, in the young, and in the priests. But when it was just about to be erected, he was troubled, and infused repentance into the traitor, and pointed him to a rope to hang himself with, and taught him [to die by] strangulation. He terrified also the silly woman, disturbing her by dreams; and he, who had tried every means to have the cross prepared, now endeavoured to put a stop to its erection; not that he was influenced by repentance on account of the greatness of his crime (for in that case he would not be utterly depraved), but because he perceived his own destruction [to be at hand]. For the cross of Christ was the beginning of his condemnation the beginning of his death, the beginning of his destruction. Wherefore, also, he works in some that they should deny the cross, be ashamed of the passion, call the death an appearance, mutilate and explain away the birth of the Virgin, and calumniate the [human] nature itself as being abominable. He fights along with the Jews to a denial of the cross, and with the Gentiles to the calumniating of Mary, who are heretical in holding that Christ possessed a mere phantasmal body. For the leader of all wickedness assumes manifold forms, beguiler of men as he is, inconsistent, and even contradicting himself, projecting one course and then following another. For he is wise to do evil, but as to what good may be he is totally ignorant. And indeed he is full of ignorance, on account of his voluntary want of reason: for how can he be deemed anything else who does not perceive reason when it lies at his very feet?

Chapter V.-Apostrophe to Satan.

For if the Lord were a mere man, possessed of a soul and body only, why dost thou mutilate and explain away His being born with the common nature of humanity? Why dost thou call the passion a mere appearance, as if it were any strange thing happening to a [mere] man? And why dost thou reckon the death of a mortal to be simply an imaginary death? But if, [on the other hand,] He is both God and man, then why dost thou call it unlawful to style Him "the Lord of glory," who is by nature unchangeable? Why dost thou say that it is unlawful to declare of the Lawgiver who possesses a human soul, "The Word was made flesh," and was a perfect man, and not merely one dwelling in a man? But how came this magician into existence, who of old formed all nature that can be apprehended either by the senses or intellect, according to the will of the Father; and, when He became incarnate, healed every kind of disease and infirmity?

Chapter VI.-Continuation.

And how can He be but God, who raises up the dead, sends away the lame sound of limb, cleanses the lepers, restores sight to the blind, and either increases or transmutes existing substances, as the five loaves and the two fishes, and the water which became wine, and who puts to flight thy whole host by a mere word? And why dost thou abuse the nature of the Virgin, and style her members disgraceful, since thou didst of old display such in public processions, and didst order them to be exhibited naked, males in the sight of females, and females to stir up the unbridled lust of males? But now these are reckoned by thee disgraceful, and thou pretendest to be full of modesty, thou spirit of fornication, not knowing that then only anything becomes disgraceful when it is polluted by wickedness. But when sin is not present, none of the things that have been created are shameful, none of them evil, but all very good. But inasmuch as thou art blind, thou revilest these things.

Chapter VII.-Continuation: Inconsistency of Satan.

And how, again, does Christ not at all appear to thee to be of the Virgin, but to be God over all, and the Almighty? Say, then, who sent Him? Who was Lord over Him? And whose will did He obey? And what laws did He fulfil, since He was subject neither to the will nor power of any one? And while you deny that Christ was born, you affirm that the unbegotten was begotten, and that He who had no beginning was nailed to the cross, by whose permission I am unable to say. But thy changeable tactics do not escape me, nor am I ignorant that thou art wont to walk with slanting and uncertain steps. And thou art ignorant who really was born, thou who pretendest to know everything.

Chapter VIII.-Continuation: Ignorance of Satan.

For many things are unknown to thee; [such as the following]: the virginity of Mary; the wonderful birth; Who it was that became incarnate; the star which guided those who were in the east; the Magi who presented gifts; the salutation of the archangel to the Virgin; the marvellous conception of her that was betrothed; the announcement of the boy-forerunner respecting the son of the Virgin, and his leaping in the womb on account of what was foreseen; the songs of the angels over Him that was born; the glad tidings announced to the shepherds; the fear of Herod lest his kingdom should be taken from him; the command to slay the infants; the removal into Egypt, and the return from that country to the same region; the infant swaddling-bands; the human registration; the nourishing by means of milk; the name of father given to Him who did not beget; the manger because there was not room [elsewhere]; no human preparation [for the Child]; the gradual growth, human speech, hunger, thirst, journeyings, weariness; the offering of sacrifices and then also circumcision, baptism; the voice of God over Him that was baptized, as to who He was and whence [He had come]; the testimony of the Spirit and the Father from above; the voice of John the prophet when it signified the passion by the appellation of "the Lamb; "the performance of divers miracles, manifold healings; the rebuke of the Lord ruling both the sea and the winds; evil spirits expelled; thou thyself subjected to torture, and, when afflicted by the power of Him who had been manifested, not having it in thy power to do anything.

Chapter IX.-Continuation: Ignorance of Satan.

Seeing these things, thou wast in utter perplexity. And thou wast ignorant that it was a virgin that should bring forth; but the angels' song of praise struck thee with astonishment, as well as the adoration of the Magi, and the appearance of the star. Thou didst revert to thy state of [wilful] ignorance, because all the circumstances seemed to thee trifling; for thou didst deem the swaddling-bands, the circumcision, and the nourishment by means of milk contemptible: these things appeared to thee unworthy of God. Again, thou didst behold a man who remained forty days and nights without tasting human food, along with ministering angels at whose presence thou didst shudder, when first of all thou hadst seen Him baptized as a common man, and knewest not the reason thereof. But after His [lengthened] fast thou didst again assume thy wonted audacity, and didst tempt Him when hungry, as if He had been an ordinary man, not knowing who He was. For thou saidst, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Now, this expression, "If thou be the Son," is an indication of ignorance. For if thou hadst possessed real knowledge, thou wouldst have understood that the Creator can with equal ease both create what does not exist, and change that which already has a being. And thou temptedst by means of hunger Him who nourisheth all that require food.

And thou temptedst the very "Lord of glory," forgetting in thy malevolence that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. For if thou hadst known that He was the Son of God, thou wouldst also have understood that He who had kept his body from feeling any want for forty days and as many nights, could have also done the same for ever. Why, then, does He suffer hunger? In order to prove that He had assumed a body subject to the same feelings as those of ordinary men. By the first fact He showed that He was God, and by the second that He was also man.

Chapter X.-Continuation: Audacity of Satan.

Darest thou, then, who didst fall ”as lightning” from the very highest glory, to say to the Lord, ”Cast thyself down from hence [to Him] to whom the things that are not are reckoned as if they were, and to provoke to a display of vainglory Him that was free from all ostentation? And didst thou pretend to read in Scripture concerning Him: ”For He hath given His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest thou shouldest dash Thy foot against a stone? ” At the same time thou didst pretend to be ignorant of the rest, furtively concealing what [the Scripture] predicted concerning thee and thy servants: ”Thou shalt tread upon the adder and the basilisk; the lion and the dragon shall thou trample under foot.”

Chapter XI.-Continuation: Audacity of Satan.

If, therefore, thou art trodden down under the feet of the Lord, how dost thou tempt Him that cannot be tempted, forgetting that precept of the lawgiver, "Thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God? " Yea, thou even darest, most accursed one, to appropriate the works of God to thyself, and to declare that the dominion over these was delivered to thee. And thou dost set forth thine own fall as an example to the Lord, and dost promise to give Him what is really His own, if He would fall down and worship thee. And how didst thou not shudder, O thou spirit more wicked through thy malevolence than all other wicked spirits, to utter such words against the Lord? Through thine appetite was thou overcome, and through thy vainglory wast thou brought to dishonour: through avarice and ambition dost thou [now] draw on [others] to ungodliness. Thou, O Belial, dragon, apostate, crooked serpent, rebel against God, outcast from Christ, alien from the Holy Spirit, exile from the ranks of the angels, reviler of the laws of God, enemy of all that is lawful, who didst rise up against the first-formed of men, and didst drive forth [from obedience to] the commandment [of God] those who had in no respect injured thee; thou who didst raise up against Abel the murderous Cain; thou who didst take arms against Job: dost thou say to the Lord, "If Thou wilt fall down and worship me? "Oh what audacity! Oh what madness! Thou runaway slave, thou incorrigible slave, dost thou rebel against the good Lord? Dost thou say to so great a Lord, the God of all that either the mind or the senses can perceive, "If Thou wilt fall down and worship me? "

Chapter XII.-The Meek Reply of Christ.

But the Lord is long-suffering, and does not reduce to nothing him who in his ignorance dares [to utter] such words, but meekly replies, ”Get thee hence, Satan.” He does not say, ”Get thee behind Me,” for it is not possible that he should be converted; but, ”Begone, Satan,” to the course which thou hast chosen. ”Begone”to those things to which, through thy malevolence, thou hast been called. For I know Who I am, and by Whom I have been sent, and Whom it behoves Me to worship. For ”thou shall worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” I know the one [God]; I am acquainted with the only [Lord] from whom thou hast become an apostate. I am not an enemy of God; I acknowledge His pre-eminence; I know the Father, who is the author of my generation.

Chapter XIII.-Various Exhortations and Directions.

These things, brethren, out of the affection which I entertain for you, I have felt compelled to write, exhorting you with a view to the glory of God, not as if I were a person of any consequence, but simply as a brother. Be ye subject to the bishop, to the presbyters, and to the deacons. Love one another in the Lord, as being the images of God. Take heed, ye husbands, that ye love your wives as your own members. Ye wives also, love your husbands, as being one with them in virtue of your union. If any one lives in chastity or continence, let him not be lifted up, lest he lose his reward. Do not lightly esteem the festivals. Despise not the period of forty days, for it comprises an imitation of the conduct of the Lord. After the week of the passion, do not neglect to fast on the fourth and sixth days, distributing at the same time of thine abundance to the poor. If any one fasts on the Lord's Day or on the Sabbath, except on the paschal Sabbath only, he is a murderer of Christ.

Chapter XIV.-Farewells and Cautions.

Let your prayers be extended to the Church of Antioch, whence also I as a prisoner am being led to Rome. I salute the holy bishop Polycarp; I salute the holy bishop Vitalius, and the sacred presbytery, and my fellow-servants the deacons; in whose stead may my soul be found. Once more I bid farewell to the bishop, and to the presbyters in the Lord. If any one celebrates the passover along with the Jews, or receives the emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those that killed the Lord and His apostles.

Chapter XV.-Salutations. Conclusion.

Philo and Agathopus the deacons salute you. I salute the company of virgins, and the order of widows; of whom may I have joy! I salute the people of the Lord, from the least unto the greatest. I have sent you this letter through Euphanius the reader, a man honoured of God, and very faithful, happening to meet with him at Rhegium, just as he was going on board ship. Remember my bonds that I may be made perfect in Christ. Fare ye well in the flesh, the soul, and the spirit, while ye think of things perfect, and turn yourselves away from the workers of iniquity, who corrupt the word of truth, and are strengthened inwardly by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Epistle to the Virgin Mary

Her friend Ignatius to the Christ-bearing Mary. Thou oughtest to have comforted and consoled me who am a neophyte, and a disciple of thy [beloved] John. For I have heard things wonderful to tell respecting thy [son] Jesus, and I am astonished by such a report. But I desire with my whole heart to obtain information concerning the things which I have heard from thee, who wast always intimate and allied with Him, and who wast acquainted with [all] His secrets. I have also written to thee at another time, and have asked thee concerning the same things. Fare thou well; and let the neophytes who are with me be comforted of thee, and by thee, and in thee. Amen.

Reply of the Blessed Virgin to This Letter.
The lowly handmaid of Christ Jesus to Ignatius, her beloved fellow-disciple. The things which thou hast heard and learned from John concerning Jesus are true. Believe them, cling to them, and hold fast the profession of that Christianity which thou hast embraced, and conform thy habits and life to thy profession. Now I will come in company with John to visit thee, and those that are with thee. Stand fast in the faith, and show thyself a man; nor let the fierceness of persecution move thee, but let thy spirit be strong and rejoice in God thy Saviour. Amen.

Authorship. These letters are not by Ignatius of Antioch. They were written in his name in the fourth or fifth century, and the genuine letters of Ignatius are the seven shorter ones on this site.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.