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THE IGNATIAN PROBLEM: THE RECENSIONS OF A LETTER CORPUS AS A REFLECTION OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND DEVELOPMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

If the level of tampering with contents is an indicator of importance, then the letters of Ignatius constitute one of the most important collections of early Christian literature. The relationship between the various recensions of this corpus has fascinated many subsequent generations. The concerns expressed over the relationship between these differing forms of the letter collection is not simply a knotty problem, which is the preserve of ivory-towered scholars alone. Rather, arguments relating to the authenticity, or otherwise, of these various recensions has been the basis of polarised debates between leading church figures over matters of ecclesiastic structure, and in regard to key questions of theology and doctrine for many centuries and also in multiple contexts within Christian history. Therefore, far from being abstract and arcane, discussions concerning the form of the Ignatian letter collection and the authenticity of the contents of the individual letters have played a significant role in some of the major theological debates in the church from the patristic era to the contemporary period. There is much to be learnt from a close study of the various corpora of the letters of Ignatius, especially when each collection form is studied in its own terms with its own theological concerns and agendas. As such, the writings of Ignatius provide multiple windows into various moments of church history and the related theological debates spanning not only many centuries, but in fact stretching across the first two millennia of the Christian religion.

However, due to the very widely and correctly accepted scholarly consensus that the so-called middle recension of the letters of Ignatius represented the authentic writings of the bishop of Antioch, the result has been the virtual neglect of study concerning the later expanded form of the Ignatius' writings – the so-called long recension. Yet even that terminology requires clarification. It should be noted that the "long recension", occurs in two distinct forms and phases. Both of these phases reflects the literary creativity of later generations of Christian thought. For this reason, close analysis of the long recension provides invaluable insight into the theological concerns and the ecclesiastical structures of various groups of believers both during the second half of the fourth century, and also at a later more indeterminate time. It should also be noted that while the long recension has been labelled as a 'recension', this belies the fact that it comprises of six fresh epistolary compositions in Greek, and then also at a later phase a further four brief Latin letters. In fact, the long recension of the letters of Ignatius, as a development of the middle recension, contains far more original material than for instance Matthew's Gospel does in comparison to its largest source, Mark's Gospel¹. Yet, while the long recension of the

¹ The Gospel of Matthew contains 1068 verses and the Gospel of Mark comprises 661 verses. According to Streeter, on a maximalist count "Matthew reproduces the substance of all but 55 verses of Mark". B.H. STREETER, *The Four Gospels: A Study in Origins*, London, Macmillan, 1924, p. 169. Streeter, however, believes this is an over-estimate, and that some of the 55 verses in question are not cases of omission but rather substitution. Based on a different method of counting, Beaton estimates that Matthew reproduces 73% of Matthew's words. This percentage is obtained on the basis of Beaton count that Matthew has reproduced 8555 of the 11,708 words contained in the Gospel of Mark. R.C. BEATON, 'How Matthew

letters of Ignatius contains far more original material than Matthew does in comparison to Mark, this larger corpora of Ignatian writings has received only marginal interest². In part, this might perhaps be due to the more explicit attempt of the long recension of the letters of Ignatius to displace the shorter form of the middle recension. Ultimately, this literary ruse may have led to the “downfall” of the long recension, when in the modern period it was finally exposed as being a later literary expansion of the earlier, authentic middle recension of the writings of Ignatius.

The result has been the almost total neglect of the long recension in its own right as a collection of important Christian writings expressing a particular set of theological concerns. However, that change of focus was a reversal of the dominance of the long recension from the time of its composition until the seventeenth century, when it was shown not to represent the authentic letter collection of Ignatius. However, continued study of the long recension can reveal much about the evolution and development of Christian theology in the late fourth century and later periods. Therefore, as a means of providing insight into the ways in which a particular strand of theological thought evolved and grew from earlier traditions into later expressions and formulations, the long recension represents an important example of such development of theological thought and argument.

II. THE MANY RECENSIONS OF THE LETTERS OF IGNATIUS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP

It is generally agreed that there are three major recensions of the letters of Ignatius, one of which has two identifiable phases. In what follows, a brief overview will be provided of these three recensions, focusing on their contents, sequence, and relationship. The scholarly consensus or debate concerning the date of each recension will be briefly discussed. However, the theological concerns and developments in each of the major recensions will be discussed in separate sections that follow after this initial discussion of the relationship between the various recensions of the letters of Ignatius.

1. *The Middle Recension*

It is widely, but not universally accepted that the middle recension reflects the earliest form of the corpus of the letters of Ignatius. Moreover, these letters are generally accepted to be the genuine literary compositions of Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch. This recension comprises seven letters, all written in a relative short period of time while Ignatius was being transported under custody of Roman guard to face execution in the imperial capital³. The epistles of the middle recension are typically divided into two groups. The

Writes’, in M. BOCKMUEHL AND D.A. CARSON (eds), *The Written Gospels*, Cambridge, CUP, 2005, p. 120, n. 25.

² The comparison between the scholarly focus on Matthew’s Gospel – which is never labelled as a mere recension, and the long recension of the letters of Ignatius which is rarely studied is illustrative of the status of the former as a new composition and the latter as a mere revision. Therefore, perhaps part of the reason for this is that the Gospel of Matthew does not claim to be an expanded authentic version of Mark.

³ In relation to the compressed period of composition of all seven letters of Ignatius, Holmes makes the following comment. “We meet him for the first and only time for just a few weeks not long before his death as a martyr in Rome early in the second century. But during those weeks he wrote, virtually as his ‘last will and testament,’ seven letters of extraordinary interest because of the unparalleled light they shed on the history of the church at that time, and because of what they reveal about the remarkable personality of the author”. MICHAEL W. HOLMES, (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed., Grand Rapids, Baker, 2007, p. 166.

first group consists of the four letters that were written by Ignatius while he was at Smyrna. These are the letters to the *Ephesians*, *Magnesians*, *Trallians*, and to the *Romans*. The next group of three letters, also written by Ignatius but from Troas, are the letters to the *Philadelphians* and the one to the *Smyrnaeans*, as well as the only letter of the middle recension addressed to an individual, the *Letter to Polycarp*, the bishop of Smyrna⁴.

The arguments in favour of the originality and authenticity of the middle recension are many and varied. First, the earliest manuscript evidence for a writing from the Ignatian corpus is a substantial fragment of the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* (Ign. *Smyr.* 3,3–12,1). This fragment, P.Berol. 10581, is in the form of a papyrus codex, and the portion of the text of the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* that it preserves reflects the textual form of the middle recension. Second, the evidence preserved in the early fourth century writings of Eusebius of Caesarea shows that the form of text he used was the middle recension of the Ignatian corpus⁵. Describing the writings of Ignatius, Eusebius refers only to the seven letters of the middle recension. Moreover, the excerpts he cites agree with textual form contained in the middle recension (Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* 3.36). Third, the expansions to the seven letters of the middle recension that are found in the textual form of the long recension, as well as the contents of the additional letters of the letters of the long recension, betray at several points later theological concerns. Hence, the long recension clearly appears secondary in nature, and thus it is best understood as a subsequent and later form of the Ignatian letter corpus in comparison to the earlier middle recension.

While it is widely accepted that the textual form of the middle recension is earlier than that of the long recension, nonetheless a number of scholars have questioned the authenticity of the middle recension. That is, while they see the middle recension as being the earliest form of the Ignatian corpus, such scholars have questioned whether this seven letter form of the corpus originates with Ignatius himself. Two separate lines of approach have been adopted in relation to questioning the authenticity of the middle recension as a set of writings authored by Ignatius. First, Rius-Camps has suggested that the middle recension itself is a mix of authentic and inauthentic letters. His hypothesis is that Ignatius was the author of only four of the letters of the middle recension, and that the other three were spurious⁶. The second approach comprises a more thoroughgoing rejection of the entire seven letter collection of the middle recension as having been written by Ignatius. In this vein, Joly argues that the entire seven letter corpus is a fabrication⁷. This line of argument has been developed further by Hübner, who argues that the seven letters of the middle recension at various points reflect knowledge of a more developed form of Gnosticism, which was not known prior to the second half of the second century. Consequently, it is argued that the contents of the seven letters are not chronologically consistent with the date of the final years of the life and martyrdom of Ignatius, which is

⁴ Lightfoot uses a larger division of the Ignatian letters into five groups for his classification of the long recension. The two groups of the middle recension still stand as separate groups in that larger five group system. See J.B. LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, London, Macmillan, 1889, vol. 3, p. 128.

⁵ The determination of the date of the *Historia ecclesiastica* has occasioned scholar investigation. Andrew Louth argued that the work was first issued in A.D. 313, but the current form was updated around 323 or 324 to include more recent events. See A. LOUTH, *The Date of Eusebius' Historia ecclesiastica*, in *JTS* 41 (1990), pp. 111-123. See also, T.D. BARNES, *The Editions of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, in *Greek, Romans and Byzantine Studies*, xxi (1980) p. 196.

⁶ The four letters written from Smyrna are considered authentic (*Ephesians*, *Magnesians*, *Trallians*, and *Romans*), while the three from Troas (*Philadelphians*, *Smyrnaeans*, and the *Letter to Polycarp*) are deemed to be later creations. J. RIUS-CAMPS, *The Four Authentic Letters of Ignatius* (Christianismos 2), Rome, Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1979.

⁷ R. JOLY, *Le Dossier d'Ignace d'Antioch*, Université libre Bruxelles, Faculté de Philosophie et lettres 69, Bruxelles, Éditions de l'université de Bruxelles, 1979.

traditionally placed towards the beginning of the second century⁸. The arguments of Hübner have been greatly developed and supplemented by his student Thomas Lechner⁹.

The main positive argument Lechner presents in favour of the rejection of Ignatius' authorship of the middle recension is that he considers the so-called 'Hymn of the Star' (*I.Eph.* 19) to be a parody of Valentinian myth. Thus, it is suggested that some of the material contained in the middle recension reflects a rebuttal of Valentinian cosmology. On this basis, he dates the middle recension to the period A.D. 165 to 175¹⁰. Even if Lechner's arguments concerning the target of the polemic in the Hymn of the Star were widely viewed as persuasive, then all that could be inferred is that this single section of the *Letter to the Ephesians* might be later material. The implication might then be that this short section were an interpolation into a genuine letter. However, the arguments of Lechner and Hübner have not thus far altered the scholarly consensus that the middle recension does represent the authentic writings of Ignatius. The reason for the lack of acceptance of this theory is that the proposed points of contact between the middle recension of the Ignatian letters and Valentinian cosmology are neither obvious or persuasive. Therefore, the consensus that the middle recension stems from Ignatius himself and reflects the earliest form of the corpus of his writings remains intact and largely supported.

2. *The Long Recension*

The long recension is universally agreed to reflect later stages in the development of the Ignatian corpus. However, it would be incorrect to speak without qualification of the long recension being composed either at a single point of time, or as exemplifying a unified compositional approach. Typically the long recension is understood as comprising the seven letters of the middle recension but in expanded forms, and combined with six additional letters written in Greek¹¹.

This standard definition of the contents of the long recension was challenged by Jack Hannah, who stated that the long recension "consists of the same letters [as the middle recension] but extensively expanded and edited"¹². Hannah described the three letters that survive in Syriac and which are known as the short recension as his third group. Subsequently he identifies a fourth group which "consists of six letters which are regarded by most scholars as spurious"¹³. Not only is Hannah's classification system non-standard, it is motivated by the thesis he presents in his article. On the basis of his understanding of the long recension, comprising only the expanded forms of the seven letters of the middle recension, he argues that "this recension was made about A.D. 140 in the vicinity of Ephesus"¹⁴. Later in his article Hannah dates the long recension more broadly to A.D.

⁸ R.M. HÜBNER, *Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius Antiochen*, in *ZAC* 1 (1997) pp. 44-72.

⁹ T. LECHNER, *Ignatius adversus Valentinianos? Chronologische und theologieggeschichtliche Studien zu Briefen des Ignatius von Antiochen*, (VCSupp 47), Leiden, Brill, 1999).

¹⁰ LECHNER, *Ignatius adversus Valentinianos?*, pp. 306-307.

¹¹ This standard understanding of the long recension has been proposed by LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 1, 109-134; and more recently repeated by W.R. Schoedel and by Foster. P. FOSTER, *The Epistles of Ignatius*, in P. FOSTER (ed.) *The Apostolic Fathers*, London: T&T Clark – a Continuum imprint, 2007, p. 84. Schoedel states, '[t]he long recension contains an expanded version of the seven letters of the middle recension and six additional letters. W.R. SCHOEDEL, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, Fortress, 1985, p. 4.

¹² J.W. HANNAH, *The Setting of the Ignatian Long Recension*, in *JBL* 79 (1960) 221-238, p. 221.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

135-155, commenting that “the LR becomes the earliest truly anti-Gnostic writing”¹⁵. Hannah adds one further argument to his thesis. He sees the type of editorial work that was undertaken by the redactor of the long recension as mirroring that of the supposed redactor of the Pauline corpus, who is viewed as having produced the Pauline letter to the Ephesians and was one of the architects of the revival of Paulinism in this same period of the second quarter of the second century. From this set of observations, Hannah advances his major conclusion:

The fact that two sets of literature, the Pauline and the Ignatian, both appear to have undergone a similar type of redaction, suggests that a school existed in southwestern Asia Minor whose purpose was to establish the lines of orthodoxy for the churches¹⁶.

This argument is predicated on a number of dubious assertions. First, the decision to separate the redactional work of the interpolations to the seven genuine letters from the composition of the six additional Greek letters is both arbitrary and unfounded. Second, the claim that the Pauline letters underwent the same type of redactional activity is unsupported. Additional non-Pauline letters may have been composed in the apostle’s name, but there is little evidence for the redactional expansion of the authentic Pauline letters. Third, the proposal of a redactional “school” in Asia Minor has no evidential basis, it is incredibly naïve, and it proposes an “orthodox” system of control that was unknown even in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Lightfoot anticipated the type of argument that would divide the expansions to the seven authentic as being due to a different literary act than that of the composition of the additional letters. He bases his argument for the unity of the redactional expansions of the genuine letters and the composition of the additional letters on two pieces of evidence, which he poses as questions.

The points of investigation then are twofold: *First*, Is the resemblance of these [additional] letters sufficiently close to justify us in assigning them to the same author [as the interpolations to the seven letters of the middle recension]; and *Secondly*, Does the external evidence – the phenomena of MSS and the catena of quotations – lead to the same or to an opposite conclusion¹⁷?

Lightfoot answers the first question with four mutually supporting observations that arise from a consideration of the internal characteristics of the interpolations and the additional compositions. First, in comparison to the sparing use of scriptural citations in the middle recension, both elements of the long recension – the expanded parts of the seven authentic letters and the additional letters – contain a preponderance of scriptural citations. Therefore, both forms of additional material employ scriptural citations in common ways, but in notably distinct manner in comparison with the authentic form of the seven letters. The second observation is the most important for the discussion of this study, but in this part of his discussion Lightfoot says relatively little. He briefly observes, “[of] the *doctrinal features* nothing need be said here”¹⁸. Then in good academic fashion Lightfoot comments that, “throughout the thirteen letters the same doctrines are maintained, the same heresies assailed, and the same theological terms employed”¹⁹. Consideration of these doctrinal ideas will form the basis of the discussion of the theological concerns and developments to be found in the long recension. Third, Lightfoot notes similar ‘literary obligations.’ This term denotes literary borrowing of the same material from the authentic Ignatian letters (and from the *Apostolic Constitutions*) and its reuse both in the interpolations to the genuine epistles and in the additional letters.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 237-238.

¹⁷ LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol 1, 246.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

Fourth, the style and expression of interpolated passages and the additional letters is similar in a number of respects. Thus Lightfoot observes “we find in both sets of epistles the same terms applied to false teachers ... there is a fondness for adjectives ending in -υκός ... there is a recurrence of the same phrases ... [and] there is a partiality for certain other words”²⁰.

The external evidence is a little more complex since the additional letters (sometimes without the *Letter to the Philippians*) are found in manuscripts both in combination with the middle recension of the seven authentic letters and chiefly with the longer form of those letters. This may reflect the way collections were formed and expanded, rather than suggesting that the additional letters circulated independently of the interpolated form of the seven genuine letters, and hence had a separate origin. Moreover, Lightfoot makes the telling point concerning the citation of material from different recensions of the Ignatian letters.

In fact the tenor of external evidence will be sufficiently plain when it is stated that, whereas the seven letters are quoted by a fairly continuous series of Greek, Latin, and Syriac writers, beginning with Irenaeus and Origen in the second and third centuries, not a single quotation from the Additional Letters has been discovered prior to the last decade of the sixth century at the very earliest²¹.

Consequently, based on both consideration of the internal feature of the interpolated passages and the additional letters, and on the external evidence that material from interpolated passages or additional letters is not cited before the end of the sixth century, a strong case can be presented for the interpolations and additional letters stemming from the same compositional hand. Writing at the beginning of the fourth century, Eusebius knew of only seven Ignatian letters, and the extensive citations he provides all reflect the form preserved in the middle recension. Therefore, there is strong reason to date the long recension, entailing both the interpolations to the seven letters of the middle recension and the six additional Greek letters, to the period after the beginning of the fourth century when Eusebius composed his *Historia Ecclesiastica* and prior to the end sixth century when citations of the long recension begin to emerge. That is the composition of the long recension is broadly, but plausibly dated to the period A.D. 330-590.

This, however, does not quite end the discussion of the contents of the long recension of the Ignatian letters. At an even later stage four further letters began to circulate in Latin versions of manuscripts of the letters of Ignatius. The addition of these four letters may be described as the second phase of the long recension. The purpose of these four extra epistles entails further theological concerns that are no doubt part of the contemporary theological interests of the author. As will be seen from even a superficial analysis of the contents, this expansion reflects an increased interest in the figure of Mary, and the expression of piety towards her. While there have been attempts to locate the date of composition by linking it to particular moments of flourishing in Marian piety, the reality is that Marian devotion is a theological phenomenon that developed over many century and consequently while the theological perspective of these additional letters is transparent, the time of composition remains unclear.

3. *The Short Recension*

The evolution of the short recension of the letters of Ignatius will be discussed more fully below, when an assessment will be made of whether there are any theological perspectives or motivations in the formation of this form of the Ignatian corpus. It is

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 251.

sufficient to note that this recension is known and survives only in Syriac. It comprised of three of the letters of the middle recension, *Ephesians*, *Romans*, and the letter addressed to *Polycarp*. These three letters have all been abbreviated in comparison with the middle recension, the *Epistle to the Ephesians* is the most radically abbreviated of the three. Of the three Syriac manuscripts which survive for the short recension, the earliest is typically dated to the first half of the sixth century²². Hence, it is difficult to date the short recension with any certainty prior to the sixth century.

III. THE THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS OF THE MIDDLE RECENSION

The vast majority of scholarly attention has been focused on the so-called middle recension of the letters of Ignatius. This is understandable and likely a correct focus since the shorter form of these letters represents the authentic writings of Ignatius and also reflects Christian thought in the first half of the second century, a period from which there is a paucity of Christian documents. Due to this focus of attention, the theological profile and concerns of the middle recension are well-known. Themes that are particularly prominent include Ignatius' christological understandings especially in response to docetic views, his reflection on the theological basis for ecclesial structures, the nature of the eucharist and the importance of corporate participation, and the rejection of what Ignatius sees as Judaizing tendencies. Several of these theological themes will be treated briefly in turn, both to reflect the theological concerns of the middle recension in its own right, but then to establish a base-line with which the theological perspectives of the long recension may be compared.

1. *Christological Perspectives of the Middle Recension*

For Ignatius, Jesus is God. This is a bold and unambiguous claim made in several places in the seven authentic letters of the middle recension. While such a claim may be based on statements in several of the writings that were later to constitute the collection of texts contained in the New Testament, none of those writings refer to the divinity of Jesus with the same levels of confidence, clarity and regularity as is found in the writings of Ignatius. Some of the strongest examples among the writings of the New Testament include the following. In the resurrection appearance scene in the fourth gospel the response from Thomas to Jesus "my Lord and my God" (Jn 20,28) has been frequently understood as a declaration of the deity of Jesus. While recognising the striking nature of this evocative declaration and describing it as "the supreme Christological pronouncement of the Fourth Gospel"²³, Brown sees this as not equating to a doctrinal statement. Instead, Brown states, "the NT use of 'God' for Jesus is not yet a truly dogmatic formulation, but appears in a liturgical or cultic context"²⁴. Whether Brown's assessment gives due weight to the significance of this declaration may be questioned. It is the case that he appears to create an arbitrary distinction between "doctrinal" and "liturgical" use. Such a distinction may not be helpful and almost certainly would not have been recognised by the fourth evangelist. Thus, in contrast, Jörg Frey has seen the affirmation in Jn 20,28 as fundamentally and unambiguously being a theological

²² W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of Syriac MSS in the British Museum*, London, British Museum, 1870-2, p. 778.

²³ R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI* (AB 29A), New York, Doubleday, 1970, p. 1047.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

statement, albeit without anachronistically representing it as akin to the credal statements that emerged from the council discussions of the fourth and fifth centuries. Therefore, specifically in relation to Jn 20,28, but also taking into account the wider Johannine material, Frey states,

The Johannine manner of relating God and Christ, but also Christ and the Spirit-Paraclete and even God and the Spirit, marks a decisive step towards the Trinitarian thought pattern later established by the utilization of Greek philosophical terms. Of course, the later clarifications are still far away in John, but there is at least a “proto-Trinitarian” element in the God-talk or “theology” of John²⁵.

A similar example may be found in Luke’s account of Paul’s Miletus speech, with the reference to τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιεποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου, “the church of God which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20,28). Apart from the complicating textual variant τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου (□⁷⁴ A C* D E Ψ)²⁶, the statement has been seen as ambiguous. Taking the reading θεοῦ as original and as the antecedent of the pronoun in the phrase ‘his own blood’, it is unclear whether the author is referring to Jesus as God, or whether this is some type of anthropomorphism to describe the redemptive act of God²⁷.

When compared with these and other important yet nonetheless ambiguous statements contained in the writings of the New Testament, the affirmations that Ignatius makes concerning the divinity of Christ are far more decisive. Ignatius describes Jesus as God on multiple occasions, in a variety of ways, including several that are best understood as credal or doctrinal statements²⁸. Towards the beginning of the letter to the Smyrnaeans Ignatius states, Δοξάζω Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν θεὸν τὸν οὕτως ὑμᾶς σοφίσαντα, “I glorify Jesus Christ the God who made you wise” (Ign. *Smyr.* 1,1). The referent θεὸν is placed in apposition to Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, and these two nominal terms are dual ways of denoting the same entity. Here Schoedel notes that “Ignatius goes beyond Paul in calling Christ ‘God.’”²⁹. This provides an unambiguous example of language in the middle recension of the letters of Ignatius where Jesus is unhesitatingly named as “God”.

In one of Ignatius’ semi-credal statements³⁰, as an expression of his doctrinal understanding, Ignatius writes:

ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκυφορήθη ὑπὸ Μαρίας κατ’ οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος μὲν Δαυεὶδ πνεύματος δὲ ἁγίου ὃς ἐγεννήθη καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη ἵνα τῷ πάθει τὸ ὕδωρ καθάρσῃ. (Ign. *Eph.* 18,2).

For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God’s plan, both from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptized in order that by his suffering he may cleanse the water. (Ign. *Eph.* 18,2).

²⁵ J. FREY, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* (BMSEC), Waco, Baylor, 2018, pp. xxx-xxxii.

²⁶ Several variants exist. The reading τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ is supported by manuscripts 5711 416 Bx 1505. What appears to be a conflation of the two basic variants, τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου καὶ θεοῦ, is attested in C³ M. In relation to this textual evidence, Metzger notes ‘The external evidence is singularly balanced between “church of God” and “church of the Lord” (the reading “church of the Lord and God” is obviously conflate, and therefore secondary – as are also the other variant readings).’ B.M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, second edition, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994, p. 425.

²⁷ For a discussion of the hermeneutical complexities and ambiguities of this verse see C.K. BARRETT, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. II, Introduction and Commentary on Acts XV-XXVIII (ICC), Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1998, pp. 976-977.

²⁸ This observation is also stated by Helmut Löhr. See H. LÖHR, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*, in W. PRATSCHE (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*, Waco, Baylor, 2010, p. 110.

²⁹ SCHOEDEL, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 220.

³⁰ There are five such statements. These are found in Ign. *Eph.* 7,2; 18,2; Ign. *Mag.* 11,1; Ign. *Trall.* 9,1-2; Ign. *Smyr.* 1,1-2.

Here Ignatius names “our God” as “Jesus the Christ”, as the first statement in a sequence of Christological affirmations. It is striking to observe that while Ignatius calls Jesus ‘our God’, he can also describe Jesus as being conceived by Mary. Therefore, Ignatius perceives no fundamental tension between affirming Jesus as divine, while in the same breath declaring him to have been conceived through a human mother. The use of the possessive pronoun is typical of Ignatius’ phraseology (cf. *Ign. Eph. inscrip.*)³¹. However, attempts to argue on the basis of this grammatical feature that Ignatius is distinguishing between types of divinity possessed by Christ and the Father are unconvincing³². Within this theological framework of declaring the divinity of Jesus, Ignatius articulates an incarnational theology that expresses the idea that this divinity was present in the human form of Jesus. When describing Jesus as the “one physician”, Ignatius explicates the apparent tension due to the incarnation simply by affirming both aspects of seemingly contradictory pairings: “both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God come in the flesh, true life in death...” (*Ign. Eph. 7,2*). The phrase “God come in the flesh” is the way in which Ignatius expresses his claim that the human person of Jesus is to be regarded as divine. Instead of reading the phrase as *σαρκὶ γενόμενος θεός*, “God come in the flesh”, some printed texts read *ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ θεός*, “in man – God”³³. It is surprising that the latter reading, supported by a Syriac version S^f, and various Christian writers (Athanasias, Theodoret, Gelasius and Severus of Antioch) is preferred over the combined witness of Codex Mediceo-Laurentianus 57.7 (the only surviving Greek manuscript of the middle recension) and L (the Latin translation of the middle recension)³⁴. In many ways, for the observation being made here, little is at stake. Both expressions affirm the incarnation and express Ignatius’ clear view that Jesus is to be understood as divine.

It is equally striking that while Ignatius can attribute divinity to Jesus, he can also attribute to God the sufferings of Jesus. Thus addressing the Romans on the topic of his own impending martyrdom, and expressing the concern that the Roman believers will intervene on his behalf, Ignatius pleads with them not to attempt to prevent his death. He writes, “[a]llow me to be an imitator of the sufferings of my God” (*Ign. Rom. 6,3*). The use of the phrase *τοῦ πάθους τοῦ θεοῦ μου*, “the suffering of my God”, reveals that Ignatius regards the model of Christ’s death, which he himself hopes to imitate, as capable of being described appropriately as God’s suffering. There is no confusion here on Ignatius’ part. His affirmation of the divinity of Christ makes it entirely valid from his perspective to speak of the sufferings as being those of God, as much as they are those of Christ³⁵.

Therefore, one of the key theological developments in the middle recension, or earliest form of the letters of Ignatius, in comparison with the Pauline epistles, the synoptic gospels and several of the other writings contained in the New Testament is the unambiguous declaration of the divinity of Christ. These repeated affirmations are to be found at various points throughout the letters. Ignatius’ affirmation of the divinity of Jesus is found in letter openings (*Ign. Eph. inscrip.*; *Smyr. 1,1*), in the semi-credal doctrinal

³¹ J.B. LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, London, Macmillan, 1889, vol 3, p. 26.

³² E. VON DER GOLTZ, *Ignatius von Antiochien als Christ und Theologe* (TU 12,3) Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1894, 21-28.

³³ HOLMES, (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, p. 188.

³⁴ A theological motivation has been discerned for the change to the formula *ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ θεός*. Schoedel states, “[t]he change can be ascribed to the desire of later theologians to avoid any suggestion of an Arian or Apollinarian Christology which denied a human soul to Christ (hence ‘man’ instead of merely flesh was required).” SCHOEDEL, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 61.

³⁵ R.M. GRANT, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary*, Vol. IV Ignatius of Antioch, Camden, N.J., Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966, p. 92.

statements (Ign. *Eph.* 18.2), and even in the context of discussing his own impending martyrdom. The incarnational language that Ignatius employs to describe Jesus as “God come in the flesh” (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2), does resonate with a similar expression found in what might be one of the later writings in the New Testament. In the Johannine epistles the author presents a test of christological orthodoxy in the following terms:

ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ· πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, (1 Jn 4,2)

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; (1 Jn 4,2)

Some of the later New Testament texts, in particular the Johannine writings, perhaps stemming from the late first-century or early second-century, appear to present a theological outlook that is closely related to that found in Ign. *Eph.* 7,2 regarding the reality of the incarnation. Ignatius’ letter is also close to the Johannine writings in terms of the date of composition, since his letters were almost certainly written in the first third of the second century. However, notwithstanding the link, in the letters of Ignatius this type of affirmation finds more explicit expression, especially through placing it alongside the claim that Jesus has not just come in the flesh, but that he is God come in the flesh. There is, therefore, no reservation in the writings of Ignatius about affirming the divinity of Christ. Rather, the issue in which Ignatius is in conflict with his opponents in the letters to the *Ephesians* and *Trallians* is the reality of the incarnation. Namely, that Jesus was truly human. The assertion that Jesus was divine, that is that he could be described as “our God, Jesus the Christ” (Ign. *Eph.* 18,2), appears not to have been a source of controversy. Consequently, it is possible to trace a highly significant theological development in christological understanding and expression between the writings of the New Testament and the letters of Ignatius.

2. Ecclesiology and Episcopacy in the Middle Recension

Perhaps the most recognizable feature of Ignatius’ ecclesiological concerns is his advocacy for a hierarchical system of three forms of ministry. The leadership centres on a single bishop in each location, supported by presbyters, and under them deacons are involved in various aspects of ministry. This pattern of a tripartite system of ecclesial offices is recurrent in the letters. Perhaps one of the clearest descriptions of what Ignatius envisages in the pattern is found in the *Letter to the Trallians*. In that context, Ignatius describes all three levels of ministry as apostolic and as also as having a hierarchical relationship.

It is essential, therefore, that you continue your current practice and do nothing without the bishop, but be subject also to the council of the presbyters as to the apostles of Jesus Christ ... Furthermore, it is necessary that those who are deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ please everyone in every respect. For they are not merely deacons of food and drink, but ministers of God’s church. (Ign. *Trall.* 2,2-3).

Following from this statement, Ignatius also declares that deacons should be respected “as Jesus Christ”, that the bishop “is a model of the Father”, and that presbyters are a model both of “God’s council” as well as “the band of apostles” (Ign. *Trall.* 3,1). Ignatius demands unqualified respect of these three offices, since he sees them as typological representations of God, or of the apostles. While the fluid and imprecise nature of Ignatius’ analogical typologies have frequently been noted³⁶, the key point is that for

³⁶ For a summary of various scholars who have noted the shifting typological patterns see G. VALL, *Learning Christ: Ignatius of Antioch & the Mystery of Redemption*, Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 2013, p. 343.

Ignatius the three roles of church leadership are modelled on a more fundamental ontological reality. Therefore each office has a dignity that is derived from a reality that surpasses that of the office-holder. Consequently, the three roles are to be respected precisely because they enshrine through a typological schema a divine or apostolic basis of existence.

The ecclesial structure that Ignatius advocates is seen by him as being fundamental to the existence of Christian communities. Having described the three offices and their typological patterning, Ignatius boldly states, “[w]ithout these no group can be called a church” (Ign. *Trall.* 3,1). Such a threefold structure is, according to the Ignatian conception of ecclesiology, not merely preferential, but fundamentally essential to the constitution of such communities. In regard to Ignatius’ concept of ecclesial structure, Sullivan makes the astute observations that “he [Ignatius] had no doubt about the structure a church ought to have, but there is reason to doubt that all Christian churches of his day actually realized it”³⁷. In fact Sullivan might be a little circumspect here. Ignatius demand for, or perhaps attempted imposition of his preferred threefold ecclesial structure was in all likelihood part of the cause of the friction between him and his opponents. By rejecting the legitimacy of any rites, such as the eucharist, in Christian groups that did not adhere this threefold pattern of ministry Ignatius declared such believers to be deviant and thus not patterned on the Jesus, the Father or the apostles.

Although the innovation of this threefold pattern of ministry may not have been an innovation created by Ignatius, he advocates for it in particularly strong tones and to the exclusion of any other pattern. Moreover, within this three-level scheme he argues for the exaltation of the role of the bishop to a degree that appears to be more prominent than that reflected in other Christian texts of the period, or earlier³⁸. The consistent advocacy of this threefold pattern of ministry differs from what is envisaged in the Pauline letters. Among those letters that are typically considered to be authentic Paul does not tend to address individuals or even a smaller subset of the community as the authority figures. Thus Thompson can conclude his study on leadership in the Pauline churches by noting that “[t]he undisputed letters of Paul give little indication of the emergence of the ecclesiastical offices that are evident in the Pastoral Epistles and the literature of the next generation”³⁹. While Dunn sees the development of institutional offices as described in the Pastoral Epistles as a typical routinization of the charisma familiar in new religious movements, nonetheless he sees that development as being in line with the Pauline heritage. However, Dunn argues that while Paul envisaged his communities as spirit-led charismatic entities, alongside this “[l]eadership did emerge”⁴⁰. According to Dunn, this is seen with named individuals such as Stephanus and his household, as well as Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor 16,15-18). The leadership role of such figures is seen when Paul instructs the Corinthians that they should “be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work” (1 Cor 16,16). As Dunn states, this is “an appeal for the charismatic authority of their actions to be acknowledged. The initiatives they had taken and the hard work they had displayed were so obviously good that their lead should be

³⁷ FRANCIS A. SULLIVAN, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church*, New York/Mahwah, Newman Press, 2001, p. 111.

³⁸ While Schoedel assumes that the threefold pattern of ministry must have been widely the norm among Christian communities, he does see the focus on the episcopal office as due to Ignatius’ own concerns and perspectives. Thus he states, “[i]t is only his exaltation of the role of the bishop that sometimes strikes us as going beyond what was commonly accepted.” SCHOEDEL, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 142.

³⁹ JAMES W. THOMPSON, *The Church according to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2014, p. 241.

⁴⁰ J.D.G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 584.

followed⁴¹. This perspective is obviously different from the set and hierarchically structured pattern of leadership found in the writings of Ignatius.

What Ignatius describes is more noticeably akin to the pattern of leadership outlined in the Pastoral Epistles. In the letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus at various points the three terms ἐπισκοπή⁴², πρεσβύτερος⁴³, and διάκονος⁴⁴, all used to designate leadership roles in the contexts being addressed. While the use of terms overlaps with the terms employed in the letters of Ignatius, the two sets of terms are not used in identical ways. Trebilco argues that in the Pastoral Epistles the terms ἐπισκοπή and πρεσβύτερος do not refer to two discrete roles, but are alternative and overlapping ways of referring to a leadership role, although the terms are not coterminous. From this viewpoint he argues that the term πρεσβύτερος is used in two senses. First, it originally designated “senior members” of the community, a meaning found in 1 Tim 5,1. This was a group of people who were not necessarily the leaders with the requisite skills laid out in the Pastoral Epistles⁴⁵. Second, there are ruling presbyters. Trebilco argues, “that the ‘presbyters’ who according to 1 Tim 5:17-19 are to rule well and teach are the same group as the ‘overseers’ in 1 Tim 3”⁴⁶. Therefore, Trebilco envisages only two leadership groups in the Pastoral Epistles, but described using three terms. These leadership groups are the “presbyter-elders” and the “deacons”. If Trebilco’s analysis is correct, this reveals a marked difference from the threefold pattern in the writings of Ignatius. If Trebilco were not correct, then it is still the case that the roles attributed to the leadership offices in the Pastoral Epistles are loosely defined and fall short of the authority ascribed in particular to the ἐπισκοπή in the letters of Ignatius. Therefore, the Pastoral Epistles reflect some kind of medial position in regard to the leadership structures in early Christian communities in comparison to the charismatic roles described in the authentic Pauline letters and the more hierarchically structured system of church governance envisaged in the letters of Ignatius. However, despite the development reflected in the Pastoral Epistles in comparison with the authentic or earlier letters of Paul, they do not display the same level of development found in the writings of Ignatius. Consequently, the letters of Ignatius portray a marked development in the structure of church leadership in comparison to all phases of the Pauline writings.

3. *The Eucharist in the Middle Recension*

Within the middle recension there is also a marked development in the theological understanding of the eucharist in comparison with the ideas expressed in the gospels and the Pauline letters. In many ways Ignatius’ eucharistic thought should be considered to be one of his fundamental and lasting contributions to a Christian theology of eucharist. The ideas that he expressed, although admittedly undergoing development and refinement in the thought of later Christian writers, were without doubt foundational for those theological reflections of subsequent generations.

Within the New Testament, broadly speaking there are two interlinked strands of eucharistic traditions. The first is the description of Jesus’ last supper as recorded in the synoptic gospels (Matt 26,26-29//Mk 14,22-25//Lk 22,14-20). Although there are some

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 585.

⁴² 1 Tim 3,10.2; Tit 1,7.

⁴³ 1 Tim 4,14; 5,1.2.17.19; Tit 1.5.

⁴⁴ 1 Tim 1,12; 3,8.10.12.13; 4,6; 2 Tim 4,5.11.

⁴⁵ P. TREBILCO, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (WUNT 166), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2004, p. 453.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

important differences, the Markan and Matthean are broadly similar. Also, as is well known, the Lukan account is more divergent with the most striking feature being the use of two cups, one before (Lk 22,17) and one after (Lk 22,20) the breaking of bread (Lk 22,19)⁴⁷. The second strand of eucharistic tradition is found in the Pauline letters (1 Cor 11,23-26).

Within the synoptic accounts the meal is shared as part of the Passover ritual. Thus in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples to find a certain man and to inform him "I am to keep the Passover at your house with my disciples" (Matt 26,18). Similarly in Luke's Gospel immediately prior to the sharing of the first cup, the Lukan Jesus declares, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22,15). As Fitzmyer notes, "[t]he Synoptic evangelists present that Last Supper as a Passover meal (Mark 14:1-2,12-17; Luke 22:1,7-14; Matt 26:2,5,17-20), and Luke more pronouncedly than the others"⁴⁸. Within the synoptic tradition, the dominical saying identifies the bread with Jesus' body (Mk 14,22) and the wine with Jesus' blood. Moreover, the blood is further denoted as being covenantal in some sense and also representative, "this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many" (Mk 14,24). Matthew glosses Jesus' words over the cup to clarify that the blood poured out is "for forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26,28). Thus Matthew introduces more clearly the notion of blood poured out as a sacrificial and atoning act. The theme of the forgiving of sins is prominent in Matthew's Gospel. Luz comments on the centrality of that theme by noting that,

For Matthew the forgiveness of sins stands at the center of Jesus' mission. Even his name indicated that he will save his people from their sins (1:21). ... Once again we see here that the words of interpretation on the breaking of the bread and the cup are not merely parables that explain; they are a word of promise that permits the churches in the ritual of eating and drinking to share in the saving power of Jesus' death⁴⁹.

However, the words "for forgiveness of sins" are also climactic within the gospel narrative. This redactional phrase unique to Matthew's account, "underlines that the death of Jesus is soteriological, a deliverance from slavery to sin. The same words are omitted from 3.2 diff. Mk 1.4 ... Matthew saves them for association with the covenant made through Jesus' sacrificial death"⁵⁰. Therefore, in the synoptic tradition the bread and the wine of the Passover meal are seen as representing, in some symbolic sense, the body and blood of Christ. Moreover, the blood of Christ which is figuratively represented by the Passover wine is seen as covenantal, it is representative in that it is offered on behalf of many, and according to Matthew it is soteriological in that it brings about forgiveness of sins.

By contrast, in the Pauline account of the last supper the Passover link is not explicit. However, elsewhere in 1 Corinthians the Passover association with Christ is preserved, "for Christ our Passover has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5,7). In common with the synoptic tradition, Paul makes the equation between the bread and the wine as representing the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 11,24-25). Paul describes the words of institution over the bread as stating, "this is my body, which is for you" (1 Cor 11,24). In a fairly undefined sense the body of Christ, which the bread represents, is seen as benefitting the

⁴⁷ The Western text, principally represented in Codex Bezae, deletes the second cup in Lk 22,20. This shorter form is one of the so-called Western non-interpolations.

⁴⁸ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (AB 28A), New York: Doubleday, 1985, p. 1378.

⁴⁹ U. LUZ, *Matthew 21-28* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis, Fortress, 2005, p. 381.

⁵⁰ W.D. DAVIES AND D.C. ALISON, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC), vol. 3, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997, p. 474.

Corinthian believers and as being offered on their behalf⁵¹. Paul also presents the shared meal of bread and wine as being carried out in remembrance of Jesus. However, the notion of “remembrance” transcends simple recall. As Fitzmyer notes, “[i]t is not merely a recollection of Jesus and what he did at his supper, but a representing of him and a *re-enactment of his acts* at the Last Supper for the conscious awareness of the Christians at Roman Corinth”⁵². Perhaps in a similar way, the statement that participation in the eucharistic meal means that one “proclaims the Lord’s death until he comes again” (1 Cor 11,26) entails more than historical memory. The eucharist connects Christ’s first coming with his second coming, by making Jesus present and empoweringly active among those who participate in the eucharistic meal⁵³.

In the New Testament, there is some theological reflection on the significance of the eucharist. However, despite the theological weight placed on both the synoptic accounts and the Pauline tradition, the theological inferences drawn by later authors and the explicit interpretations they provide are slight. The Paschal links are more prominent in the synoptic tradition. By contrast, the ideas of remembrance and proleptic preparation for the Parousia are key elements in the Pauline understanding of the eucharist.

In distinction to the minimal theological reflection to be found in the New Testament on the significance of the Last Supper, in the writings of Ignatius one finds a more developed theological understanding of the eucharist. In fact, this theological development is one of Ignatius’ key theological contributions to the larger development of Christian thought. As Löhr observes,

The Ignatian letters show a concept of the Christian meal celebration called “Thanksgiving” (εὐχαριστία) developed beyond that of the New Testament writings. The term (as in Did 9.1, 5) is to be understood as a metonym for the entire celebration. The letters also speak of “breaking-bread” (IgnEph 20.2), or simply of “God’s bread” (IgnEph 5.2; IgnRom 7.3)⁵⁴.

Therefore, in Ignatius’ writings, theological perspectives on the eucharist coalesce with his thought on ecclesiology and episcopacy. It is in the collective ecclesial gathering, overseen by the bishop, that the eucharistic meal is to be celebrated, and it is within that context according to Ignatius that the theological significance of the ritual meal is actualised. As Schoedel states, “[t]he eucharist is the center of worship for Ignatius (cf. *Eph.* 5.2; 13.1; *Phd.* 4; *Smyr.* 7.1; 8.1) and serves as the focus for the sense of saving power in the Christian community (cf. *Eph.* 20.2)”⁵⁵.

Discussing episcopal authority and leadership in his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius declares that anyone who are not in fellowship with the local bishop actually “lacks the bread of God” (Ign. *Eph.* 5,2). Here Ignatius links the concept of unity with the bishop to that of the efficacy of the eucharistic. It appears that behind this rhetoric Ignatius is calling into question the validity of the eucharistic meals of his opponents who did not recognise the authority of the local bishop. In a striking passage Ignatius attributes curative spiritual power to the eucharistic elements. He declares the act of “breaking one bread” to be “the medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in

⁵¹ Fee interprets this verse with even more precise theological significance. He states, “Paul surely understands this language regarding the bread as referring to Jesus’ body as given in death “in behalf of/in place of” those who are now eating at the table. G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT), rev. ed., Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2014, p. 610.

⁵² J.A. FITZMYER, *First Corinthians* (AYB 32), New Haven, Yale UP, 2008, p. 441.

⁵³ As Barrett observes, “[t]he church as it met round the supper table would form a living link between the beginning at the end of the interim between the two comings of the Lord.” C.K. BARRETT, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC), 2nd ed., London, A&C Black, 1971, p. 271.

⁵⁴ H. LÖHR, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*, in W. PRATSCHER (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*, Waco, Baylor UP, 2010, p. 108.

⁵⁵ SCHOEDEL, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 21.

Jesus Christ” (Ign. *Eph.* 20,2). For Ignatius the antithesis of death is not simply life, but life in Jesus Christ. Therefore the eucharist is not simply a remedy against mortality, but it facilitates participation in the life of Jesus. While the related images of medicine and antidote by suggest a mystical (if not even a magical) aspect within the healing imagery, the thought is perhaps more involved than simply asserting that partaking of the eucharist is a protective against mortality⁵⁶.

The protective aspect of the eucharist appears to be in Ignatius’ thought when he address the Trallians. In a somewhat fleeting aside Ignatius comments, “you, therefore, must arm yourselves with gentleness and regain your strength in faith (which is the flesh of the Lord) and in love (which is the blood of Jesus Christ)” (Ign. *Trall.* 8,1). The references to ‘the flesh of the Lord’ and “the blood of Jesus Christ” in combination naturally evoke eucharistic perspectives. Here Ignatius declares “strength in faith” to be equivalent to “the flesh of the Lord”, and “love” as equivalent to “the blood of Jesus Christ”. He does not, however, explain the basis for these suggestive equivalencies that he presents. In many ways, Ignatius’ simple presents these pairs alongside each other as striking juxtapositions, without the need to explain the basis of the linkage⁵⁷. A similar metaphor, or juxtaposition of bread and wine with other theological claims, occurs in the letter to the Romans. In this context Ignatius states that “I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink I want his blood, which is incorruptible love” (Ign. *Rom.* 7,3). Here the focus appears more on another of Ignatius’ key theological concerns, rather than developing his eucharistic thought. That concern is arguing against a docetic Christology. This is achieved by equating the bread of God, with the flesh of Christ which in turn is identified with the Christ being from the seed of David. Hence the bread of God language affords Ignatius another opportunity to affirm the reality of Jesus’ Davidic decent and thus to present the reality of the incarnation.

Writing to the Philadelphians, Ignatius again present his concerns over unity in Christian communities. He sees that unity being achieved in a twofold manner – by participating in the ‘one eucharist’, and submitting oneself to the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyters and deacons. Thus he warns the Philadelphians:

Take care, therefore, to participate in one eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup that leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the council of presbyters and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do it in accordance with God. (Ign. *Philad.* 4,1).

Almost incidentally, Ignatius makes a number of affirmations concerning the eucharist. Although the bread is not explicitly mentioned, implicitly it is identified with the ‘flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and the eucharistic is explicitly seen as the container of the blood of Christ. The eucharist is to be celebrated in accordance with God, which as the parenthetical comment suggests is achieved when the eucharist is celebrated under the sanction of the local bishop. Thus as Vall observes, “Ignatius ties the eucharist very closely to the episcopal ministry”⁵⁸.

However, it is in the letter to the Smyrnaeans that the theology of the eucharist comes to the fore, and it is presented as a dividing issue between Ignatius and those whom he accuses of holding “heretical opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ”. These opponents are accused of refusing to participate in the eucharist because of their docetic Christology. Thus Ignatius declares, “[t]hey abstain from the eucharist and prayer because they refuse

⁵⁶ According to Schoedel the imagery in this description “is generally taken to support a very ‘realistic’ (if not “magical”) conception of the sacrament.’ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵⁸ G. VALL, *Learning Christ: Ignatius of Antioch & the Mystery of Redemption*, Washington, Catholic University of America, 2013, p. 306.

to acknowledge that the eucharist is the flesh of our saviour Jesus Christ” (Ign. *Smyr.* 6,2). In this key passage Ignatius unambiguously declares the eucharist to be the flesh of Christ, and concludes that his opponents refuse to participate in the eucharistic meals conducted by the local bishop because they deny the reality of the incarnation or enfleshment of Christ. Therefore, in this context “identifying the eucharistic flesh with Jesus’ historical flesh”⁵⁹, Ignatius insists “on the strongest possible bond between the paschal mystery and the church’s sacramental life”⁶⁰. Again it is in Smyrnaeans that the strongest statement is provided between the link of episcopal authority and the validity of the eucharistic meal. Ignatius states, “only that eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop (or whomever he himself designates) is to be considered valid” (Ign. *Smyr.* 8,1).

Therefore, in the writings of Ignatius it is possible to trace a marked development and shift in eucharistic thought in comparison with the same topic as articulated in the New Testament. In the synoptic gospels the links with the Jewish Passover meal are far more prominent. By contrast, in Ignatius this aspect has disappeared. Moreover, the Pauline perspective that the eucharist is both preparation for and anticipation of the Parousia are also absent in Ignatian thought. For Ignatius, the eucharist is the central sacramental demonstration of the reality of Christ’s incarnation, and hence it rebuts the claims of his docetic opponents and explains their refusal to participate in the eucharistic meal. The reality of Christ’s flesh in the eucharist, according to Ignatius, negates their claims that Christ’s human appearance was only a mere semblance. Furthermore, the refusal to participate in a valid eucharist under the authority of the local bishop demonstrates the opponents refusal to accept the divinely ordered structure of the church in the pattern of bishops, presbyters and deacons. These are marked develops in theology from those eucharistic ideas to be found in the New Testament. Moreover, the ideas on the eucharist that occur in Ignatius’ writings are foundational for subsequent developments in regard to eucharistic theology at least till the time of the Reformation.

Numerous theological developments are present in the middle recension, or earliest form of the letters of Ignatius in comparison with perspectives contained in the Pauline epistles, the synoptic gospels and the Johannine writings. In relation to eucharistic ideas, Ignatius’ writing present ways of viewing the eucharist that are markedly different from the embryonic reflections in contained in the accounts of the last supper and Paul’s description of the eucharist⁶¹. Even more significantly, the ideas that Ignatius expresses around the eucharist became highly influential and formed the basis for much Christian theology on the sacramental nature of the eucharist. In relation to christological statements, Ignatius’ unambiguous affirmations of the divinity of Christ go beyond anything found explicitly in the Pauline letters, although there may be some closer

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ There have been attempts to find continuity between perspectives contained in the New Testament on the eucharist and the theological reflections of Ignatius. In this vein Pitre argues in relation Jn 6,53-55 that Jesus’ words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood as the vehicle for resurrection and eternal life are aligned with Ignatius’ description of the bread and wine as “the medicine of immortality” (Ign. *Eph.* 20.2). Thus Pitre argues, “Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum stands in continuity with the thought of Ignatius of Antioch. ... We have here a textbook case of the teaching of Jesus in Capernaum being translated from an early Jewish key into the language of a more developed Gentile Christianity”. B. PITRE, *Jesus and the Last Supper*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 2016, pp. 426-427. Apart from the apparent conclusion that the Johannine discourse in Jn 6,53-55 represents that teachings of Jesus in Capernaum, it should also be noted than an actual eucharist is absent from the fourth gospel. Moreover, the points of verbal contact between the fourth gospel and Ignatius’ comments on the eucharist, in particular as the “medicine of immortality” are low. Therefore, it is difficult to detect the type of continuity that Pitre sees between the Gospel of John and the letters of Ignatius in regard to the eucharistic thought.

theological alignment with Thomas' confession in Jn 20,28. Similarly, Ignatius' description of leadership roles shares some of the terminology found, in particular, in the Pastoral Epistles. However, the fixed threefold hierarchical pattern of leadership is an obvious development in comparison with anything found in the corpus of Pauline writings. Therefore, in the middle recension one may detect clear examples of theological development in important areas of Christian thought in comparison with ideas on the same topics to be found in writings from the Jesus movement that were written a generation or two prior to Ignatius.

IV. THE THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS OF THE LONG RECENSION

Remarkably little work has been undertaken on the long recension of the letters of Ignatius in its own right. Typically the discussion has focused on the relationship of the long recension to the other forms of the letter collection, with primary focus on demonstrating that the long recension is later than, and dependent upon the middle recension. Although Hannah argued that the long recension in the form of the interpolated versions of the seven letters of the middle recension came into existence in the second century (A.D. 135-155) as a response to Gnosticism⁶², this position is not defensible. As has been argued by others, and will be shown more fully below, the theological concerns of the long recension of Ignatius' letters reflect the theological disputes of the second half of the fourth century. Specifically, the christological perspectives contained in the long recension align with ultra-Arianism of the type found after the dissolution of the Nicene consensus. In particular, the christological viewpoints articulated by proponents of this extreme Arianism survive in the works of Eunomius, and to a lesser extent in the literary remains of works by Aetius, and by Thallus⁶³.

The key claim of the extreme Arians, which brought adherents of this party into conflict with the then dominant semi-Arians, was their repudiation of the idea that the son was of "like" (*homoiousia*) nature with the father. The writings of Aetius, the prime instigator of ultra-Arianism, on the topic of the incarnation survive in quotation or excerpts contained in the writings of his opponents. Epiphanius cites an isolated saying of Aetius in the following form, "The Ingenerate [unbegotten] cannot be like the Generate [begotten]. Indeed they differ in name, the one is 'ingenerate,' and the other, 'generate'"⁶⁴. This perspective, centring upon the fundamental difference between the natures of the father and the son, was the intractable point of division between the semi-Arians and the ultra-Arians. During the second half of the fourth century the inability of both parties to find a compromise between their views resulted in decades of bitter polemic. Ultimately, this led to reciprocal condemnations being issued. The semi-Arians condemned the ultra-Arians at the Council of Seleucia (359), and subsequently the ultra-Arians denounced the semi-Arians at the Council of Constantinople (360), and again at the Council of Antioch (360/361). The latter council held at Antioch demonstrates the

⁶² HANNAH, "The Setting of the Ignatian Long Recension", 221-238.

⁶³ There is some dispute concerning the correct terminology to name this group. The terms "Anomoenism" or "Anhomoian" were preferred by Simonetti. See M. SIMONETTI, *La Crisi Ariana nel Quarto Secolo* (Studia Ephemeridis "Augustinianum" 11), Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1975. However, Hanson prefers the term 'Neo-Arian' because as he argues "Anhomoian" "is incorrect because the Neo-Arians on several occasions repudiated the view that the Son was, without qualification, 'unlike (*anhomoios*) the Father: this was an insulting label given to them by their opponents." R.P.C. HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1988, p. 598.

⁶⁴ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 76.6.1. Trans. F. WILLIAMS, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Books II and III. *De Fide* (NHMS 79), 2nd, rev. ed., Leiden, Brill, 2013, p. 516.

strength of the ultra-Arian party in that location. It is possible that this might account, at least in part, for the reason for recasting the letters of Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, to transform his christology into one that provided support for the ultra-Arian christological views. By doing this, it both created an ancient pedigree for ultra-Arian views, and moreover it established Antioch as a place where the doctrine of the difference between the natures of the father and the son had been preserved since the beginnings of Christianity in one of the most prominent sees of the church.

1. Christological Perspectives of the Long Recension

Without any shadow of doubt, it is the christological perspectives of the long recension of the letters of Ignatius that reflect the most thoroughgoing theological concern both in the interpolated passages added to the seven letters of the middle recension, and also in the text of the additional letters. Here that theological perspective will be illustrated in the seven interpolated letters by presenting the both the form of the long and middle recensions synoptically. This will, perhaps, provide the most striking examples of the handiwork and the theological concerns of the compositor of the long recension. However, the thoroughgoing and sustained nature of these christological concerns will be further illustrated by citing passages from the additional letters (which obviously are unparalleled in the middle recension) in order to show how those same perspectives are carried over into the supplementary epistles that stand as part of the long recension stemming from the same author.

Turning to a number of Ignatius' semi-credal statements, it is immediately apparent how affirmations that attribute divinity to Jesus are removed or are radically rewritten. Moreover, there is a marked desire to show that Jesus was of a different οὐσία from the Father. Furthermore, within the long recension it is affirmed that while the λόγος existed before time, the son was not co-eternal with the father, and therefore was separable in nature and consequently distinguishable in substance from the father who alone was the only true God.

Ign. Eph. 7,2 Middle Recension	Ign. Eph. 7,2 Long Recension
There is only one physician, who is both of flesh and spirit, both 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.	But our Physician is the only true God, the unbegotten and unapproachable, the Lord of all, the Father and Begetter of the only-begotten Son. We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For "the word was made flesh." Being incorporeal, He was in the body; being impassible, He was in a passible body; being immortal, He was in a mortal body; being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption, and heal them, and might restore them to health, when they were diseased with ungodliness and wicked lusts.

There are some primary observations that are helpful in relation to the differences between the middle and long recensions. First, the long recension is more than triple the length of the middle recension. The long recension also cites the fourth gospel "the word

was made flesh” (Jn 1,14), whereas the Gospel of John is never cited in the middle recension of the Ignatian letters⁶⁵.

In terms of the key medical image, whereas the middle recension declares there to be “only one physician” and identifies “Jesus Christ our Lord” as that person, the long recension makes a different and dual identification. The physician is “the only true God ... the Father”. However, there is another who also serves as physician “the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word”. Therefore, the metaphor is changed from the image of one physician to that of two. While the Father, who is the primary physician, is described as “the only true God”, Jesus can nonetheless be described as “the Lord our God”. This does not cohere with the perspectives in the middle recension for this ascription of divinity is relativized through other qualifications in the semi-credal material of the long recension. The one described as “Son and Word” is “only-begotten”, but not in Nicene formulation eternally begotten. While affirming that he exists before time, the statement steers away from declaring him to be co-eternal with the father. By affirming that the son was begotten before time, the statement in the long recension avoids the crude notion of the son being begotten at a point in time. Such ideas were attributed to Arius by those who wrote against him. Thus Socrates of Constantinople cites Arius as teaching, “[i]f the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not” (Socrates, *Hist. Ecc.* 1,5)⁶⁶. Such a perspective is reported as the key error of Arius in multiple sources. Thus Alexander in his *Deposition of Arius*, lists Arius as the head of the list of the apostates, and attributes to him ‘novelties contrary to the scriptures’ which include the following description of the Son, the word of God:

The Word of God was not always, but originated from things that were not; for God that is, has made him that was not, of that which was not; wherefore there was a time when He was not; for the Son is a creature and a work. Neither is He like in essence to the Father; neither is He the true and natural Word of the Father; neither is He His true Wisdom; but He is one of the things made and created, and is called the Word and Wisdom by an abuse of terms, since He Himself originated by the proper Word of God, and by the Wisdom that is in God, by which God has made not only all other things but Him also. Wherefore He is by nature subject to change and variation as are all rational creatures. And the Word is foreign from the essence of the Father, and is alien and separated therefrom. And the Father cannot be described by the Son, for the Word does not know the Father perfectly and accurately, neither can He see Him perfectly. Moreover, the Son knows not His own essence as it really is; for He is made for us, that God might create us by Him, as by an instrument; and He would not have existed, had not God wished to create us. (Alexander, *Deposition of Arius*)⁶⁷.

Therefore, the rewritten material in the first semi-credal statement of the long recension of Ignatius’ *Letter to the Ephesians* (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2) does avoid the crudeness and the temporal limitation placed on the existence of the word in the statements attributed to Arius in texts such as Alexander’s *Deposition of Arius*. However, while stating that the word existed before time, and even affirming that Jesus could be designated by believers as “the Lord our God”, there is a clear tendency to separate son’s

⁶⁵ It has been argued that for the middle recension ‘Ignatius’ use of the Fourth Gospel cannot be established with any degree of certainty.’ P. FOSTER, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch and the Writings that later formed the New Testament*, in A.F. GREGORY AND C.M. TUCKETT (eds), *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, Oxford: OUP, 2005, p. 175. For the contrary point of view see C.E. HILL, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, Oxford, OUP, 2004, esp. pp. 427-441.

⁶⁶ Socrates of Constantinople, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, trans. A.C. ZENOS, in P. SCHAFF AND H. WALLACE (eds), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series vol. 2, Buffalo, NY, Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1890.

⁶⁷ See M. ATKINSON (trans.), Alexander, *The Deposition of Arius*, (rev. A. ROBERTSON) in P. SCHAFF AND H. WALLACE (eds), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series vol. 4, Buffalo, NY, Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1892, pp. 68-72.

duration of existence (albeit outside of time) from that of the father, and to separate the son from the father so that the incarnation of the son could not transmit the corruption of being in the flesh back to the father, who was understood to be incorruptible because the substance of his being was beyond subjection to corruptibility. However, the statement affirms that the son was like the father in respect of them both acting as a physician for believers. Thus the son was able to mediate the work of the father to believers. However, according to the long form of this semi credal statement the son was not eternally begotten, and hence was not co-eternal with the father⁶⁸.

In the additional letters contained in the long recension, the christological views of the ultra-Arians find fuller expression. Thus, building on Ignatius’ anti-docetic rhetoric, the *Letter to the Tarsians* has Ignatius condemning the idea that Jesus is divine, an idea which one finds articulated clearly in the authentic letters. In *Tarsians*, the editor attributes the following words to Ignatius.

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; others that he is not the son of the creator, and others that he is himself God over all. (Ign. *Tarsians* 2,1).

The editor skilfully presents in rapid sequence a number of statements that either Ignatius could have written against docetic opponents, or that represent opinions rejected both Arian and Nicene Christians. Then as the climax to this sequence, the editor presents Ignatius as rejecting a view that stands at the heart of the christological views that the ultra-Arians rejected. Yet even here, the editor has presented the view of his opponents in an extreme form. He alludes to a group who state of the son, “that he is himself God over all”. This representation of Nicene christology presents a potential confusion between the person of the son and the father in such a fashion that makes the perspective akin to the theologically suspect views of modalism.

2. Ecclesiology and Episcopacy in the Long Recension

In regard to church structures and leadership patterns and roles, there is much shared ground between the perspectives of Ignatius contained in the middle recension of his letters, and those of the editor of the long recension of the Ignatian corpus. The editor does provide a few additional theological reflections on the nature of the threefold pattern of ecclesial leadership, but in essence the long recension upholds Ignatius’ perspective of this topic.

Ign. <i>Trall.</i> 2,2-3 Middle Recension	Ign. <i>Trall.</i> 2,2-3 Long Recension
It is essential, therefore, that you continue your current practice and do nothing without the bishop, but be subject also to the council of the presbyters as to the apostles of Jesus Christ ... Furthermore, it is necessary that those who are deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ please everyone in every respect. For they are not merely deacons of food and drink, but ministers of God’s church.	It is essential, therefore, that you continue your current practice and do nothing without the bishop, but be subject also to the council of the presbyters as to the apostles of Jesus Christ ... Furthermore, it is fitting also, that in every way to please the deacons who are deacons of the mysteries of Christ Jesus For they are not merely deacons of food and drink, but ministers of God’s church.

Thus, here one sees only minor changes in wording. In this way the long recension largely adheres to Ignatius’ own perspectives on the pattern and functions of the three offices of ministry.

Notwithstanding this, within some of the additional letters of the long recension, the perspectives on the various ecclesial leadership roles appears to reflect a more fully developed understanding of the functions of these offices, than is present in the

⁶⁸ See HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 634.

descriptions of those roles as described in the middle recension. For example, in the letter addressed to the deacon Hero, the editor of the long recension has Ignatius instruct Hero in the following manner.

Do nothing without the bishops; for they are priests, and you are a servant of the priests. They baptise, offer sacrifice, ordain, and lay on hands; but you minister to them, as the holy Stephen did at Jerusalem to James and the presbyters. Do not neglect the sacred meetings; inquire after every one by name. Let no man despise your youth, but be an example to believers both in word and deed. (Ign. *Hero* 3,1).

The opening injunction resonates with instructions Ignatius gives in the authentic epistles of the middle recension⁶⁹. However, after this, the contents betray a later period and reflect a more developed understanding of leadership roles. Bishops are called priests, and a list of sacred duties is given. The offering of sacrifice most likely reflects a sacrificial understanding of the eucharist. Deacons are more explicitly seen as subservient to the bishop and to the presbyters. The role of deacon appears to involve taking an attendance register in the regular meetings, something not mentioned in the middle recension of the letters of Ignatius.

Therefore, there is no concern to contradict or correct Ignatius’ theological perspectives on ecclesiology and episcopacy as contained in the middle recension. Notwithstanding this, there are some anachronistic descriptions of the functions of these ecclesial roles, which reveal that the perspectives expressed do not originate from the first half of the second century, but from a significantly later period.

3. *Eucharistic Thought in the Long Recension*

While the long recension has been recognised as deviating from the christological perspectives articulated in the middle recension of Ignatius’ letters, little attention has been focused on the way the eucharistic thought of the middle recension is handled and evolves in the long recension⁷⁰. In order to consider Ignatius’ eucharistic thought in the long recension it is again helpful to place passages from the interpolated forms of the seven letters of the long recension in parallel with the relevant passages in the middle recension. In *Philadelphians*, the eucharistic material as it is rewritten in the long recension is modified in two major ways. First, it is recast in such a manner that it is no longer presented as protective advice against the deviant practices of opponents. Second, it is expanded in such a way that there is more specificity in regard to the actual performance and practice of the eucharist.

Ign. <i>Philad.</i> 4,1 Middle Recension	Ign. <i>Philad.</i> 4,1 Long Recension
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⁶⁹ See Ign. *Magn.* 7.1. “So you must do nothing without the bishop and the presbyters”.

⁷⁰ One recent although partial consideration of this issue was discussed in a recent SBL paper. TOBIAS FLEMMING, *The Meal in the Letters of Ignatius: Textual Variants as Evidence for Transforming Practice and Theology*, SBL Annual Meeting, Denver, Colorado, 17 Nov 2018, in the Meals in the Greco-Roman World section, 1:00-3:30pm. The abstract from Flemmings’ paper stated: “The Letters of Ignatius have a particularly complex textual history as they exist in three different recensions of varying length, theological profile, and historical background. Most scholarship has tended to focus on the supposedly “original” middle recension, whose rich metaphorical language has often been interpreted as referring to a Christian meal in which bread and wine were consumed as flesh and blood of Christ. Such “realistic” readings have been challenged in recent studies (e.g. HEILMANN, 2014) which highlight the complex function of the used imagery in their argumentative contexts. Textual variations between individual manuscripts and recensions, however, point towards the fact that the understanding of the Letters’ metaphorical language indeed changed over time and against the backdrop of a transforming ritual practice and meal theology. By applying the working hypothesis of the network ‘Mahl und Text’ to selected passages in the Letters of Ignatius which—at least in some recensions and manuscripts—deal with the Christian meal, the proposed paper aims at making some of these diachronic developments visible.”

<p>Take care, therefore, to participate in one eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup that leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the council of presbyters and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do it in accordance with God.</p>	<p>I have confidence of you in the Lord, that you will be of no other mind. Therefore I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and exhort you to have but one faith, and one [kind of] preaching, and one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ; and His blood which was shed for us is one; one loaf also is broken to all [the communicants], and one cup is distributed among them all: there is but one altar for the whole church, and one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants.</p>
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Both passages contain references to the threefold pattern of ministry, and both make use of the “one flesh” and “one cup” language. However, the tenor and purpose of the two passages is strikingly different. In the middle recension the key theme is that of participation in the one eucharistic ritual, albeit carried out under the auspices of the local bishop. For Ignatius, this is in itself a test of unity. This discussion of the eucharist as a test of unity builds carefully on the progression of thought in the middle recension of Ignatius’ *Letter to the Philadelphians*. Hence, Ignatius’ thinking build on the immediately preceding material, where he notes that “if any follows a schismatic, he does not inherit the kingdom of God. If any hold to an alien view, they disassociate themselves from the passion” (Ign. *Philad.* 3,3, middle recension). The long recension, however, breaks or alters the logic of this argument by rewriting the second warning in more general terms as “if any man does not stand aloof from the preacher of falsehood, he shall be condemned to hell” (Ign. *Philad.* 3,3, long recension). By removing the reference to the “passion” the transition to the eucharistic language of the flesh and the cup is weakened. Additionally, in the long recension, the editor continues with a lengthy tirade which does reprise the reference to the passion. Thus in a loosely connected manner he states, “if one walks according to strange opinion, he is not of Christ, nor a partaker of his passion” (Ign. *Philad.* 3,3, long recension). As is apparent, in this new literary form the focus does not centre on the passion or on eucharistic ideas. Instead, citing LXX Ps 119,21 the focus falls upon “hating those that hate God”. Consequently, the transition to the topic of the eucharist in Ign. *Philad.* 4,1, long recension, is abrupt, and is less concerned with the theological idea of the eucharist being a focal point of unity. Instead, the author is more interested in the praxis with the use of one loaf and one cup of which all partake, and the theological affirmation of “one altar for the whole church” (Ign. *Philad.* 4,1, long recension).

Ignatius’ statement in the middle recension of the *Letter to the Romans* that “I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink I want his blood, which is incorruptible love” (Ign. *Rom.* 7,3)⁷¹, is largely identical in with the form in the long recensions, but there are a couple of alterations designed to make the passage fit with ultra-Arian perspectives.

Ign. <i>Rom.</i> 7,3 Middle Recension	Ign. <i>Rom.</i> 7,3 Long Recension
<p>ἄρτον θεοῦ θέλω ὃ ἐστὶν σὰρξ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυεὶδ καὶ πόμα θέλω τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ὃ ἐστὶν ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος.</p>	<p>ἄρτον θεοῦ θέλω ἄρτον οὐράνιον, ἄρτον ζωῆς ὃ ἐστὶν σὰρξ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυεὶδ καὶ πόμα θέλω τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ὃ ἐστὶν ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος.</p>

⁷¹ For a fuller discussion of this passage in the middle recension see Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 185-186.

<p>I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.</p>	<p>I desire the bread of God the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.</p>
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Here the addition, in the form of the two extra phrases in the long recension, is at a literary level a slight and subtle change. However, theologically it is of fundamental significance for those wishing to espouse an ultra-Arian christology. The middle recension equates the bread of God as being the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was incarnate and born as a descendant of David. Such phraseology aligns with the Nicene affirmation that Christ was, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ, “of the same substance as the Father”. While this statement formally became part of the Nicene creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381, such language stood at the centre of the dispute between those who held to a Nicene Christology, and those who questioned this formulation either from a semi-Arian or from an ultra-Arian perspective. The formulation contained in the long recension subtly makes it possible to see “Ignatius” affirming two different substances, the bread of God which is the heavenly bread and the flesh of Jesus which is the bread of life. Therefore, when eucharistic language has christological implications that appear to support Nicene perspectives, then the editor of the long recension is apt to change the phrasing. Here the change in wording is relatively minor in comparison with other examples. However, it opens the possibility of a distinction between the heavenly bread of God, and the bread of life which is the flesh of Christ.

Similarly, in a passage in the middle recension where Ignatius unambiguously declares the eucharist to be Jesus’ flesh and to have salvific power that is linked to the father’s work through the son, the long recension simply deletes the statement and replaces it with a completely different statement. In the middle recension, Ignatius states “[t]hey abstain from the eucharist and prayer because they refuse to acknowledge that the eucharist is the flesh of our saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the father by his goodness raised up again” (Ign. *Smyr.* 6,2, middle recension). By contrast, the editor of the long recension describes those who propagate docetic ideas as those who,

are ashamed of the cross; they mock at the passion; they make a jest of the resurrection. They are the offspring of that spirit who is the author of all evil, who led Adam, by means of his wife, to transgress the commandment, who slew Abel by the hands of Cain, who fought against Job, who was the accuser of Joshua the son of Josedech, who sought to sift the faith of the apostles, who stirred up the multitude of the Jews against the Lord, who also now work in the children of disobedience; from whom the Lord Jesus Christ will deliver us, who prayed that the faith of the apostles might not fail, not because he was not able of himself to preserve it, but because he rejoiced in the pre-eminence of the Father. It is fitting, therefore, that ye should keep aloof from such persons, and neither in private nor in public to talk with them; but to give heed to the law, and the prophets, and to those who have preached to you the word of salvation. But flee from all abominable heresies, and those that cause schisms, as the beginning of evils. (Ign. *Smyr.* 7,1, long recension)⁷².

Apart from removing any connection between the flesh of Christ and the salvific work of the father, the new text also portrays Jesus as praying on behalf of the apostles to the father, because Jesus himself recognises and rejoices in “the pre-eminence of the father”. Therefore, once again, the long recension modifies the eucharistic language of Ignatius’ letters at key points when that eucharistic language has christological implications that might be seen as lending weight to Nicene viewpoints.

⁷² The section divisions differ between the middle and long recensions at this point. Notwithstanding this the end of Ign. *Smyr.* 6,2 (middle recension) parallels Ign. *Smyr.* 7,1 (long recension).

V. THE THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS OF THE SECOND PHASE OF THE LONG RECENSION

The second phase, or later expansion of the long recension consists of four additional letters. Three of these letters purport to be written by Ignatius. Two are addressed to John, a third is addressed to the virgin Mary by Ignatius, and the final letter of this group is a reply from Mary to Ignatius. These letters are only known from Latin manuscripts. There is no evidence that they ever existed in Greek. Consequently they are best understood as later Latin compositions that post-date the other six additional letters in the thirteen (or twelve) letter form of the long recension.

Lightfoot dates these additional letters very broadly, drawing upon general theological concerns and the poor quality of the literary work which they exhibit in their contents. He states,

As the motive is obviously the desire to do honour to the Virgin, we are naturally led to connect this forgery with the outburst of Mariolatry, which marked the eleventh and following centuries. The workmanship is coarse and clumsy, and could only have escaped detection in an uncritical age⁷³.

While Lightfoot's suggestion is reasonable, it is perhaps not the case that interest in Mary was inconsequential prior to the eleventh century in the Latin speaking church. Therefore a closer consideration of these four short letters is necessary before there can be an attempt to fix their date, or to characterise the theological concerns of this corpus of four additional epistles.

In the first letter from Ignatius addressed to John he declares that many of the women in his own community "desire to see Mary the mother of Jesus, and wish daily to run off from us to you, that they may meet her and touch those breasts which nourished the Lord Jesus, and may enquire of her in regard to some rather secret matters" (*Ign. First Epistle to John*). In this letter, Ignatius states that he has received information from people who had contact with Mary in Jerusalem. A certain Salome, perhaps the figure named among Mark's group of women visitors to the tomb (Mk 15,40; 16,1), is described as having stayed with Mary for five months. According to her account and that of others, Mary "is full of all graces after the manner of a virgin, fruitful in virtue and grace" (*Ign. First Epistle to John*). Moreover, Mary is depicted as rejoicing in the face of afflictions, which include persecution, penury, and returning gratitude to those who injure her. In all these characteristics "she shines forth gloriously as contending in the fight of the faith". Furthermore, the letter describes Mary as,

the lady of our new religion and repentance, and the handmaiden among the faithful or 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 the Pharisees ... there is in Mary the mother of Jesus an angelic purity of nature allied with the nature of humanity. (*Ign. First Epistle to John*).

There is little doubt that such statements reflect a heightened veneration of Mary. Notwithstanding this, they statements lack specificity that would fix the time of composition of this letter. It is almost certainly the case that such Marian focus is simply reflective of the period after the Council of Ephesus in 431, with its adoption of the *Theotokos* title. However, there are several periods when such Marian devotion grew in intensity⁷⁴. For instance, the emergence of Marian devotion in the eighth century in Latin

⁷³ LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 1, p. 235.

⁷⁴ Following the Council of Ephesus one sees, for instance, a flowering of Marian traditions pertaining to the dormition and assumption of the Virgin. Thus Shoemaker observes "these legends found such great

liturgical forms such as *The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, and in Latin chants such as *Ave Maris Stella*⁷⁵, reflects a period of fertile Marian reflection in the West. As much of this Marian piety was developed and practiced in monastic settings, it is possible to entertain the idea that copying and reworking of Ignatius' letters took place in the same context. It is perhaps striking, though coincidental, that this flowering of Marian piety in the eighth century employs the imagery of a star, which can first be found even among the authentic writings of Ignatius.

Now the virginity of Mary and her giving birth were hidden from the ruler of this age, as was also the death of the Lord – three mysteries to be loudly proclaimed, yet which accomplished in the silence of God. How, then, were they revealed to the ages? A star shone forth in heaven brighter than all the stars; its light was indescribable and its strangeness caused amazement (Ign. *Eph.* 19, 1-2, midd, recension).

It is not being suggested that Ignatius is in this context equating the reference to the shining star with Mary. Rather, only that he uses stellar imagery in close connection with a comment on the virginity of Mary, as one of the profound mysteries that were accomplished in the silence of God⁷⁶.

Also in the eighth century, Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (715-730) composed an influential homily on the dormition of Mary, that argued that Mary's perpetual virginity transformed her physical being into an incorruptible state, that meant she could not be confined in a tomb. In tones replete with heightened fervour and devotion directed towards Mary, Germanus writes "your virginal body is utterly holy, utterly pure, truly the dwelling place of God, and because of this it endures and does not know earthly dissolution" (Germanus, *Homily on the Dormition*, I). Therefore, both in the east and in the west, during the eighth century one finds an environment where Marian piety receives new interest and expression. It is at least equally possible, albeit beyond proof, that the second phase of the long recension of the letters of Ignatius may have been composed during this period, rather than during the eleventh century⁷⁷.

These observations show that attempts to chronologically place these varied and non-specific Marian references do not provide a secure basis for dating the four additional letters to the period of the eleventh century. That date is, of course, not impossible. However, it is difficult to fix any specific date. Perhaps the only factor in favour of an earlier date might be the fluidity and imprecision of some of the Marian language. Additionally, some of the classic later Marian titles, such as "Queen of heaven", are lacking in the four additional letters. However, yet again, this absence provides very slender evidence for the purpose of dating.

In the second letter addressed to John, Ignatius expresses his desire for John to grant him permission to visit Jerusalem that he might meet Mary and other leading figures in the Jesus movement residing in the city. Ignatius explains his desire to meet Mary in the following terms: "who would not rejoice to behold and to address her who bore the true God from her own womb" (Ign. *Second Epistle to John*). The striking thing here is that unlike the extreme Arian christology of the first phase of the long recension with its avoidance of attributing the language of divinity to Jesus, here there is a reversal of that

appeal during the period from 450 to 600". STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (O ECS) Oxford, OUP, 2002, p. 1.

⁷⁵ This chant is a plainsong chant addressed to Mary as part of the office of Vespers. Its origin is typically traced to the eighth century. The earliest extant texts are typically dated to the ninth century: Codex Vindob. 387, fol. 2v; a Carolingian ms. of *De ordine ac positione stellarum in signis* dated in a colophon to 818.

⁷⁶ Schoedel provides the most plausible understanding of the imagery when he states that, [t]he star of Matt 2:1-12, then, still presents the parallel most relevant to *Eph.* 19.2. But Ignatius reaches back to a more mythological version of the account. SCHOEDEL, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 92.

⁷⁷ *Contra* LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 1, p. 235.

theological concern. Jesus, the son of Mary can, without qualification or concern, be described as “the true God”. The author of this Latin letter apparently did not recognise the ultra-Arian christology of the first phase of the long recension, and simply makes a statement that aligns with the christology of the middle recension and with Nicene perspectives. This may reflect a period when Christian writers were no longer attuned to the nuances of the christological debates of the fourth century, or the way that the first phase of the long recension had been utilised to promote the view of Eunomius and his circle.

Among the notable people Ignatius wished to meet in Jerusalem, he mentions by name James the Just. By tradition, this James was the brother of Jesus as described in Mark’s Gospel (Mk 6.3) and other early Christian texts. The notion of Jesus having biological siblings was a challenge for belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary. To this end a number of theories were advanced such as seeing the “brothers” and “sisters” as half-siblings by a former marriage of Joseph⁷⁸, or even as cousins⁷⁹. The former theory has been associated with the fourth century figure, Epiphanius of Salamis⁸⁰. However, it is particularly prominent in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which was likely composed in the seventh century, and was a Latin re-writing of the traditions from *Protevangelium of James*.

The second letter of Ignatius to John performs some contortions in describing both the similarity of James to Jesus, while also maintaining biological distance in order to uphold the perpetual virginity of Mary. The letter states the wish to meet with James, and has Ignatius report what he has heard of this figure, “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” (Ign. *Second Epistle to John*).

While the letter comments upon James’ remarkable resemblance to Jesus to the extent that they could be taken to be twins, it emphasises that this similarity was only superficial and not due to common parenthood: “as if he were a twin-brother of the same womb”. Since the gospel story presents Jesus as a unique first-born (Lk 2,7) and a non-twin child, and the letter to John explains away the resemblance as only apparently biological, it negates any claim that James was biologically a sibling of Jesus. This is more an implication of the text, rather than a direct statement. However, in this regard it retrojects this specific observation concerning James’ remarkable similarity in comparison with Jesus into a text that purports to be written while James is still alive (before A.D. 62), and simultaneously removes any claim that James was “of the same womb” of Jesus. This concern could feasibly have emerged at any point from the late second century onwards. However, the fact that this same issue is being addressed in Latin Christianity in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* in the seventh century, may reveal that it is possible that around this date the four Latin letters of Ignatius were composed. This would also cohere with what was noted to be a period of rising Marian piety in the seventh and eighth centuries.

⁷⁸ The theory that the siblings were step-brothers and step-sisters from a former marriage of the now widower Joseph is clearly articulated in the *Protevangelium of James*, where Joseph attempts to refuse marriage to Mary by stating ‘I have sons and am an old man’ (*Prot. Jas.* 9.2). For a discussion see P. FOSTER, *The Protevangelium of James*, in P. FOSTER (ed.), *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, London, T&T Clark – A Continuum imprint, 2008, 110-125.

⁷⁹ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, Book 1, 29.3.9.

⁸⁰ Eusebius reports Hegesippus as describing the so-called brothers as cousins. Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* 4.22.4.

In both of its two phases the long recension of the letters of Ignatius contains theological motivated developments. In the initial phase of the long recension, which came into existence during the second half of the fourth century, there is clear tendency both in the re-writing of the seven letters of the middle recension and in the perspectives of the additional letters to provide christological statements that resonate strongly with the position of ultra-Arian theology. Thus the first phase of the long recension is a thoroughgoing theological development of the middle recension, which is made to promote the christological perspective that align for instance with views found in the works of Eunomius.

The second phase of the long recension is more difficult to fix chronologically, although it was suggested that Lightfoot's preference for the eleventh century as an outburst of Marian piety is not the only plausible possibility. Consequently, albeit tentatively, it was noted that Marian piety was also prominent in the eighth century, and that this might be an alternative possibility. It was noted that in a highly transparent fashion the second phase of the long recension promotes increased devotion to the Virgin Mary, and retrojects such piety into the context of the early second century through the creation of four additional Latin letters that were added to the Ignatian corpus.

VI. THE SYRIAC SHORT RECENSION

The short recension of the Ignatian letter corpus is known only in Syriac form. The short recension contains three letters from the middle recension – *Ephesians*, *Romans*, and the letter addressed to *Polycarp*. This recension is known from three Syriac manuscripts housed in the British Museum, which were published by William Cureton in 1845.⁸¹ The contents of these three manuscripts may be described as follows:

The earliest of these manuscripts, British Museum Add. 12175, dated to the first half of the sixth century, contained only the *Epistle to Polycarp*. The other two manuscripts, British Museum Add. 14618, dated to the seventh or eighth century, and British Museum Add. 17192, dated to the sixth or seventh century, but by Wright to the tenth century,⁸² both contain the *Epistle to Polycarp*, *Ephesians* and *Romans* in that order⁸³.

Cureton argued that this three letter collection represented the authentic corpus of Ignatius' writings. This position was convincingly rebutted by Lightfoot and Zahn, who demonstrated that the short recension was a latter abbreviated form or an epitome of the letters of Ignatius. The arguments of Lightfoot⁸⁴ and Zahn⁸⁵ have been strengthened with the discovery of a large manuscript fragment of *Smyrnaeans* 3,3–12,1, which on palaeographical grounds is dated to the fifth century. This discovery undermines one of the key arguments in favour of the originality of the short recension. Namely that the earliest manuscript of the short recension dated to the sixth century, whereas prior to the discovery of P. Berol. 10581 the earliest manuscripts of the middle recension dated to the tenth or eleventh centuries.

Apart from the short recension containing fewer letters in the collection than the middle recension, it also is comprised of shorter forms of the three letters in its corpus. For instance, the eight chapter version of the middle recension *Epistle to Polycarp* is

⁸¹ W. CURETON, *The Ancient Syriac Version of Saint Ignatius*, London, Rivington, 1845.

⁸² W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of Syriac MSS in the British Museum*, London, British Museum, 1870-2, pp. 778.

⁸³ See FOSTER, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 83.

⁸⁴ LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 1, p. 246.

⁸⁵ T. VON ZAHN, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, Gotha Perthes, 1893.

almost identical to the Syriac version for the first six chapters. However, the final two chapters of the *Epistle to Polycarp*, replete with personal instructions and greetings is radically abbreviated. The shorter recension excerpts a few phrases, and concludes the letter with the following two sentence, one taken for each of the final two chapters but with the final sentence being modified. “the Christian has not power over himself, but is ready to be subject to God. I salute him who is accounted worthy to go to Antioch in my stead, as I charged you”⁸⁶. By contrast, Ignatius letter to the *Ephesians*, the longest letter in the middle and long recensions (21 chapters), is radically truncated to such an extent that both the *Epistle to Polycarp* and *Epistle to Romans*, which are significantly shorter in the middle and longer recensions are now both of greater length in the short Syriac recension⁸⁷.

It is difficult to detect any theological motivation or conscious selection as being operative in the formation of this shortened three letter corpus. The removal of the personalised notes at the end of each epistle is presumably intended to make the contents more universal in nature⁸⁸. The selection does not reflect either those letters that address the concerns with Docetism⁸⁹, or alternatively those who promote maintaining Jewish practices⁹⁰. Therefore, the selection of the three epistles has little to do with the polemic that was prominent in the middle recension⁹¹. In fact, the short recension appears to be largely unaware of such disputes. The redactional handiwork of the editor of the short recension is most clearly seen at the end of the *Letter to the Romans* and to a lesser extent at the end of the *Letter to Polycarp*. In both these additions there appears to be a desire to portray Ignatius as calm and resolute in the face of impending martyrdom. The additional comment to this effect is brief in the case of the *Letter to Polycarp*: “the Christian has not power over himself, but is ready to be subject to God” (Ign. *Poly.* short recension). By contrast, the closing comment in *Romans*, a letter already charged with martyrological fervour is much more extensive, and it serves to magnify the concerns around Ignatius’ own martyrdom and provides more generally exhortations on the need to embrace martyrdom as a way of attaining perfection. This passage is drawn from Ign. *Trallians* 4–5, but embedded in the wider martyrological context of the shorter form of the letter to the *Romans*⁹². However, in its new context it reinforces and intensifies the concerns surrounding Ignatius’ impending death.

I know many things in God, but I moderate myself, that I may not perish through boasting; for now it behoves me to fear the more, and not to regard those who puff me up. For they who say to me such things, scourge me; for I love to suffer, but I do not know if I am worthy. For to many zeal is not seen, but with me it has war. I have need therefore of gentleness, by which the ruler of this world is destroyed. I am able to write you heavenly things; but I fear lest I should do you an injury. Know me from myself; for I am cautious lest you should not be able to bear them, and should be perplexed. For even I, not because I am bound, am able to know heavenly things, and the places of the angels,

⁸⁶ LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 3, p. 88.

⁸⁷ In the short recension *Polycarp* occupies more than 2 pages of text, *Ephesians* less than two pages, and *Romans* close to three pages. See LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 3, pp. 86-92.

⁸⁸ The same motivation might be present in the shorter or alternative forms of the letter to the Romans, which lack the final chapter with its long list of greetings. For a full discussion see H.Y. GAMBLE, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979.

⁸⁹ The letters where docetic tendencies are addressed are *Ephesians*, *Smynaeans* and *Trallians*. Only *Ephesians* forms part of the Syriac short recension.

⁹⁰ The critique of believers adopting Judaism as a way of life is most prominent in *Magnesians* and *Philadelphians*. See LÖHR, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 111. However, neither of those epistles is part of the short recension.

⁹¹ For a fuller discussion see FOSTER, *The Epistles of Ignatius*, pp. 89-93.

⁹² This is noted briefly by Lightfoot. He simply states, “A fragment of *Trallians* is embedded in *Romans*”. LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 1, p. 234.

and the station of the powers that are seen and are not seen, on this account I am a disciple; for I am far short of the perfection that is worthy of God. Be perfectly strong in the patience of Jesus Christ our God. (Ign. *Rom.* short recension)⁹³.

A number of themes emerge from this passage. First, this text promotes a quietistic and a non-triumphalistic approach to martyrdom. Second, in this passage Ignatius is portrayed as possessing deep cosmological insights about the “places of the angels” and “the station of the powers”. Yet this is not represented as having produced perfection. It is not possible to determine, on the basis of this brief comment, whether this is an implied criticism of those for whom cosmological knowledge and insight was viewed as the path to perfection. Third, in line with the middle recension, but in contradistinction from the long recension, no qualms are expressed about describing Jesus as divine. This is expressed in the charge to be strong “in the patience of Jesus Christ our God”. This line might be based on the closing lines of the middle recension of the *Letter to Polycarp*, one of the other letters known to the editor of the short recension. In that context Ignatius writes “I bid you farewell always in our God Jesus Christ” (Ign. *Poly.* 8,3)⁹⁴. However, it should be noted that there is no reference to the theme of patience in that context.

Overall, the Syriac short recension does not reflect the same level of theological development in regard to the middle recension as was discernible in the long recension. It may simply be that the short recension was a recasting of perhaps the only three letters of Ignatius known to its editor. If that was the case, then the literary concerns may have been no more than to universalise the contents by removing the personal greetings, and to provide a slight emphasis on a non-triumphalistic approach to martyrdom. One might wish to speculate that this was in response to the martyrological cults, but the letters of the short recension simply do not provide sufficient evidence for that to be a certain conclusion.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion has presented multiple periods of theological development within the Ignatian corpus of writings, and also within the several forms of the collection various theological concerns are apparent – many of which reflect theological evolution in their own right. In line with the general, scholarly consensus it was argued that the middle recension of seven letters of Ignatius was not only the earliest recoverable form of the corpus⁹⁵. Moreover, that the middle recension could also be understood as the

⁹³ The translation here is a slightly modernised form of the translation of W. Wright contained in LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 3, p. 92.

⁹⁴ SCHOEDEL, *Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 280.

⁹⁵ Here the terminology “earliest recoverable form” draws upon recent advances in New Testament textual criticism, which describe the *Ausgangstext* or the “initial text” as being the text form that text critics seek to reconstruct. There is a distinction to be made between an “original text” and the “initial text”, with the latter being the form of text that can be reconstructed from the extant manuscript witnesses. Given the richness and relative primitivity of the New Testament manuscripts the gap between the “initial text” and the “original text” might be small, perhaps for instance in the case of the letter to Philemon. However, with a writing such as the Gospel of John, if scholars are correct that the text underwent various expansions or “editions” prior to the formation of the canonical form of the text (with or without the *Pericopae Adulterae*), then it might be less meaningful even to speak of an “original text” of the fourth gospel. For a balanced discussion of the issues at stake in these designations see M.W. HOLMES, *From “Original Text” to “Initial Text”: The Traditional Goal of New Testament Textual Criticism in Contemporary Discussion*, in BART D. EHRMAN AND MICHAEL W. HOLMES (eds), *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (NTTSD 42), 2nd ed., Leiden, Brill, 2013, pp. 637-688.

authentic writings of Ignatius⁹⁶. This supports the standard scholarly understanding, and is based upon a series of arguments that have been marshalled in favour of this position since the late nineteenth century onwards⁹⁷.

Three topics of theology were considered in relation to the middle recension: christology, ecclesiology and episcopacy, and eucharistic theology. In regard to each of these areas a marked level of theological development was observed in comparison to the theological ideas expressed on the same topics in various writings that later formed the New Testament. The christology of the middle recension was seen to make more explicit claims declaring the divinity of Jesus. It was noted that Ignatius repeatedly declared Jesus to be God, or our God (cf. Ign. *Eph.* 18,2). In terms of ecclesiology, Ignatius advocates a threefold pattern of leadership in the form of bishops, presbyters and deacons⁹⁸. While the three roles of “bishop/overseer”, “presbyter” and “deacon” are known in various places within the New Testament writings, the threefold pattern in the form Ignatius presents it is not known. Moreover, the figure known as the ἐπίσκοπος is known primarily in earlier writings from the Pastoral Epistles, and it is not typically characteristic of the earlier Pauline letters (although cf. Phil 1,1). However, in regard to the role of the ἐπίσκοπος ‘bishop’, it was noted that Ignatius presents a much more authoritative and elevated role for this figure, in comparison with New Testament texts such as 1 Tim 3,1-7. Third, in regard to the eucharist, Ignatius was seen to have a different and developed theological understanding. In the gospels the last supper is presented largely as a Passover meal, with Jesus identify himself in some way with the elements of bread and wine. In Paul, the eschatological perspective comes to the fore with the Lord’s supper seen as providing a connection for believers between the presence of the earthly life of Jesus with his future presence at the Parousia by making Christ ‘present’ in the interim period through participation in the eucharist. However, in Ignatius that is a more explicit identification between the elements of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ. Ignatius then “weaponizes” this theological perspective to confront and attack his opponents who hold a docetic christology⁹⁹.

It was argued that the long recension of Ignatius’ letters was a product of the second half of the fourth century, and this form of the corpus was edited from an ultra-Arian perspective. The editor systematically removes any aspect of Ignatius’ language that appears to suggest that Jesus was coeternal or consubstantial with the father. This radical rewriting did not only effect christological passages, but it impinged on Ignatius’ eucharistic statements as contained in the middle recension when the language suggested equality between the God as bread of heaven and Jesus’ physical flesh (Ign. *Rom.* 7,3), or when the father’s soteriological involvement was too closely tied to the eucharistic presence of Christ in a way that might be taken to comprise ultra-Arian christological perspectives (Ign. *Smyr.* 6,2, middle recension; Ign. *Smyr.* 7,1 long recension).

The Syriac short recension was seen to be largely motivated by literary factors, rather than being the expression of theological motivations. It was noted that this three letter

⁹⁶ No facile identification is being made that suggests the equivalence of the printed texts such as the standard edition of Ignatius’ letters in HOLMES, (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* with the words that Ignatius actually wrote. Obviously the usually text critical problems beset the reconstruction of text of the middle recension. In some ways the lateness and limited number of Greek manuscripts for the middle recension of the Ignatian letters present a different set of text critical issues than is the case with the New Testament manuscript tradition.

⁹⁷ In particular, see LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 1, pp. 328-430.

⁹⁸ SULLIVAN, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church*, pp. 103-125.

⁹⁹ LÖHR, *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*, pp. 110-111.

form of the corpus might be due to the fact that only those three letters were available to the editor of the short recension. The shorter forms of those three letters was often the result of removing personal details or greetings at the end of the letters. It was suggested that this was the result of a desire to make the letters more universal and enduring in scope. Alongside these more obvious motivations, it was suggested that there was a possible concern with the correct attitude to martyrdom and that the long addition at the end of the short form of the *Letter of the Romans* may reflect this concern.

The authentic writings of Ignatius are a window into several innovative and creative theological developments. These developments might reflect a line of continuous, but otherwise unevicenced developments from the theological perspectives contained in several of the writings of the New Testament, between the decades of the writing of the Pauline epistles and the gospels until the writing of the Ignatian letters. Alternatively, some of them may emerge from that creative but personally destructive crucible of impending martyrdom that refined and crystallised Ignatius' thought. Perhaps the most likely scenario is that both factors were at play. It is fascinating that the writings of Ignatius remained a site of theological controversy and development nearly three centuries later when the views of the ultra-Arians re-emerged during the second half of the fourth century¹⁰⁰. It has been suggested that Antioch was one of the theological centres for this articulation of extreme Arian christology. As such, there may have been a desire to claim Ignatius, through a re-writing of his letters, as one who guaranteed the antiquity of such perspectives. In many ways, at least in the radical rewriting of the Ignatian corpus, the ultra-Arians were successful. While their views were officially condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381, nobody in later generations seemed to notice that their christological perspectives were written large in the long recension of the letters of Ignatius. If the extant manuscript provides a good guide, then from the late antique period and throughout the medieval period, the long recension dominated, both in the Greek form of the text and in the prevalence of Latin versional manuscripts¹⁰¹. In fact, the first printed form of Ignatius letters that appeared in Latin in 1498 published twelve of the letters of the long recension, with the omission of the letter of Mary of Cassobola to Ignatius¹⁰².

In this way, the letters of Ignatius have had a formative and continuing influence on the theology of the Christian church in way that are often unrecognised. This influence is perhaps surprising given the situational nature of the initial seven letters and the fact that they were written during a time of immense psychological stress¹⁰³. The theological ideas in the authentic letters and the theological debates and ideas those writings generated in their later forms perhaps attest to the power of this often controversial figure, who, like his letters, saw that his journey to Rome was not an end in itself but instead reflected his own process of becoming and evolving as a disciple of Jesus. It is to Ignatius that the last words should be given – maybe these are words he would have been happy to address to those who read, interpreted and transmitted his writings in ways that he considered faithful to his theological ideas. However, given his fiery rhetoric and bitter polemic, one suspects he would not have issued such irenic words to those who re-wrote his letters in

¹⁰⁰ Gilliam concludes his monograph with the observation that 'Ignatius of Antioch was one battleground upon which proponents of pro-Nicene and non-Nicene Christologies faced off.' PAUL R. GILLIAM, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Arian Controversy* (VCS 140), Leiden, Brill, 2017, p. 228.

¹⁰¹ LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part 2 Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. 1, pp. 109-134.

¹⁰² J. FABER STAPULENSIS (ed.) *Ignatii Undecim Epistole*, Paris, 1498.

¹⁰³ See P. FOSTER, *Christ and the Apostles in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*, in M. GRUNDEKEN AND J. VERHEYDEN (eds), *Early Christian Communities between Ideal and Real*, (WUNT 2.342), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015, 109-126, see p. 110.

ways of which he might not have approved. However, Ignatius may have been happy to know that his theological ideas were generative and developmental and would become part of a larger body of Christian theology that was indebted to his ideas, but nonetheless was still in the process of become something greater than what was expressed in those formative ideas alone. So perhaps his theology, like his discipleship, was subject to a process of evolution or development. Therefore, perhaps Ignatius would have been willing to say of his theology what he stated in regard to his discipleship, “For now I begin to be a disciple, and I speak to you as fellow-disciples with me” (Ign. *Eph.* 3,1).

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