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PATHS OF QUARTODECIMAN PASCHA IN THE LETTERS OF IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

ŚCIEŻKI KWARTODECYMAŃSKIEJ PASCHY W LISTACH IGNACEGO ANTIOCHEŃSKIEGO

ABSTRACT

Wydaje się oczywistym, że Kościół celebrował Misterium Paschalne od początku swojego istnienia. Jednak najstarszą celebracją paschalną Kościoła, jaką znamy z wczesnochrześcijańskich pism, jest ta, która rozprzestrzeniła się w drugim wieku w Azji Mniejszej. Była ona oparta na kwartodecymańskiej teologii. Możemy przyjrzeć się bliżej temu doświadczeniu paschalnemu głównie dzięki dwóm homiliiom: Melitona z Sardes i Pseudo-Hipolita. Niemniej jednak jest jeszcze jedno źródło, które ujawnia podobieństwo do wymienionych dwóch dokumentów i które, choć niedoartyściowane we współczesnych badaniach, dostarcza ważnych przesłanek dla kwartodecymańskiej koncepcji. Ponadto okazuje się być poprzednikiem obu wcześniej wymienionych homilii, stąd mogłoby służyć do pewnego stopnia za wzorzec. Źródłem tym jest zbiór siedmiu listów Ignacego Antiocheńskiego, które datowane są na początek drugiego wieku. Powstałe w klimacie prześladowania, listy te ujawniają charakterystyczne cechy kwartodecymańskiej teologii. I jest to ewidentnie teologia, w której Ignacy się wychował. Co jest znamienne, teologia ta jest już rozwinięta. Ignacy wydaje się stosować ją z głębokim sensem i zrozumieniem jak ktoś, kto w niej wzrastał. To może oznaczać, że korzenie kwartodecymańskiej teologii sięgają dalej. Pytaniem jest: gdzie?

Presumably the Church has been celebrating the Paschal Mystery from the beginning of its presence. However the oldest paschal celebration of the Church that is known to us from the early Christian writings is the one proliferated in the second century in Asia Minor. It was based on quartodeciman theology. We may take closer look at that paschal experience mainly thanks to the two paschal homilies: of Melito of Sardis and Pseudo-Hippolytus. Yet, there is another source that exhibits similarity to the two documents and, although underestimated in the modern researches, provides valid view on quartodeciman perception. Moreover, it appears to be predecessor of the both, hence could serve as pattern to certain extent. The referred source is the set of seven letters of Ignatius of Antioch that are dated on the beginning of the second century. Created in the climate of persecution the letters reveal distinctive features of the quartodeciman theology. And it is evidently the theology in which Ignatius has been brought up. What is significant is that the theology appears to be already developed. Ignatius seems to be applying it with deep sense and understanding, like the one who has been nurtured in it. This may mean that the roots of quartodeciman theology go back further. Question is where to.

Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ from the beginning was the very heart of Christianity. This has been expressed by thoroughly paschal spirituality in which the early Christians lived their faith. Based on these premises it seems reasonable to assume that the Church has been celebrating the Paschal Mystery from the beginning of its presence.

However the oldest Pascha¹ of the Church that is known to us from the early Christian writings is the one proliferated in the second century in Asia Minor, where it had been more vital than in any other place, on the trail of St. Paul and moreover of St. John. This is wherefrom it had spread, at least in its content, to the entire Christian world. Taking root from Jewish Pascha, applying rich typology and making qualitative and significative step forward, the Christian Pascha has brought deeper understanding of the Good Friday and Holy Saturday, providing in this way an insight and understanding of the Christ's Death theology. Marking the date of paschal celebration on 14th of Nissan, the Quartodecimans have built plenteous conception of Paschal Mystery, what together with typological elaboration had contributed at the right moment of history to great single idea of Pascha, as the meeting of two Testaments – the Old and the New one. The unity and continuation is based on mysterious ascent of everything to Christ, where all things should find their fulfillment: “the immolation of the sheep, and the rite of the Pasch, and the letter of the Law”².

The two contemporaneous researchers, W. Hryniewicz and R. Cantalamessa, convergently point that in the quartodeciman conception the continuation moves on a way of prevalent realization of what was only a type before, achievement that is exceeding the prefiguration and getting internal dynamics that leans on “becoming” and “making happened”, like the history of salvation or the mystery of incarnation³. In this way “the Law has become Logos, and the old has become new, and the type has become reality, and the lamb the Son”⁴.

Two jewels of paschal literature and their predecessor

Such deep and meaningful research, as well as the theological evaluation, became achievable mainly thanks to the two jewels of paschal literature, which have the roots dated back to the period of second century. These are the paschal homily of Melito of Sardis and the homily of Anonym Quartodeciman, commonly

¹ The classic term of “Passover” etymologically reflects the sense of passage, meant as Christ's transition from death to life, which is specific for the tradition of Sunday celebration. The quartodeciman tradition emphasizes the sense of passion, meant as Christ's suffering. In order to avoid ambiguity and to enable proper differentiation between the traditions the neutral term of “Pascha” will be used in this article.

² Melito of Sardis, *Peri Pascha* 6. Translation from Greek: T. Halton, “The Furrow”, Vol. 19, No. 4, April 1968, pp. 212-222 (Catholic University of America, Washington, DC).

³ Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Chrystus nasza Pascha*, Lublin 1982, p. 148-150. Similarly R. Cantalamessa, *La Pasqua della nostra salvezza*, Polish translation: M. Brzezinka, *Pascha naszego zbawienia*, Kraków 1998, p. 6.

⁴ Melito, *Peri Pascha* 7.

known under the name of Pseudo-Hippolytus. These two documents, one of which was recently discovered, and the other remained hidden under the name of other later authors, are like two eyes that allow us to take closer look at the Pascha of the Church in this period of time and to see it from inside in the whole splendor of its youth⁵.

Yet, it should be noted that there is another source that exhibits similarity to the two abovementioned documents and that provides valid view on quartodeciman perception. Moreover, it appears to be predecessor of the both, hence could serve as pattern to certain extent, especially in the area of imagery which is so much displayed in the paschal homilies. The referred source is the set of seven letters of Ignatius of Antioch that are dated on the beginning of the second century. In the present state of researches on the roots of Paschal Mystery in the Church it seems that the letters of Ignatius of Antioch remain in shadow being underestimated. There are very few mentions about Ignatius' letters in the monumental Hryniewicz's work⁶. More can be found at Cantalamessa's work⁷, however it looks like the Ignatius' epistles being dominated by the homilies of Melito and Pseudo-Hippolytus remain still not valued enough, particularly when it comes to the roots of Paschal Mystery in the Church. Similar observations can be made in Schoedel's commentary to Ignatius' letters⁸. The comprehensive study does not dive into the paschal strands, specifically the quartodeciman ones, and refers very rarely to Melito's paschal homily. Taking all the circumstances into consideration, the aim of this article is to bring to light the richness of content and the theological meaning of seven letters of the bishop of Antioch, showing in this way the key importance of the literary work for paschal topics and opening paths for further research.

Somewhere between AD 106 and 107 Ignatius, bishop of the church in Antioch of Syria, had been arrested in this city and sent to Rome for trial. In the custody of Roman soldiers he had been taken across the great roads of southern Asia Minor. There are no details of the persecution in which he was arrested, and the circumstances of his travel to Rome can mainly be recognized from his own letters. Along the way to the capital Ignatius meets representatives that are sent from local Churches to support him. In return, before reaching Rome where he expects martyrdom, he writes seven letters: five to the Churches he met, one to Polycarp, the bishop of Ephesus and one to the Church he was heading – in Rome. From the letters it may easily be concluded that Ignatius is in fact far from seeing his journey in sober historical terms. He views it rather as a triumphant march of mythic proportions. He thus invites fellow Christians to see beyond appearances and to

⁵ Cf. R. Canatalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, p. 9.

⁶ The referred W. Hryniewicz's work consist of trilogy: *Chrystus nasza Pascha*, Lublin 1982; *Nasza Pascha z Chrystusem*, Lublin 1987; *Pascha Chrystusa w dziejach człowieka i wszechświata*, Lublin 1991.

⁷ Mainly referred here: *La Pasqua della nostra salvezza*.

⁸ The referred W. Schoedel's work: *Ignatius of Antioch. A commentary on the letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Philadelphia 1985.

grasp the hidden meaning of his wretched condition, of his martyrdom that is approaching. It seems obvious that Christians who had been nurtured on the story of crucified Lord and who had experienced such rejection in their own lives would be prepared to welcome such a figure⁹. And having been clearly nurtured on the Good Friday theology Ignatius has condensed all the events and circumstances down to one point: the passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This is what he desires, what he wants to imitate and where he expects to take a part in Christ's resurrection.

The picture that Ignatius has drawn in his letters, and that the course of events in his life has drawn itself – as it was presented, corresponds with the main concept of the Quartodeciman theology. It is quite striking in Ignatius letters that the bishop being on his way to martyrdom desires death. He knows what kind of death may be sentenced to him and that it may have the final in the Flavian Amphitheatre in face to face meeting with the wild beasts. But he does not want the death just for death. In this particular death he expects to find real life, he hopes to stand in open presence with his Lord. Death will not devour his life but precisely because of Christ being in him the death will inflict death itself. It can plainly be observed how this conception outlines the distinctive idea that was emphasized by eastern Churches in the theology of Paschal Mystery, in particular reflected throughout the Quartodeciman Pascha. It can furthermore be compared with the circumstance that Ignatius of Antioch – as noted by R. Cantalamessa – was most probably one of Quartodecimans. This would result from the fact of occupying the capital city of Asia Minor, which was one of the last agreeing for discontinuation of quartodeciman practice¹⁰. Combination of all the facts reveals its harmony in conjunction with Ignatius theology, which shows undeniable resemblance to the views of the group, in particular with regard to the idea of winning death.

Victorious death – key emphasis in quartodeciman theology

Relating to the ancient dispute about the date of Christian Pascha it should be underlined that having established the paschal celebration on the day of Christ's death the Quartodecimans have seen the resurrection as its extension, as a kind of natural color of the victorious death, as a visible manifestation of what tacitly but realistically has already been accomplished on the cross and in the descent into hell – means, the triumph over death. It is easy to recognize the traces of influence of St. John who tried to unite the death with resurrection, abasement with exaltation, eliminating certain temporal distance, placing all within the idea of glorious death comprehended as exaltation. This also comes with an impression of one-sidedness of the quartodeciman pascha that is brought out,

⁹ Cf. W. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch...*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰ Cf. R. Cantalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, p. 156. Similarly W. Hryniewicz, *Chrystus nasza Pascha*, p. 154.

as pointed, of naive belief that the Pascha also etymologically derives from the word ‘suffer’¹¹.

Death of Christ in the Quartodeciman Pascha combines the two poles of the mystery: death of the death and absorption of the death into the victory, according to St. Paul’s statement: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1Cor 15:54). When the voracious power of death threw herself on the body of Christ, it was like biting granite, because in Him there was nothing digestible for death – means, there was no sin in Him. The death’s sting has been broken and turned against it, so that death annihilated itself. And so with death He defeated the death. This is an image drawn by Anonym Quartodeciman¹². In a similar way recapitulates Melito of Sardis saying that with the Spirit who cannot die Christ defeated the death which was killing a man¹³. What can be observed here with relation to the letters of Ignatius of Antioch is the striking similarity of images and themes that the bishop applies. It occurs both, in the mentioned image of wild and voracious beast, pouncing on its prey – through what Ignatius draws the fate awaiting him in Rome, and in the image of food, which Ignatius uses to show what brings death and what life. Cautioning against poisoned food, he paints a picture of evil offshoots bearing deadly fruit that if someone tastes then immediately dies¹⁴. Same with the picture of wine mixed with honey and added poison that when someone is drinking, drinking with pleasure, but with the sinister pleasure is drinking a death¹⁵. Whereas recommending the real nourishment, which he is calling Christian food¹⁶, Ignatius portrays the fruit¹⁷ born from the offshoots planted by the Father, not decaying fruit, food that is not from the delight of this world, but God’s Bread¹⁸. This is the pure bread of Christ that Ignatius wants to become. By the teeth of wild beasts, ground as the wheat, he will become a true disciple of Jesus Christ and in the same way the sacrifice pleasing to God¹⁹. Here, too, the topic of the Eucharist is emerging, with its roots in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, summarized by Ignatius as food of immortality, medicine allowing not die, but live forever in Jesus Christ²⁰. Ignatius hopes to find life is his death, that is, the animals that inflict his death now when he is “already” in Christ, in fact will kill his death,

¹¹ Cf. R. Cantalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, p. 152. Both, Melito of Sardis and Pseudo-Hippolytus believe that *paschein* (to celebrate Pascha) is derived from *pathein* (to suffer).

¹² This is how R. Cantalamessa paraphrases Pseudo-Hippolytus’s *In sanctum Pascha* 57, p. 153. See also Pseudo-Hippolytus text in *The Paschal Mystery: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, ed. A.G. Hamman, translation Thomas Halton (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1969).

¹³ Melito, *Peri Pascha* 66.

¹⁴ Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Trallians*, XI.1, in J.B. Lightfoot, J.R. Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers. Translation*, London 1891. This will be the main translation used for this article. See also A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of writings of the Fathers*, vol. 1, The Apostolic Fathers, Edinburgh 1885.

¹⁵ Cf. Ignatius, *Trallians* VI.2.

¹⁶ Cf. Ignatius, *Trallians* VI.1.

¹⁷ Cf. Ignatius, *Trallians* XI.1. Compare with Pseudo-Hippolytus *In sanctum Pascha* 68.

¹⁸ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* VII.3.

¹⁹ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* IV.1-2.

²⁰ Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* XX.2.

and he will find himself in the Risen Lord. Thus, already in the first letter Ignatius confesses, speaking of Jesus Christ: “true life in death”²¹.

Passion and death of Christ is often invoked by Ignatius, among others, as a mystery that is hidden from the prince of this world²², in which God has prepared abolishing of death²³, confirmed by Scripture and the Prophets²⁴, in which if we do not participate there is no life in us²⁵, on which our life also arose²⁶, in which Christ invites us, being His members, to the union²⁷, imitation of which we should desire²⁸ in order to be in agreement with it²⁹. Therefore Ignatius as the one who is “in the midst of life, yet lusting after death”³⁰, like the Apostles, who despised death and who were found superior to death³¹, exhorts the brothers to believe in death of Jesus Christ and thus escaped death³². The core meaning of this proclamation and the emphases in the imagery of the Passion of Christ clearly reflect the key ideas of the quartodeciman theology. This also forms the fundamentals for Ignatius interpretation of the events in his life.

This may, however, arise doubts, because all of this seems to be outlining a form of worshipping death that Ignatius is performing, what at one time, as mentioned by R. Cantalamessa, became an objection to Quartodecimans³³. Nonetheless, we know that they did not celebrate and did not worship the death in general, but the death of Christ, which in itself is not negative, but it is negation of the negation, that is, the death of death. Already in the moment of death they saw acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice granted from Father’s side, even without necessity to wait for the resurrection. This idea starting from the second century is portrayed by Christians to emphasize the fact that the triumph of Christ began on the cross. Upon this went the symbolism of the cross gemmed with precious stones, cross as trophy, and furthermore the whole iconographic tradition which shows the living and risen (open eye) but simultaneously the dead (open side) Christ. Finally, so much soteriological vision of the death has been connected with a theology that was rich in blood of Christ and that was developed in precisely such spiritual climate. The later sacramental theology is largely based on this.

²¹ Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* VII.2.

²² Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* XIX.1.

²³ Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* XIX.3.

²⁴ Cf. Ignatius, *Philadelphians* VIII.2, IX.2.

²⁵ Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* V.2.

²⁶ Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* IX.1.

²⁷ Cf. Ignatius, *Trallians* XI.1.

²⁸ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* VI.3.

²⁹ Cf. Ignatius, *Philadelphian* III.3.

³⁰ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* VII.2.

³¹ Cf. Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans*, III.2.

³² Cf. Ignatius, *Trallians* II.1; *Magnesians* XI.1.

³³ Cf. R. Canatalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, p. 154.

Passage in passion – essential dynamics in quartodeciman conception

In this perspective, the two poles of the paschal mystery – the death and life – are not only mutually present, but it is a dynamic presence. Compared with the Sunday Pascha – so called Easter Day – that was embedded on the dynamic vision of transition from death to life, the ancient Pascha of the second century, and in particular the Quartodeciman Pascha, seemed to have a static character. It appeared rather as a static fact, that is passion, than dynamic movement as the passage is. However such an assumption, as marked by R. Cantalamessa, is incorrect³⁴. Dynamism of the Pascha-passion is less schematic and not so conspicuous, because it is completely internal and at the same time very strong. Also for the Quartodecimans the Pascha assumed transition. W. Hryniewicz points that what we can observe in quartodeciman Pascha is just different distribution of emphases but not significant difference³⁵. This what Christ has done, that is His Pascha as a transition from life to death, made possible a Christian Pascha, as a passage from death to life. The relation between Christ's passage and the Christian's passage, which in the Sunday Pascha is sometimes seen as a relationship of patterning, here is seen as the relationship of a causative factor. As a result, the Christ's transition from life to death, on the basis of principle of opposition, gives a result in the form of human passage from death to life. Behind this is a great topic of St. Paul, showing Christ as the new Adam, who restores man to the state of grace, redeeming through His obedience the disobedience of the first Adam (Rom 5.12n). This main idea is presented by Ignatius in the most concise way: "His passion is our resurrection"³⁶, that is, His passage through death has unlocked for us the door to life.

In the two aforementioned homilies of the ancient authors this theme is emphasized in the long series of antitheses, where the death of Christ is seen as the life and resurrection of a man³⁷. From the paschal homily of Anonym Quartodeciman we learn that the liberation from passion by Passion was achieved for us, from His death is our immortality, from His wounds our health, from His fall our rising from the dead, from His abasement our exaltation, and our life from slaying Him³⁸. And Melito of Sardis using the same rhetorical figure, which is the antithesis, expresses the redemptive dynamism "from – to", when indicating that He is the one who made that we have passed from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life, from tyranny to eternal reign³⁹.

All these themes and images are scattered in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch and woven into his existential experience. Describing his own situation, Ignatius

³⁴ Cf. R. Canatalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, p. 155.

³⁵ Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Chrystus nasza Pascha*, p. 160.

³⁶ Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* V.3.

³⁷ Cf. R. Canatalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, pp. 155-156.

³⁸ Cf. Pseudo-Hippolytus, *In sanctum Pascha* 51.

³⁹ Cf. Melito, *Peri Pascha* 68.

often says about bonds⁴⁰, slavery⁴¹ and being prisoner⁴². He also uses a cluster of ideas that revolves around the references to himself as the offscouring⁴³, being condemned⁴⁴, what all together shows the abasement that Ignatius experiences and the self-effacement that he takes. On this background he makes more general point saying that Christ's life is not in us as long as of our own free choice we do not accept to die into His passion⁴⁵. But while pointing this, Ignatius simultaneously personally declares to take the path. This will place him in agreement with Lord's Passion. He also provides justification to such choice. All his attitude is based on resting without anxiety in God, where Ignatius finds that indeed by means of suffering he may attain to God⁴⁶. When he suffers, he shall be the freed man of Jesus Christ, and shall rise again emancipated in Him⁴⁷, because through His death our life arose like a sun⁴⁸. So to die in behalf of Jesus Christ is for Ignatius a new birth, whose pangs are already coming⁴⁹. Therefore, trying to draw a line on those justifications, Ignatius exclaims: "Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God"⁵⁰, because to die in Him is to live, to stay alive is to die⁵¹. In result to own spiritual experience the bishop of Antioch exhorts the brothers to be fully persuaded concerning the birth and the passion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ⁵², "who died for us, in order, by believing in His death, ye may escape from death"⁵³. Only by the fruits of His cross, His divinely-blessed passion, we are who we are⁵⁴. This is proclaimed by the ensign, which is set up for all ages through His resurrection⁵⁵. In this way Ignatius comes back to the central idea of quato-deciman Pascha: "His passion is our resurrection", from which he has derived all of that theological imagery.

In this context it is worth to note the solar imagery that Ignatius applies in relation to Christ's death and resurrection. Referring to Lord's Day, in saying that on that day "our life" (that is, Christ or the new being embodied in Christ) "arose", he uses a verb not usually associated with the resurrection but with rising sun⁵⁶. Congruent imagery Ignatius applies to his own travel from east (Antioch) to west

⁴⁰ Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* III.1; *Magnesians* I.2, XII.1, XI.2; *Trallians* I.1, V.1, XII.2; *Smyrnaeans* X.2; *Polycarp* II.3.

⁴¹ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* IV.3.

⁴² Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* XXI.2; *Smyrnaeans* IV.2, VI.2, XI.1.

⁴³ Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* XVIII.1.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* XII.1; *Trallians* III.3.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* V.1.

⁴⁶ Cf. Ignatius, *Polycarp* VII.1.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* IV.3.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* IX.1.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* VI.1.

⁵⁰ Ignatius, *Romans* VI.3.

⁵¹ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* VI.2.

⁵² Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* XI.1.

⁵³ Cf. Ignatius, *Trallians* II.1.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* I.2.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* I.2.

⁵⁶ Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* IX.1.

(Rome)⁵⁷. Although the symbolism provides a significant point of contact with widely diffused patterns of thought in Hellenism, Ignatius makes here a characteristic move when he links the resurrection with the mystery of Christ's death and emphasizes the latter as that through which the faith comes⁵⁸. As in every paschal image that is portrayed in the letters, the bishop of Antioch goes on to liken his own person to the sun itself which in its daily journey across the sky sinks from the world only to rise again. W. Schoedel points that similar imagery of the sun journey under the earth is exploited in the fragment 8b.2-4 of Melito of Sardis, where Christian baptism is discussed in terms of the sun being washed in the western ocean only to rise again in the east, and where Christ's baptism in the Jordan is then explained against the background of the same imagery and connected with the crucifixion through a comparison of the sun's passage under the earth with the descent into Hades⁵⁹. Such a circle of ideas may explain why Ignatius refers to his own martyrdom and to Christ as rising like the sun.

Christian Pascha of the second century celebrates, then, the transition from life to death, blessed passion, from which the human passage from death to life is born. This particular vision of the mystery of salvation was so rooted in the theology of Asia Minor, that even the adoption of Sunday as a day of celebration of Pascha has not erased the teaching in the memory of Fathers. Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, after moving from his native Smyrna to Gaul wrote that the name of this paschal mystery is passion, that is the cause of liberation, because it is our exaltation. This is an echo of what few decades earlier Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the church in Smyrna, the concise summary of the aforementioned central idea of quartodeciman Pascha that the passion of Christ is our resurrection. The Passion of Jesus Christ – His Pascha – works on the principle of antithesis in relation to the resurrection and exaltation of man – our Pascha. Such ways of making a synthesis between Pascha of God and Pascha of man were preserved almost exclusively in Judaism. However the whole of the conception allows to note that it corresponds to a consistent and original vision of the paschal mystery, which was born on the paths of the two Apostles, Paul and John. But it would be wrongly to say that these main concepts of the kerygma of new testament are maintained and continued only in the tradition of Quartodeciman or Asian theology. To a greater or lesser extent they are present everywhere. However it is clear that the tradition of Pacha-Passion has created perfect ground for the development of such a theology of Christ's death.

Embedded apologetics and christological implications

The incentive for extraordinary focus on the theological significance of Christ's death, which is noticeable in this paschal tradition, should additionally be

⁵⁷ Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* II.2.

⁵⁸ Cf. W. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch...*, p. 124.

⁵⁹ Cf. W. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch...*, p. 171.

discerned, as noticed by R. Cantalamessa, in the exceptionally vital theology of incarnation, which developed in the second century as a response to the gnostic Docetism⁶⁰. This is exactly how throughout the mystery of man-God, which took place in the hypostatic union of incarnation, the paschal mystery became possible. The paradox of death, which at the same time is life, became a harmonious extension of the paradox of a man who simultaneously is God. The death has been defeated, because the one, who has suffered it as a man, won it as God. This is the appropriate theological meaning, as further indicates R. Cantalamessa, that shall be given to one of the richest in content pieces of the homily of Melito, where is stated that “for the one who was born as Son, and led to slaughter as a lamb, and sacrificed as a sheep, and buried as a man, rose up from the dead as God, since he is by nature both God and man”⁶¹. In these words we have perfect combination between the paschal mystery and the incarnation, between soteriology and christology⁶². These sentences show how deeply in the paschal catechesis of the second century is rooted the importance of apologetics (Christ is God) and anti-Gnosticism (Christ is God and man at the same time), what has been underlined through resurrection: “in that he is buried he is man, in that he comes to life again he is God”⁶³.

In the arena of struggle with Docetism also Ignatius of Antioch had appeared. His teaching in the field is based on the concept of thinking in terms of the actual incarnation that implies an emphasis on concrete historical realities. Thus, Ignatius considers significant the fact that Jesus suffered in the days of Pontius Pilate⁶⁴. He also correlates Docetism with avoidance of good deeds⁶⁵. Moreover, he connects the reality of the Christ’s Passion with meaningfulness of his own martyrdom⁶⁶. But one of the most interesting is the speech in the letter to Ephesians, where Ignatius in the string of christological antitheses collates contrasting features in the way not quite alien to Gnostics and speaks of Christ in hymnic form, in a rich poetic flavor: “There is one only physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true Life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord”⁶⁷. A characteristic feature of this statement is the correlation of deity with the very human conditions and circumstances. The string of parallel expressions reveals remarkable similarity to Melito’s paschal homily. As noted by W. Schoedel, right from the beginning, where the mystery of Pascha is named as “new and old, eternal and temporal, corruptible and incorruptible, mortal and immortal”⁶⁸, through many other passages,

⁶⁰ Cf. R. Canatalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, p. 158.

⁶¹ Melito, *Peri Pascha* 8.

⁶² Cf. R. Canatalamessa, *La Pasqua...*, pp. 158-159.

⁶³ Melito, *Peri Pascha* 9.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* XI; *Trallians* IX.1; *Smyrnaeans* I.2.

⁶⁵ Cf. Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* VI.2-VII.1.

⁶⁶ Cf. Ignatius, *Trallians* X; *Smyrnaeans* IV.2.

⁶⁷ Ignatius, *Ephesians* VII.2.

⁶⁸ Melito, *Peri Pascha* 2.

the homily reflects the same rhetorical impulses. This similarity may be explained by the fact that both writers were seeking to emphasize the true human reality of the divine Christ in opposition to docetism and both were familiar with the same rhetorical methods⁶⁹. However, apart from the apologetic and rhetorical aspects that have played a role, there is also the theological foundation that have been driving the speeches and that is rooted in the quartodeciman Paschal Mystery. Emphasizing the reality of Christ's passion the authors have naturally been justifying the reality of incarnation and furthermore the reality of divine-human nature of Christ. Therefore in these works the seed of the later two-nature christology can be seen. That what has been so flowery developed by Melito, first was outlined by Ignatius. His series of antitheses seem to move from the historical to the exalted Christ. This has been highlighted in the last antithesis by the words "first" and "then". In the letter to Polycarp Ignatius makes similar juxtaposition encouraging the bishop of Ephesus to look forward to Christ, "that is above every season, the Eternal, the Invisible, who became visible for our sake, the Impalpable, the Impassible, who suffered for our sake, who endured in all ways for our sake"⁷⁰. In this case it is clear that the order is reversed. The statement moves from the eternal to the historical Christ who inside the human history was suffering in the human body. There is no doubt, however, that in both cases, in the letter to the Ephesians and in the letter to Polycarp, Ignatius refers to the dual nature of Jesus Christ.

This dual nature of Jesus Christ, however, remained somewhat behind a curtain, giving a sense of inexpressibility of both, the person of Christ and His redemptive work. Therefore, as pointed by W. Hryniewicz, the first Fathers, and among them Ignatius of Antioch and Melito of Sardis, relate the term "mysterion" not only to the person of Christ but also to the respective events of His life, such as birth, cross and resurrection⁷¹. Although still imprecisely in Ignatius' teaching, it is certainly Melito who correlates "mysterion" with Christian cult. While Ignatius speaks of Lord's Day in this context and lays certain foundations⁷², Melito clearly connects "mysterion" with the Pascha⁷³ marking the "new mystery" not just in chronological sense but, above all, in the sense of immense and unexpected fullness. Furthermore this term is used in the homily of Pseudo-Hippolytus in connection with the whole paschal event⁷⁴. The redemptive work of Christ is therefore both, a history and a mystery. As a historical fact it is one-time and past event, and as God's mystery continues in incessant actual present⁷⁵.

⁶⁹ W. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch...*, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Ignatius, *Polycarp* III.2.

⁷¹ Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Chrystus nasza Pascha*, p. 54.

⁷² Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* IX.1.

⁷³ Cf. Melito, *Peri Pascha* 2, 11, 56, 65.

⁷⁴ Cf. Pseudo-Hippolytus, *In sanctum Pascha* 3, 5.

⁷⁵ Cf. W. Hryniewicz, *Chrystus nasza Pascha*, pp. 55-57.

Church of martyrs – circumstances of quartodeciman theology formation

The significance of Paschal Mystery in Ignatius' eyes is confirmed by the fact that he begins his letters with mention of the cross and resurrection, or dedicates whole chapters to this mystery⁷⁶. Together with Melito of Sardis and Pseudo-Hippolytus he presents the mystery of salvation in a christocentric way. Death on the cross of the Lord of world and rising from death of the Crucified are the central events of salvation. The set of the evolving emphases, as they appear in the literary work of the Fathers, reflects the spirit in which the Church of the time of persecution has been celebrating its Pascha. The Pascha was essentially felt as a torment, because passion – what practically means martyrdom – in this moment of time was the most important piece of the Church' reality. This is why the Christ's passion was often called "martyrium", and martyrdom of Christians, such as Ignatius of Antioch or Polycarp of Ephesus, was liturgically termed "passio". In such spiritual climate it is not difficult to understand why the Church of martyrs has made the blessed passion of its Head the beloved subject of its own Pascha⁷⁷.

In such a climate of persecution the letters of Ignatius of Antioch have been formed. In most natural way in the concrete circumstances of his life the bishop of Antioch calls a set of ideas that reveal distinctive features of the quartodeciman theology. And it is evidently the theology in which Ignatius has been brought up, as it was invoked from the deepest layers of his heart and applied to his own life at the time of dread, when facing martyrdom. What is significant, this theology – as we find it in Ignatius' letters – appears to be already developed. Ignatius seems to be applying it with deep sense and understanding, like the one who has been nurtured in it. This may mean that the roots of quartodeciman theology go back further. Question is where to? If Ignatius draws on someone's experience, who is it? Are the seeds of these sitting in *Corpus Paulinum*? This may be a subject of further research.

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⁷⁶ Cf. Ignatius, *Ephesians* XVIII; *Trallians* IX; *Romans* VI; *Philadelphians* prescr. 1; *Smyrnaeans* I.

⁷⁷ Cf. R. Cantalamesa, *La Pasqua...*, pp. 161-162.

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