

IMITATIO CHRISTI AND IMITATIO DEI: HIGH CHRISTOLOGY AND IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH'S ETHICS

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ABSTRACT. Scholars have long noted Ignatius of Antioch's statements of high christology. Jesus, who as God appeared in human form (*Eph.* 19.3), is 'God in man' (*Eph.* 7.2) and is 'our God' (*Eph.* inscr.; 15.3; 18.2; *Rom.* inscr.; 3.3; *Polyc.* 8.3). Jesus Christ is included in such 'nascent trinitarian' passages as *Eph.* 9.1 and *Magn.* 13.1-2. Yet further treasures remain to be mined, and the specific vein I will explore is the integration of Ignatius' high christology with his ethics. His paraenesis is rooted in 'the mind of God', also described as 'the mind of Christ' (*Eph.* 3.2; *Phld.* inscr.), who is 'the God who made you so wise' (*Smyrn.* 1.1; cf. *Eph.* 17.2). Ignatian moral instruction combines 'the will of God and Jesus Christ' (*Trall.* 1.1), 'the honor of the Father and the honor of Jesus Christ' (*Trall.* 12.2), and 'the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (*Phld.* 1.1). Believers are to be 'imitators of God' (*Trall.* 1.2) as well as 'imitators of Jesus Christ' (*Phld.* 7.2). Ignatius even prayed that he would be 'an imitator of the suffering of my God' (*Rom.* 6.3; cf. *Eph.* 10.3). Ignatian exhortation thus merges an *imitatio Christi* with an *imitatio Dei*. Arising from his particular experiences and specific circumstances, Ignatius' contextualized paraenesis elevates the Son to an authoritative status parallel to that of the Father. The interplay of christology and ethics also underscores a multi-leveled understanding of 'unity' and a multivalent use of 'flesh and spirit'.

KEY WORDS: Ignatius, christology, ethics, unity, imitation

Investigations of Ignatius' understanding of the Father, Son, and Spirit have often tended to be a-historical studies of his 'trinitarian' thought, or (more recently) have tended to situate his theology within a trajectory of diachronic development leading to Nicea and Chalcedon (Grant 1966b: 14-15; Fortman 1972: 38-40; Studer 1993: 32-34; McGuckin 2011: 52-54; Hillar 2012: 129-130). Thomas Weinandy's 2005 essay, entitled 'The Apostolic Christology of Ignatius of Antioch: The Road to Chalcedon', comes to mind as an example.¹ Those studies that focus upon Ignatius' own specific, histor-

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1 On the other hand, Matthew Bates' discussion of *The Birth of the Trinity* proceeds with only a footnote mention of Ignatius (Bates 2015: 159, n. 5). Bates emphasizes the role of Christian interpretations of the Old Testament in trinitarian development. The Ig-

ical context have tended to emphasize his anti-heretical purposes (Barnard 1966). Ignatius obviously pressed his christology into polemical service, especially against his so-called ‘docetic’ opponents (Saliba 1982; Trakatellis 1991: 430; Weinandy 2005: 79). Such investigations are well-plowed fields. Scholars have often overlooked, however, the fruitfulness of examining Ignatius’ christology in direct conjunction with his contextualized paraenesis.

This present essay will integrate Ignatius’ understanding of the unity of Father and Son with his contextualized ethics—his paraenesis framed by his moral thought patterns arising from his particular experiences and specific circumstances. I will merge Ignatius’ christology with his ethical language, by investigating the effect of his high christology upon his moral instruction and vice versa. In order to do so, I will begin with a brief overview of Ignatius’ high christology (see Weinandy 2005: 73, n. 5). Second, I will examine the association between Ignatian ethics and union with Christ. Third, I will examine Ignatius’ associated ‘flesh and spirit’ language. Fourth, I will merge the aforementioned investigations with Ignatius’ moral language of discipleship as imitation. By interlacing the threads of Ignatius’ christology with his ethics, one can appreciate his elevation of the Son within his paraenesis, which in turn was informed by his personal experience within particular circumstances.

Father, Son, and Spirit in Ignatius

Cyril Richardson refers to ‘a close, almost inseparable nexus between the Father and the Lord Jesus’ within ‘the most primitive Christian belief’ (Richardson 1967: 44). Within the Ignatian correspondence, the Father and the Son appear together in formulaic phrases, such as ‘the church of God the Father and of Jesus Christ’ (*Phld.* inscr.), ‘the church of God the Father and of the beloved Jesus Christ’ (*Smyrn.* inscr.), ‘the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (*Phld.* 1.1), ‘greetings in God the Father and in Jesus Christ’ (*Magn.* inscr.) and ‘Farewell in God the Father and in Jesus Christ’ (*Eph.* 21.2). Gregory Vall supplies an entire list of such ‘dyadic’ references in the Ignatian corpus (Vall 2013: 96, n. 17), thereby underscoring the unity of the Father and the Son within Ignatius’ theology.

The Holy Spirit does not play as key a role in the Ignatian correspondence, as he is not dealt with ‘so clearly’ as the Son (Lawson 1961: 146; Löhr 2010: 109). William Schoedel notes that Ignatius only refers to the Spirit ‘infrequently’, and even then ‘simply as a divine power associated with God

natian portions of the studies authored by Mark Carpenter (2005) and Mark Hanson (2011) are unfortunately marred by their substantial use of the Long Recension of the Ignatian corpus, which has been universally recognized by Ignatian scholars as spurious.

or Christ' (Schoedel 1985: 20). The data has even led to the charge that Ignatius leaned toward a binitarianism (cf. *Eph.* 3.2; 5.1; 15.1; *Magn.* 7.1-2; *Phld.* 7.2; 9.1; *Smyrn.* 3.3; 8.1). Nevertheless, the charge is unfitting, as Ignatius did not entirely ignore the Holy Spirit (Fortman 1972: 39; cf. Padberg 1962; Martin 1971; Tanner 1975), even though a close proximity is assumed between Christ and the Spirit (cf. McGuckin 2011: 52-53). *Ephesians* 9.1 describes the recipients as 'stones of a temple, prepared beforehand for the building of God the Father, hoisted up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, using as a rope the Holy Spirit' (cf. Corwin 1960: 142-144). *Magnesians* 13.1 exhorts: 'Be eager, therefore, to be firmly grounded in the precepts of the Lord and the apostles, in order that in whatever you do, you may prosper, physically and spiritually, in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and in the Spirit' (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:13; Quacquarelli 1973: 225-230).²

The Ignatian pneumatological materials focus upon the economic mission of the Spirit (Vall 2013: 114). As a possible exception, Ignatius exclaims, 'the Spirit is not deceived, because it is from God' (*Phld.* 7.1). Vall claims, 'This statement is not simply a reference to the Spirit's economic mission but to its ontological origin in God and implicitly to its divine nature' (Vall 2013: 115). While there is nothing in context that necessitates an ontological rather than an economic interpretation of the Spirit being 'from God' in this passage, the material that immediately follows does contrast learning from the Spirit with learning from a mere human (*Phld.* 7.2). Ignatius declared, 'I did not learn this from any human being. No, the Spirit itself was preaching' (*Phld.* 7.2), thereby implying the divine nature of the Spirit. In the Ignatian letters, the Spirit serves more as a teacher than as a moral enabler or motivator. In his examination of Ignatian theology, Richardson claims that 'Christ is the moral example and the inward power that quickens to life, but the Spirit is the intellectual helper' (Richardson 1967:47). The Spirit also effected Christ's incarnation (*Eph.* 18.2).

Beyond the recurrent dyadic phrases discussed above, Ignatius also repeatedly uses the word *theos* of Jesus Christ, and even the expression *ho theos* (Richardson 1967: 40).³ Foster affirms that Ignatius 'freely identifies Jesus as God' and 'is not shy' about this identification (Foster 2007: 99). Weinandy declares that Ignatius 'effortlessly' and 'spontaneously' applied the designation to the Son (Weinandy 2005: 76; cf. Grant 1966a: 8). The Ignatian cor-

2 A textual difficulty occurs in *Magn.* 13.1 (Schoedel 1985: 131; 131, n. 13). Schoedel considers *Magn.* 13.2 to be another 'trinitarian' text, but the matter is not clear in that passage. See Schoedel (1985: 130).

3 For the christological use of *ho theos*, see John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-9; 2 Peter 1:1; cf. 1 John 5:20. See Brown (1994: 171-195).

respondence uses *theos* of Christ on about a dozen occasions (Corwin 1960: 116-118; Grant 1966a: 7; Richardson 1967: 40; Weinandy 2005: 76, n. 11). Trakatellis considers six of these instances to be the most 'direct and explicit' (Trakatellis 1991: 425; cf. Brown 1963: 22). Jesus, who as God appeared in human form (*Eph.* 19.3), is 'God in man' (*Eph.* 7.2). In several instances, Ignatius attaches personal pronouns, referring to Jesus Christ as '*my* God' or '*our* God' (see Richardson 1967: 41). Ignatius references both 'our God, Jesus the Christ' (*Eph.* 18.2; *Rom.* 3.3; *Polyc.* 8.3), and 'Jesus Christ our God' (*Eph.* inscr.; *Rom.* inscr.).⁴ Trakatellis reasons that such Ignatian phrasing is 'definitive and unambiguous' (Trakatellis 1991: 427). Ignatius also repeatedly uses the term 'Lord' of Jesus Christ (see Löhr 2010: 110; cf. Richardson 1967: 43; see Weinandy 2005: 77, n. 12). Moreover, Jesus is 'Son of Man and Son of God' (*Eph.* 20.2) (Richardson 1967: 45).

Trakatellis notes that Ignatius 'simply issues his high christological statement as a matter of fact, as a truth taken for granted and fully shared by the recipients of his letters' (Trakatellis 1991: 427).⁵ Ignatius tends to assert that Christ is 'God' but without providing any explanation of the ontological details. The precision of trinitarian language (*prosōpon*, *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *physis*) is definitely absent. Ignatius kept the Father and Son distinct, as Jesus Christ is not only 'God' but also 'from God' (*Eph.* 7.2; cf. Vogt 2000; de Bhaldrath 2001). The emphasis upon the unity between the Father and Son is often upon oneness of will rather than oneness of metaphysical essence (*Magn.* 7.1). Ignatius uses this volitional aspect to his paraenetic advantage: 'Therefore as the Lord did nothing without the Father, either by himself or through the apostles (for he was united with him), so you must not do anything without the bishop and the presbyters' (*Magn.* 7.1).

High Christology and Ethics

Although Ignatius does not offer a full ethic, 'there are fragments of ethical ideas scattered throughout' his writings' (Foster 2014: 514). To act 'in accordance with the Lord' is to act 'for the honor of God' (*Polyc.* 5.2).⁶ Observing 'the law of Christ' parallels bearing 'the name of the Father' (*Rom.* inscr.). Ignatius' moral exhortation is repeatedly rooted in 'the mind of God', also described as 'the mind of Jesus Christ', because Jesus Christ is 'the

4 Unless noted otherwise, English translations come from Holmes 2007.

5 One should note, however, that Jesus is not called 'God' in *Magnesians* and *Philadelphians*, which are often interpreted as confronting some type of 'judaizing' opposition (Grant 1966a: 7-8).

6 In the Ignatian letters, 'a tendance à se construire avec la preposition κατά et exprime la manière de vivre' (Zañartu 1979: 325).

mind of the Father' (*Eph.* 3.2; *Rom.* 8.3; *Phld.* inscr. *Smyrn.* 6.2; *Polyc.* 8.1).⁷ He is 'God's knowledge' (*Eph.* 17.2). To oppose the grace of Jesus Christ is to act contrary to 'the mind of God' (*Smyrn.* 6.2). Jesus Christ is 'the unerring mouth by whom the Father has spoken truly' (*Rom.* 8.2). Such functional equivalence is possible because Jesus Christ is 'the mind of the Father' and 'the God who made you so wise' (*Eph.* 3.2; *Smyrn.* 1.1).

Ignatian paraenesis considers 'the will of God and Jesus Christ' (*Trall.* 1.1), 'the honor of the Father and the honor of Jesus Christ' (*Trall.* 12.2), and 'the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (*Phld.* 1.1). Believers are both 'God-bearers' and 'Christ-bearers' (*Eph.* 9.2) (Meinhold 1979: 68; Kathanar 1996: 121). In context, being *theophoroi* and *christophoroi* relate to being 'adorned in every respect with the commandments of Jesus Christ', and loving 'nothing in human life, only God' (*Eph.* 9.2). Ignatius desired his recipients to possess 'the word of Jesus', 'that we may be his temples, and he may be in us as our God' (*Eph.* 15.2-3). He entreated, 'Let all of you run together as to one temple of God, as to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father and remained with the One and returned to the One' (*Magn.* 7.2).

This 'temple' indwelling with its concomitant theology of union was integrated with ecclesial and ethical ramifications. 'Let there be nothing among you that is capable of dividing you, but be united with the bishop and with those who lead, as an example and lesson of incorruptibility' (*Magn.* 6.2). 'Do not attempt to convince yourselves that anything done apart from the others is right, but, gathering together, let there be one prayer, one petition, one mind, one hope, with love and blameless joy, which is Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is better' (*Magn.* 7.1).

Ethics as Union with Christ

Ignatius exhorted Polycarp, 'Focus on unity, for there is nothing better' (*Polyc.* 1.2). Vall calls unity 'the dominant leitmotif of the Ignatian corpus' (Vall 2013: 89). He specifically examines three different themes of unity: the unity of Jesus and the Father, the unity of flesh and spirit, and the unity of faith and love (Vall 2013: 91; see also Tugwell 1989: 109-115). 'Faith' and 'love' are recurrently coupled, and they serve as 'the central Christian virtues' (Löhr 2010: 112). Ignatius asserted that 'faith and love are everything; nothing is preferable to them' (*Smyrn.* 6.1). Moreover, faith and love are 'the twin pillars upon which Ignatius builds his ultimate vision of *henōsis*' (Swartley 1973: 83; cf. Torrance 1948: 68). 'Faith is the beginning and love is the end, and the two, when they exist in unity, are God. Everything else that

7 According to Kleist, the Ignatian use of 'mind' (*gnōmē*) involves both the understanding (intelligence) and the will (disposition/inclination) (Kleist 1946: 121; 137, n. 3).

contributes to excellence follows from them' (*Eph.* 14.1; Zañartu 2009: 329). Jesus Christ himself was united with the Father (*Eph.* 5.1; cf. *Smyrn.* 3.3), and Ignatius considers this to be the 'most important' dimension of unity (*Magn.* 1.2). *Magnesians* 1.2 explicitly roots the 'union of flesh and spirit' and that of 'faith and love' in the unity of Jesus and the Father. 'God promises unity, which he himself is' (*Trall.* 11.2).

According to Cullen Story, there are about thirty Ignatian references to the concept of 'one' (Story 1984: 181). Ignatius' theme of unity is interwoven with his theological ethics, as the moral life is developed in union with Christ (Kleist 1946: 126; Foster 2014: 523-525). For Ignatius, Jesus Christ is our 'inseparable' and 'true' life (*Eph.* 3.2; 7.2; *Smyrn.* 4.1; Tugwell 1989: 112; Zañartu 2009: 332, 335). The language of *en Iēsou Christou*, *homonoia*, *henotēs*, *henōsis*, and *henoō* permeate the Ignatian letters (Lightfoot 1885: 108-109; Richardson 1967: 35-36; Weinrich 1993: 140; Vall 2013: 89-90).⁸ The nouns *henōsis* and *henotēs* appear nineteen times (combined) in the Ignatian correspondence, the verb *henoō* appears another six times, and the term *homonoia* occurs on eight occasions (Story 1984: 181; Weinrich 1993: 140; Harmon 2011: 39, employing Goodspeed 1993). The *sun-* prefix is also common (Vall 2013: 90). Ignatius also abounds in *en-* and *homo-*prefixed vocabulary (Vall 2013: 91, n. 9).

The unity of the Christian community is from God (*Phld.* 8.1) and 'in Jesus Christ' (*Phld.* 5.2). Simon Tugwell refers to a 'chain of ontological validation' and explains, 'The union of Christ with the Father is the foundation of the whole system of unities' (Tugwell 1989: 111, 117). 'Christ is the one Jesus Christ who came from the one Father, without ceasing to be one with him, and he establishes in himself a unity of flesh and spirit, of inner and outer, and the unity of the church is the extension of this unity to us, who can only become one and coherent in our own individuality in as much as we accept and participate in the unity of the church' (Tugwell 1989: 117; cf. Preiss 1938: 202-210). Authentic life, being 'truly alive', conjoins profession and reality, the outer and the inner, even as 'flesh and spirit' were united in Christ, who was himself united with the Father (Tugwell 1989: 117; Preiss 1938: 229-236).

Because disunity is contrary to God's character, disunity should not characterize the community of believers. In the church, Jews and Gentiles are united in a single body. The Eucharistic celebration is a picture of this unified body (*Phld.* 4.1; Howell 2009: 49-50; Long 2014: 209-211). It is 'the great sign' and 'great formative force' of ecclesial unity (McPartlan 2009: 260; cf. Kathanar 1996: 127). Therefore, Eucharistic imagery has 'strong

8 For attempts to differentiate Ignatius' use of *henotēs* and *henōsis*, see Lightfoot 1885: 109; Corwin 1960: 259-260; Vall 2013: 89, n. 4.

ethical connotations' for Ignatius (Löhr 2010: 108). Not only did the Eucharist model the agreement of Christians, it also manifested the nature of God (Stewart 2013: 22). When Christians assembled harmoniously together, they cast down the power of Satan (Khomych 2006; Stewart 2013: 21).

Moreover, the unity of the church is centered in harmony with the singular bishop, along with the elders and deacons (see Howell 2009: 27-30). Ignatian readers were to 'return to the unity of God and the council of the bishop' (*Phld.* 8.1). As Clayton Jefford explains, 'Unity is of paramount concern. And for Ignatius, that unity is only available under the presence of a bishop' (Jefford 2005: 84; cf. Weinrich 1993: 147-150). Ignatian readers were to follow their bishops, even 'as Jesus Christ followed the Father' (*Smyrn.* 8.1; cf. Isacson 2005). 'Let no one do anything that has to do with the church without the bishop' (*Smyrn.* 8.1; cf. Jefford 2005: 84). The terrestrial hierarchy of bishop-presbyters-deacons was to reflect the celestial hierarchy of God-Christ-apostles (Swartley 1973: 82). In the Ignatian structure, the true bishop is God, and the earthly bishop is 'the broker of the benefits of Christ' (Stewart 2013: 15). In short, 'la hiérarchie terrestre soit une imitation, une réplique, de la hiérarchie divine' (Preiss 1938: 230). In fact, the Eucharist was to be celebrated only under legitimate episcopal authority (*Smyrn.* 8.1; Lawson 1961: 150; Jefford 2005: 75). Ignatius viewed the choice to assemble apart from the bishop as 'reprehensible', as the life of the body is not grounded in human will but in God's own being (Bushur 2015: 15).

Undoubtedly, Ignatius' personal experience as bishop affected his understanding of the role of the bishop in his paraenesis (Brent 2009: 14-43). As James Bushur has quipped, Ignatius found himself 'fighting the forces of fragmentation' (Bushur 2015: 14). As a result, Ignatius' understanding of the unity between the Father and Son is interwoven with his understanding of ecclesial unity with the bishop (Trakatellis 1991: 429-430). Foster summarizes, 'The relationship of believers to the bishop reflects the union between the Church and Jesus, and that of Jesus to the Father (*Eph.* 5.1)' (Foster 2007: 94). Furthermore, many scholars conclude that Ignatius' emphasis upon ecclesial unity and his corollary of episcopal authority intertwine with his concern for 'peace' within his Antiochene church (*Phld.* 10.1; *Smyrn.* 11.2-3; *Polyc.* 7.1-2, 8.1), which had apparently experienced discord. It seems that some sort of disorder had plagued the church, but its well-being was restored while Ignatius was being transported to martyrdom (Brent 2009: 20-22). Ignatius therefore rejoiced that the Antiochene Christians 'are at peace and have regained their proper stature and their corporate life has been restored to its proper state' (*Smyrn.* 11.2).

Some scholars have theorized that Ignatius himself was a focus of the ecclesial discord (Foster 2007: 96; but see Robinson 2009: 177-186). For ex-

ample, Allen Brent believes Ignatius' 'charismatic outpourings' may have been partially to blame for the disunity (Brent 2009: 42; cf. Trevett 1983; Maier 1990). Others note the general history of the Jewish-Gentile tensions in the Antiochene Christian community (Stewart 2013: 22; cf. Robinson 2009: 127-162). Some interpreters have maintained that persecution 'caused some Christians to meet in smaller groups apart from the bishop and the whole church' (Bushur 2015: 15).

Thomas Robinson has recently bucked the rising tide of emphasis upon Ignatius' ecclesial problems back home, by arguing against an 'internal' focus of Ignatius' concern for 'peace' in the Antiochene church (Robinson 2009: 163-202). In his reconstruction, the church's 'peace' had been disrupted by external persecution (Robinson 2009: 163-164; contrast Harrison 1936: 79-106). Of course, 'internal' tensions and 'external' opposition are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Tugwell even hypothesized that 'disaffected members' of Ignatius' flock had denounced him to the Roman authorities (Tugwell 1989: 123). In this reconstruction, Ignatius' arrest was due to 'the internal feuding of the Christians' (Tugwell 1989: 108). Such imaginative interpretation, however, relies upon filling in the shadowy framework of the primary sources. In any case, Ignatius' concern for the Antiochene church is readily evident. He entreated the Romans, 'Remember in your prayers the church in Syria, which has God for its shepherd in my place. Jesus Christ alone will be its bishop—as will your love' (*Rom.* 9.1). Furthermore, Ignatius' concern for 'peace' and 'unity' extended beyond his Syrian church. He could declare both that 'There is nothing better than peace' (*Eph.* 13.2) and 'Focus on unity, for there is nothing better' (*Polyc.* 1.2).

Ethics, Flesh, and Spirit

This union with Jesus Christ is union with the only Physician, 'who is both flesh and spirit' (*Eph.* 7.2). The expression 'flesh and spirit' appears more than forty times in the Ignatian correspondence (Kleist 1946: 126; cf. Grant 1966a: 19; Lona 1986). In the case of Christ, his 'flesh and spirit' can often be interpreted as connoting his humanity and divinity (Schoedel 1985: 29). For instance, in the context of *Ephesians* 7.2, the pairing of 'flesh and spirit' is found among other christological phrases implying the duality of humanity and divinity: 'There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord.' In Vall's view, this is a 'unique' application of the expression 'flesh and spirit' (Vall 2013: 93).

Schoedel concludes, 'flesh and spirit represent two spheres or two dimensions that refer to human and divine reality respectively', thus forming

'the kernel of the later two-nature christologies' (Schoedel 1985: 60). He claims, 'When Ignatius refers to Christ as both "fleshly and spiritual," he has in mind the union of the divine and human in the God-Man and thus anticipates the classical two-nature christology' (Schoedel 1985: 20). Any language of anticipation, however, may connote too much teleology, as if Ignatius jumped on a train knowing the final destination was the Definition of Chalcedon. Nevertheless, one readily recognizes Ignatius' 'profound commitment to Jesus' divinity and real human existence' (see Hurtado 2005: 640; cf. Vall 2013: 98). Using the nuanced language of 'approach', Steven Harmon states, 'The quasi-creedal Christological antitheses in *Ephesians* 7.2 approach a fully-fledged two-natures Christology' (Harmon 2011: 38; italics added; cf. Weinandy 2005: 82; Schoedel 1985: 8-9).

The language of 'flesh and spirit' also dominates Ignatius' ethics, as believers are 'united in flesh and spirit to every commandment' (*Rom.* inscr.). Ignatius explicitly discussed believers living out multiple virtues in both 'flesh and spirit', including purity and self-control (*Eph.* 10.3), unity (*Magn.* 1.2), peace (*Trall.* inscr.), refreshment (*Trall.* 12.1), hope (*Phld.* 11.2), faith (*Smyrn.* 1.1), love (*Smyrn.* 13.2), diligence (*Pol.* 1.2), and contentment (*Pol.* 5.1). Ignatius declared, 'even those things that you do according to the flesh are in fact spiritual, for you do everything in Jesus Christ' (*Eph.* 8.2). He prayed for 'a union of flesh and spirit that comes from Jesus Christ', rooted in a prior unity 'of Jesus and the Father' (*Magn.* 1.2; see Lightfoot 1885: 108-109). He described faith as 'the flesh of the Lord' and love as 'the blood of Jesus Christ' (*Trall.* 8.1), and he highlighted 'faith in and love for Jesus Christ our God' (*Rom.* inscr.).

The foundational notions of unity (both unity between Father and Son and unity between flesh and spirit) thus affected Ignatian ethics. Ignatius desired to consume the 'bread of God', which is 'the flesh of Christ', and to drink his blood, which is 'incorruptible love' (*Rom.* 7.3). Jesus' blood is also called 'the blood of God', and it is attached to moral import: 'Being imitators of God, once you took on new life through the blood of God you completed perfectly the task so natural to you' (*Eph.* 1.1). To remain in Jesus Christ is to remain 'in the unity and care of God' (*Polyc.* 8.3).

Although some have argued that Ignatius emphasized a 'mystical union' with Christ, Richardson contends that the Ignatian *unio Christi* is primarily moral or ethical (Richardson 1967; cf. Preiss 1938).⁹ 'Union and obedience are synonyms for Ignatius' (Richardson 1967: 34). Moreover, Ignatius is

9 Schoedel sought to distance his interpretation of Ignatius from a mystical union interpretation, but see Vall's response: 'Of course, it remains to be seen what Ignatius means by all these expressions, but Schoedel's sanitized interpretation would require us to regard them as so much extravagant rhetoric' (Vall 2013: 95).

‘frequently at pains to emphasize the ethical content and the moral outcome of this personal fellowship of the believer with Christ’ (Richardson 1967: 37). Functioning ‘in Christ’ leads to such moral virtues as purity, temperance, and endurance (Richardson 1967: 35). Union within the church manifests the imitation of the moral nature of God, who exists in perfect harmony (Richardson 1967: 33). ‘You must join this chorus, every one of you, so that by being harmonious in unanimity and taking your pitch from God you may sing in unison with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father ... It is, therefore, advantageous for you to be in perfect unity, in order that you may always have a share in God’ (*Eph.* 4.2). Ignatius affirmed, ‘I congratulate you who are united with him, as the church is with Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ is with the Father, so that all things may be harmonious in unity’ (*Eph.* 5.1). Believers are to ‘love one another always’ and to do so ‘in Jesus Christ’ (*Magn.* 6.2).

We have already addressed Ignatius’ christological use of ‘flesh and spirit’ (human and divine) above. In the case of Ignatius’ theological anthropology, ‘flesh and spirit’ is an expression referring to the unity of the material and the immaterial self (Vall 2013: 120). Together, ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ form the whole person, as ‘true personality is only fully expressed in these two together’ (Richardson 1967: 47). The phrase almost seems like a stock expression of ‘entirely’, even as Ignatius refers to the combination of ‘inwardly and outwardly’ (*esōthen kai eksōthen*) (*Rom.* 3.2), or ‘both inside and out’ (Ehrman 2003: 273; cf. Tugwell 1989: 117).¹⁰ In this manner, the duality of ‘flesh and spirit’ becomes another bridge between Ignatian christology and Ignatian ethics. James Srawley comments, ‘The reconciliation of the antithesis between “flesh” and “spirit” through the union of God and man in Christ is realized practically by Christians in the life of faith and love’ (Srawley 1919: 31-32).

Ignatius exhorted the Romans to fulfill Christ’s commands ‘in flesh and spirit’ (*Rom.* inscr.). Christians abide in Christ ‘physically and spiritually’ (*Eph.* 10.3), or ‘both in the flesh and in the spirit’ (as translated in Ehrman 2003: 231). Married partners are to be content with their spouses ‘physically and spiritually’ (*Polyc.* 5.1), or ‘in flesh and spirit’ (Ehrman 2003: 315). The Trallians enjoyed peace ‘in flesh and spirit’ (*Trall.* inscr.), and they had refreshed the Antiochene bishop ‘in every respect, physically as well as spiritually’ (*Trall.* 12.1), or ‘in every way, in both flesh and spirit’ (Ehrman 2003: 267). Ignatius described Polycarp as ‘both physical and spiritual’ (*Polyc.* 2.2), and beseeched him to vindicate his office with ‘physical and spiritual’ dili-

10 Holmes has *esōthen kai eksōthen* in Greek, and conversely ‘outwardly and inwardly’ in his English translation.

gence (*Polyc.* 1.2). Through it all, the paraenetic goal was 'unity, both physical and spiritual' (*Magn.* 13.2) (Vall 2013: 100-105, 120-126).

Vall quips that the words *sarks* and *pneuma* are 'the bread and butter of Ignatius's anthropology' (Vall 2013: 121). As noted above, in the case of Ignatius' christology, 'flesh and spirit' connote humanity and deity. In the case of Ignatius' anthropology, however, the term *sarks* at times takes a more negative connotation. In these specific cases, *sarks* is not only a neutral reference to materiality, but a reference to the physical or worldly realm negatively focused upon 'to the neglect of the spiritual dimension' (Vall 2013: 122). Matter can present an alluring distraction (*Rom.* 9.2), and therefore one's desires must be transformed (Vall 2013: 142). The goal is not so much the suppression of lower desire as the cultivation and purification of desire directed toward Jesus and the Father (see Vall 2013: 148-149). Ignatius entreated his readers, 'that with complete purity and self-control you may abide in Christ Jesus physically and spiritually' (*Eph.* 10.3).

Notwithstanding, what seems missing from the multiple discussions of 'flesh and spirit' within the Ignatian ethic is the robust antithesis that appears in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans (Vall 2013: 118, 122). Therefore, although Kleist refers to 'flesh and spirit' as Ignatius' 'favorite antithesis' (Kleist 1946: 145, n. 14), the Antiochene bishop's paraenesis more commonly used the two in a correlation of entirety or wholeness rather than in an antithesis of polarity.¹¹ When used together in Ignatian moral exhortation, *sarks* and *pneuma* refer to 'the whole human person and of all the dimensions of human life' (Vall 2013: 121; cf. 92). Richardson therefore insists of Ignatius' use of 'flesh and spirit': 'They are not warring principles, but complementary factors, in human nature' (Richardson 1967: 49). In fact, Ignatius declares, 'but whatever you do in your mortal bodies (*kata sarka*), this is spiritual, for you always act under the control of Christ'.

Imitatio Dei and Imitatio Christi

As a further example of the integration of Ignatian christology with Ignatian paraenesis, Ignatius merged an *imitatio Dei* with an *imitatio Christi*. His concepts of unity 'closely interact' with his notion of imitation (Swartley 1973: 82; Kathana 1996). Christians are to be 'imitators of God' (*Eph.* 1.1; *Trall.* 1.2) and similarly to be 'imitators of Jesus Christ' (*Phld.* 7.2). They are to 'be eager to be imitators of the Lord', as they 'abide in Christ Jesus physically and spiritually (*sarkikōs kai pneumatikōs*)' (*Eph.* 10.3). The concept of imitation or *mimēsis* was commonplace and influential in the classical world, and appears in the New Testament documents. Kleist maintains that Ignatius' expression of being 'imitators of God' mirrors Ephesians 5:1 (Kleist

11 Even though Schoedel uses a 'polarity' framework (Schoedel 1985: 23, n. 120).

1946: 119; cf. Inge 1905: 68). Ignatius' description of being 'imitators of God' also resembles 1 Corinthians 4:16; and 11.1. In fact, Ignatius consciously viewed himself as an imitator of Paul, who was in turn an imitator of Christ (Stewart 2013: 12-13; Reis 2005). But the underlying foundation of *mimēsis* concerns Jesus' imitation of the Father. In *Philadelphians* 7.2, Ignatius exhorts, 'Love unity. Flee from divisions. Become imitators of Jesus Christ, just as he is of his Father'.

In the Ignatian letters, the followers of Christ are called 'believers', 'brethren', 'saints', and 'disciples' (Kleist 1946: 127). Hermut Löhr contends that the latter is 'central to Ignatius' self-understanding' (Löhr 2010: 107). For Ignatius, imitation is the core of discipleship, reflecting the moral nature of Jesus Christ (Richardson 1967: 38; Kathanar 1996: 122). The Antiochene bishop even referred to idealized Christian living as 'perfect discipleship' (Kleist 1946: 132).

The ultimate manifestation of discipleship was martyrdom, which involved imitating the passion of Christ (Preiss 1938; Richardson 1967: 39; Petersen 2013: 18). Discipleship remains 'a not yet fully reached ideal' that 'reaches its fulfillment only in martyrdom' (Löhr 2010: 107). Ignatius belatedly, 'Now at last I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible envy me, so that I may reach Jesus Christ. Fire and cross and battles with wild beasts, mutilation, mangling, wrenching of bones, the hacking of limbs, the crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil—let these come upon me, only let me reach Jesus Christ!' (*Rom.* 5.3). Martyrdom would be the means of his gaining 'unity with God through Christ' (Stewart 2013: 12). In the Ignatian value system, 'The highest realization of Christian morality is martyrdom' (Löhr 2010: 112; cf. Kleist 1946: 135). 'Only let it be in the name of Jesus Christ, so that I may suffer together with him! I endure everything because he himself, who is the perfect human being, empowers me' (*Smyrn.* 4.2; see Zañartu 2009: 328). As a 'sacrifice to God', Ignatius would 'truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ' (*Rom.* 4.2). He desired 'that I may not merely be called a Christian but actually prove to be one' (*Rom.* 3.2).

The Ignatian desire for martyrdom thus integrated the themes of love, suffering, unity, and imitation. 'Ignatius sees himself being stretched out in love for Christ, a love he longs to be brought to completion in full communion with his beloved' (Bushur 2015: 17). Furthermore, Ignatius seems to have believed that his sacrifice would seal the 'peace' of the Antiochene church (Stewart 2013: 13, 22; but see Robinson 2009: 184-186). Whether or not he tied his impending martyrdom to the healing of a disrupted Antiochene church, he definitely viewed his sacrifice as the completion of discipleship (Robinson 2009: 199), a concept he integrated with his ecclesial ethics (McNamara 1978). He perceived himself to be 'a ransom on behalf of

those who are obedient to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons' (*Polyc.* 6.1; cf. *Smyrn.* 10.2; *Polyc.* 2.3), and as a 'sacrifice' for the Ephesian believers in particular (*Eph.* 8.1).

Reflecting an implicit *communicatio idiomatum* (Weinandy 2005: 81), Ignatius prayed that he himself would be 'an imitator of the suffering of my God' (*Rom.* 6.3; cf. *Polyc.* 3.2). In fact, in Weinandy's estimation, the *communicatio idiomatum* is key to Ignatius' incarnational approach (Weinandy 2005: 81). For Weinandy, the 'most celebrated example of Ignatius' use of the communication of idioms' is in *Ephesians* 7.2.

Based upon his understanding of the unity of the Father and the Son, Ignatius described Polycarp as one 'who has God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as his bishop' (*Polyc.* inscr.), that is, as one 'being overseen (*episkopēmenō;*) by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (see Harmon 2011: 39). The 'Father of Jesus Christ' is 'the bishop of all' (*Magn.* 3.1). By following this God-in-Christ moral exemplar, believers prosper 'in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and in the Spirit'—an ethical department lived out in both a 'physical and spiritual' manner (*Magn.* 13.1-2), or 'in flesh and spirit' (as translated in Ehrman 2003: 253). The ethical role of imitation is not simply the obedient following of Christ (cf. Oepke 1938). It is rooted in a profound unity with Christ (in flesh and spirit) who himself is united with the Father. Once again, Ignatian theology and Ignatian ethics are indispensably interconnected. Furthermore, this integration was framed by Ignatius' particular experiences and circumstances. As Richardson claims, Ignatius' ethical emphasis reflects 'the growing emphasis on ethics in the early Church' and 'the practical interests' of Ignatius himself (Richardson 1967: 36).

According to Willard Swartley, three clusters were essential to Ignatius' concept of *imitatio Christi*: the ethical cluster, the christological cluster, and the *henōsis* cluster (Swartley 1973: 90). Swartley claims that the prevalence of each of these distinct clusters varies by Ignatian letter (Swartley 1973: 91-92). He argues that the unity of the church back home in Antioch is 'the key that unlocks the door to understanding' to Ignatius' ethical conception of unity (Swartley 1973: 93). Ignatius first knew that his Syrian church was at peace when he wrote to the Philadelphians (*Phld.* 10.1; cf. *Polyc.* 7.1). According to Swartley, this development caused a shift in Ignatius' statistical use of ethical terms (Swartley 1973: 93), although Robinson has disputed Swartley's structuring and use of the statistical evidence (Robinson 2009: 172-177).

In any case, the Pauline seed of 'Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ' (1 Corinthians 11:1, CSB; cf. 4:16) became a fuller ethic of imitation in Ignatius, who focused even more upon imitating Christ in his sufferings (cf. Colossians 1:24; Bultmann 1960; Snyder 1961; Grant 1966a: 11). The bishop

from Syria declared, ‘You are the highway of those who are being killed for God’s sake; you are fellow initiates of Paul, who was sanctified, who was approved, who is deservedly blessed—may I be found in his footsteps when I reach God!’ (*Eph.* 12:2; cf. Harland 2003). Ignatius was thus spurred on by his desire to promote the unity of the church through his ‘loving and suffering as God in Christ loved and suffered’ (Swartley 1973: 101, n. 49).

Conclusion

Among other facets of his theology, Ignatius of Antioch is known for his high christology, especially his repeated attribution of *theos* to Jesus Christ. Ignatius seems to apply *theos* to Christ deliberately, rather than ‘casually’, and yet with ease (Richardson 1967: 40-41; Trakatellis 1991: 426; contrast Brown 1963: 22-23). This essay has examined how Ignatius’ high christology merged with his ethics. His unity of the Father and the Son was integrated with an ecclesial unity centered in the unifying role of the bishop (Srawley 1919: 31-32; Stead 1971, 273; Stewart 2013: 14). Ignatius’ understanding of unity was thus affected by his personal experience, as he desired peace in his church and as he longed to suffer as its exiled bishop. His personal concern for ecclesial unity informed his consideration of the unity of ‘flesh and spirit’ (human and divine) in Christ, as paralleled by the comprehensive fullness of ‘flesh and spirit’ (physical and spiritual) in Christian living (Meinhold 1979: 55-56, 70). Because of the unity of the Son with the Father, an *imitatio Christi* paralleled an *imitatio Dei*. For Ignatius, as a Christian leader facing impending martyrdom, a full imitation of Christ involved suffering with him, as his perfected disciple.

Unfortunately, scholars have sometimes interpreted Ignatius’ understanding of the Father, Son, and Spirit in an a-historical vacuum. More recently, with a fuller diachronic awareness in hand, scholars have sometimes interpreted his so-called ‘nascent trinitarianism’ as a waystation on an anticipated road to the definitional language of Nicea and Chalcedon. Ignatius, of course, was writing occasional letters, not chapters of an atemporal systematic theology. Some scholars have examined his christology through the specific historical-contextual lens of his anti-heretical polemic. Nevertheless, other important insights surface by examining Ignatius’ high christology in conjunction with his historically contextualized paraenesis, which arose from his own particular experiences and specific circumstances. These integrated insights include the complexions of a multi-leveled unity, the dual coupling of flesh and spirit, and the role of an imitation in discipleship that is Christ-emulating and therefore God-emulating—because Ignatius espoused a ‘christologically defined concept of God’ (Trakatellis 1991: 429).

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