

Ignatius

The Syriac Version of the Ignatian Epistles

ANTE-NICENE FATHERS

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Introductory Note to the Syriac Version of the Ignatian Epistles

When the Syriac version of the Ignatian Epistles was introduced to the English world in 1845, by Mr. Cureton, the greatest satisfaction was expressed by many, who thought the inveterate controversy about to be settled. Lord Russell made the learned divine a canon of Westminster Abbey, and the critical Chevalier Bunsen¹ committed himself as its patron. To the credit of the learned, in general, the work was gratefully received, and studied with scientific conscientiousness by Lightfoot and others. The literature of this period is valuable; and the result is decisive as to the Curetonian versions at least, which are fragmentary and abridged, and yet they are a valuable contribution to the study of the whole case.

The following is the original Introductory Notice:—

Some account of the discovery of the Syriac version of the Ignatian Epistles has been already given. We have simply to add here a brief description of the mss. from which the Syriac text has been printed. That which is named α by Cureton, contains only the Epistle to Polycarp, and exhibits the text of that Epistle which, after him, we have followed. He fixes its age somewhere in the first half of the sixth century, or before the year 550. The second ms., which Cureton refers to as β , is assigned by him to the seventh or

eighth century. It contains the three Epistles of Ignatius, and furnishes the text here followed in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Romans. The third ms., which Cureton quotes as γ, has no date, but, as he tells us, "belonged to the collection acquired by Moses of Nisibis in a.d. 931, and was written apparently about three or four centuries earlier." It contains the three Epistles to Polycarp, the Ephesians, and the Romans. The text of all these mss. is in several passages manifestly corrupt, and the translators appear at times to have mistaken the meaning of the Greek original.

[N.B.—Bunsen is forced to allow the fact that the discovery of the lost work of Hippolytus "throws new light on an obscure point of the Ignatian controversy," i.e., the **Sige** in the Epistle to the Magnesians (cap. viii.); but his treatment of the matter is unworthy of a candid scholar.]

¹See the extraordinary passage and note in his *Hippolytus*, vol. i. p. 58, etc.

The Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp¹

Ignatius, who is [also called] Theophorus, to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, or rather, who has as his own bishop God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ: [wishes] abundance of happiness.

Chapter I.

Because thy mind is acceptable to me, inasmuch as it is established in God, as on a rock which is immovable, I glorify God the more exceedingly that I have been counted worthy of [seeing] thy face, which I longed after in God. Now I beseech thee, by the grace with which thou art clothed, to add [speed] to thy course, and that thou ever pray for all men that they may be saved, and that thou demand² things which are befitting, with all assiduity both of the flesh and spirit. Be studious of unity, than which nothing is more precious. Bear with all men, even as our Lord beareth with thee. Show patience³ with all men in love, as [indeed] thou doest. Be steadfast in prayer. Ask for more understanding than that which thou [already] hast. Be watchful, as possessing a spirit which sleepeth not. Speak with every man according to the will of God. Bear the infirmities of all men as a perfect athlete; for where the labour is great, the gain is also great.

Chapter II.

If thou lovest the good disciples only, thou hast no grace; [but] rather subdue those that are evil by gentleness. All [sorts of] wounds are not healed by the same medicine. Mitigate [the pain of] cutting⁴ by tenderness. Be wise as the serpent in everything, and innocent, with respect to those things which are requisite, even as the dove. For this reason thou art [composed] of both flesh and spirit, that thou mayest entice⁵ those things which are visible before thy face, and mayest ask, as to those which are concealed from thee, that they [too] may be revealed to thee, in order that thou be deficient in nothing, and mayest abound in all gifts. The time demands, even as a pilot does a ship, and as one who stands exposed to the tempest does a haven, that thou shouldst be worthy of God. Be thou watchful as an athlete of God. That which is promised to us is life eternal, which cannot be corrupted, of which things thou art also persuaded. In everything I will be instead⁶ of thy soul, and my bonds which thou hast loved.

Chapter III.

Let not those who seem to be somewhat, and teach strange doctrines, strike thee with apprehension; but

stand thou in the truth, as an athlete⁷ who is smitten, for it is [the part] of a great athlete to be smitten, and [yet] conquer. More especially is it fitting that we should bear everything for the sake of God, that He also may bear us. Be [still] more diligent than thou yet art. Be discerning of the times. Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times, Him who is invisible, Him who for our sakes became visible, Him who is impalpable, Him who is impassible, Him who for our sakes suffered, Him who endured everything in every form for our sakes.

Chapter IV.

Let not the widows be overlooked; on account of⁸ our Lord be thou their guardian, and let nothing be done without thy will; also do thou nothing without the will of God, as indeed thou doest not. Stand rightly. Let there be frequent⁹ assemblies: ask every man [to them] by his name. Despise not slaves, either male or female; but neither let them be contemptuous, but let them labour the more as for the glory of

¹The inscription varies in each of the three Syriac mss., being in the first, "The Epistle of my lord Ignatius, the bishop;" in the second, "The Epistle of Ignatius;" and in the third, "The Epistle of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch."

²For "vindicate thy place" in the Greek.

³Literally, "draw out thy spirit."

⁴Cureton observes, as one alternative here, that "the Syrian translator seems to have read παράξυσμα for παροξυσμούς."

⁵Or, "flatter," probably meaning to "deal gently with."

⁶Thus the Syriac renders ἀντίψυχον in the Greek.

⁷The Greek has ἄκμων, "an anvil."

⁸The Greek has μετὰ, "after."

⁹Or, "constant," "regular."

God, that they may be counted worthy of a more precious freedom, which is of God. Let them not desire to be set free out of the common [fund], lest they be found the slaves of lust.

Chapter V.

Flee wicked arts; but all the more discourse regarding them. Speak to my sisters, that they love in our Lord, and that their husbands be sufficient for them in the flesh and spirit. Then, again, charge my brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, as our Lord His Church. If any man is able in power to continue in purity,¹ to the honour of the flesh of our Lord, let him continue so without boasting; if he boasts, he is undone; if he become known apart from the bishop, he has destroyed himself.² It is becoming, therefore, to men and women who marry, that they marry with the counsel of the bishop, that the marriage may be in our Lord, and not in lust. Let everything, therefore, be [done] for the honour of God.

Chapter VI.

Look ye to the bishop, that God also may look upon you. I will be instead of the souls of those who are subject to the bishop, and the presbyters, and the deacons; with them may I have a portion in the presence of God! Labour together with one another, act as athletes³ together, run together, suffer together, sleep together, rise together. As stewards of God, and of His household,⁴ and His servants, please Him and serve Him, that ye may receive from Him the wages [promised]. Let none of you be rebellious. Let your baptism be to you as armour, and faith as a spear, and love as a helmet, and patience as a panoply. Let your treasures be your good works, that ye may receive the gift of God, as is just. Let your spirit be long-suffering towards each other with meekness, even as God [is] toward you. As for me, I rejoice in you at all times.

Chapter VII.

The Christian has not power over himself, but is [ever] ready to be subject to God.⁵

Chapter VIII.

I salute him who is reckoned worthy to go to Antioch in my stead, as I commanded thee.⁶

¹i.e., "in celibacy."

²Or, "corrupted himself."

³Literally, "make the contest."

⁴Literally, "sons of His house."

⁵These are the only parts of chaps. vii. and viii. in the Greek that are represented in the Syriac.

⁶These are the only parts of chaps. vii. and viii. in the Greek that are represented in the Syriac.

The Second Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians¹

Ignatius, who is [also called] Theophorus, to the Church which is blessed in the greatness of God the Father, and perfected; to her who was selected² from eternity, that she might be at all times for glory, which abideth, and is unchangeable, and is perfected and chosen in the purpose of truth by the will of the Father of Jesus Christ our God; to her who is worthy of happiness; to her who is at Ephesus, in Jesus Christ, in joy which is unblameable: [wishes] abundance of happiness.

Chapter I.

Inasmuch as your name, which is greatly beloved, is acceptable to me in God, [your name] which ye have acquired by nature, through a right and just will, and also by the faith and love of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and ye are imitators of God, and are fervent in the blood of God, and have speedily completed a work congenial to you; [for] when ye heard that I was bound,³ so as to be able to do nothing for the sake of the common name and hope (and I hope, through your prayers, that I may be devoured by beasts at Rome, so that by means of this of which I have been accounted worthy, I may be endowed with strength to be a disciple of God), ye were diligent to come and see me. Seeing, then, that we have become acquainted with your multitude⁴ in the name of God, by Onesimus, who is your bishop, in love which is unutterable, whom I pray that ye love in Jesus Christ our Lord, and that all of you imitate his example,⁵ for blessed is He who has given you such a bishop, even as ye deserve [to have].⁶

Chapter III.⁷

But inasmuch as love does not permit me to be silent in regard to you, on this account I have been forward to entreat of you that ye would be diligent in the will of God.

Chapter VIII.⁸

For, so long as there is not implanted in you any one lust which is able to torment you, behold, ye live in God. I rejoice in you, and offer supplication⁹ on account of you, Ephesians, a Church which is renowned in all ages. For those who are carnal are not able to do spiritual things, nor those that are spiritual carnal

things; in like manner as neither can faith [do] those things which are foreign to faith, nor want of faith [do] what belongs to faith. For those things which ye have done in the flesh, even these are spiritual, because ye have done everything in Jesus Christ.

Chapter IX.

And ye are prepared for the building of God the Father, and ye are raised up on high by the instrument of Jesus Christ, which is the cross; and ye are drawn by the rope, which is the Holy Spirit; and your pulley is your faith, and your love is the way which leadeth up on high to God.

Chapter X.

Pray for all men; for there is hope of repentance for them, that they may be counted worthy of God. By your works especially let them be instructed. Against their harsh words be ye conciliatory, by meekness of mind and gentleness. Against their blasphemies do ye give yourselves to prayer; and against their error be ye armed with faith. Against their fierceness be ye peaceful and quiet, and be ye not astounded by them. Let us, then, be imitators of our Lord in meekness, and strive who shall more especially be injured, and oppressed, and defrauded.

¹Another inscription is, "Epistle the Second, which is to the Ephesians."

²Literally, "separated."

³Literally, "bound for actions."

⁴Cureton renders, "have received your abundance," probably referring the words to gifts sent by the Ephesians to Ignatius.

⁵Literally, "be in his image."

⁶There is no Apodosis, unless it be found in what follows.

⁷The following clause is the whole of chap. iii. in the Greek, which is represented in the Syriac.

⁸Chaps. iv. v. vi. vii. of the Greek are totally omitted in the Syriac.

⁹Thus Cureton renders the words, referring in confirmation to the Peshito version of [Phil. i. 4](#), but the meaning is doubtful.

Chapter XIV.1

The work is not of promise,² unless a man be found in the power of faith, even to the end.

Chapter XV.

It is better that a man should be silent while he is something, than that he should be talking when he is not; that by those things which he speaks he should act, and by those things of which he is silent he should be known.

Chapter XVIII.3

My spirit bows in adoration to the cross, which is a stumbling-block to those who do not believe, but is to you for salvation and eternal life.

Chapter XIX.

There was concealed from the ruler of this world the virginity of Mary and the birth of our Lord, and the three renowned mysteries⁴ which were done in the tranquillity of God from the star. And here, at the manifestation of the Son, magic began to be destroyed, and all bonds were loosed; and the ancient kingdom and the error of evil was destroyed. Henceforward all things were moved together, and the destruction of death was devised, and there was the commencement of that which was perfected in God.⁵

¹Chaps. xi. xii. xiii. of the Greek are totally wanting in the Syriac, and only these few words of chaps. xiv. and xv. are represented.

²The meaning seems to be that mere profession, without continuous practice, is nothing.

³Chaps. xvi. and xvii. of the Greek are totally wanting in the Syriac.

⁴Literally, "the mysteries of the shout." The meaning is here confused and obscure. See the Greek.

⁵Chaps. xx. and xxi. of the Greek are altogether wanting in the Syriac. [N.B.—See spurious Epistle to Philippians, cap. 4, *infra*. This concealment from Satan of the mystery of the incarnation is the explanation, according to the Fathers, of his tempting the Messiah, and prompting His crucifixion. Also, Christ the more profoundly humbled himself, "*ne subtilis ille diaboli oculus magnum hoc pietatis deprehenderet sacramentum*" (St. Bernard, opp. ii. 1944). Bernard also uses this opinion very strikingly (opp. ii. 1953) in one of his sermons, supposing that Satan discovered the secret too late for his own purpose, and then prompted the outcry, *Come down from the cross*, to defeat the triumph of the second Adam. (Comp. St. [Mark i. 24](#) and St. [Luke iv. 34](#), where, after the first defeat of the tempter, this demon suspects the second Adam, and tries to extort the secret).]

The Third Epistle of the Same St. Ignatius¹

Ignatius, who is [also called] Theophorus, to the Church which has received grace through the greatness of the Father Most High; to her who presideth in the place of the region of the Romans, who is worthy of God, and worthy of life, and happiness, and praise, and remembrance, and is worthy of prosperity, and presideth in love, and is perfected in the law of Christ unblameable: [wishes] abundance of peace.

Chapter I.

From of old have I prayed to God, that I might be counted worthy to behold your faces which are worthy of God: now, therefore, being bound in Jesus Christ, I hope to meet you and salute you, if it be the will [of God] that I should be accounted worthy to the end. For the beginning is well arranged, if I be counted worthy to attain to the end, that I may receive my portion, without hindrance, through suffering. For I am in fear of your love, lest it should injure me. As to you, indeed, it is easy for you to do whatsoever ye wish; but as to me, it is difficult for me to be accounted worthy of God, if indeed ye spare me not.

Chapter II.

For there is no other time such as this, that I should be accounted worthy of God; neither will ye, if ye be silent, [ever] be found in a better work than this. If ye let me alone, I shall be the word of God; but if ye love my flesh, again am I [only] to myself a voice. Ye cannot give me anything more precious than this, that I should be sacrificed to God, while the altar is ready; that ye may be in one concord in love, and may praise God the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord, because He has deemed a bishop worthy to be God's, having called him from the east to the west. It is good that I should set from the world in God, that I may rise in Him to life.²

Chapter III.

Ye have never envied any man. Ye have taught others. Only pray ye for strength to be given to me from within and from without, that I may not only speak, but also may be willing, and that I may not merely be called a Christian, but also may be found to be [one]; for if I am found to be [so], I may then also be called [so]. Then [indeed] shall I be faithful, when I am no longer seen in the world. For there is nothing visible that is good. The work is not [a matter³] of persuasion; but Christianity is great when the world hateth it.

Chapter IV.

I write to all the Churches, and declare to all men, that I willingly die for the sake of God, if so be that ye hinder me not. I entreat of you not to be [affected] towards me with a love which is unseasonable. Leave me to become [the prey of] the beasts, that by their means I may be accounted worthy of God. I am the wheat of God, and by the teeth of the beasts I shall be ground,⁴ that I may be found the pure bread of God. Provoke ye greatly⁵ the wild beasts, that they may be for me a grave, and may leave nothing of my body, in order that, when I have fallen asleep, I may not be a burden upon any one. Then shall I be in truth a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world seeth not even my body. Entreat of our Lord in my behalf, that through these instruments I may be found a sacrifice to God. I do not, like Peter and Paul, issue orders unto you. They are⁶ apostles, but I am one condemned; they indeed are free, but I am a slave, even until now. But if I suffer, I shall be the freed-man of Jesus Christ, and I shall rise in Him from the dead, free. And now being in bonds, I learn to desire nothing.

¹Another inscription is, "The Third Epistle."

²Literally, "in life."

³The meaning is probably similar to that expressed in chap. xiv. of the Epistle in Ephesians.

⁴Literally, "I am ground."

⁵Literally, "with provoking, provoke."

⁶Literally, "they are who are."

Chapter V.

From Syria, and even unto Rome, I am cast among wild beasts, by sea and by land, by night and by day, being bound between ten leopards, which are the band of soldiers, who, even when I do good to them, all the more do evil unto me. I, however, am the rather instructed by their injurious treatment;¹ but not on this account am I justified to myself. I rejoice in the beasts which are prepared for me, and I pray that they may in haste be found for me; and I will provoke them speedily to devour me, and not be as those which are afraid of some other men,² and will not approach them: even should they not be willing to approach me, I will go with violence against them. Know me from myself what is expedient for me.³ Let no one⁴ envy me of those things which are seen and which are not seen, that I should be accounted worthy of Jesus Christ. Fire, and the cross, and the beasts that are prepared, cutting off of the limbs, and scattering of the hones, and crushing of the whole body, harsh torments of the devil—let these come upon me, but⁵ only let me be accounted worthy of Jesus Christ.

Chapter VI.

The pains of the birth stand over against me.⁶

Chapter VII.

And my love is crucified, and there is no fire in me for another love. I do not desire the food of corruption, neither the lusts of this world. I seek the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ; and I seek His blood, a drink which is love incorruptible.

Chapter IX. [7](#)

My spirit saluteth you, and the love of the Churches which received me as the name of Jesus Christ; for those also who were near to [my] way in the flesh, preceded me in every city.

[8](#) [Now therefore, being about to arrive shortly in Rome, I know many things in God; but I keep myself within measure, that I may not perish through boasting: for now it is needful for me to fear the more, and not pay regard to those who puff me up. For they who say such things to me scourge me; for I desire to suffer, but I do not know if I am worthy. For zeal is not visible to many, but with me it has war. I have need, therefore, of meekness, by which the prince of this world is destroyed. I am able to write to you of heavenly things, but I fear lest I should do you an injury. Know me from myself. For I am cautious lest ye should not be able to receive [such knowledge], and should be perplexed. For even I, not because I am in bonds, and am able to know heavenly things, and the places of angels, and the stations of the powers that are seen and that are not seen, am on this account a disciple; for I am far short of the perfection which is worthy of God.] Be ye perfectly strong [9](#) in the patience of Jesus Christ our God.

Here end the three Epistles of Ignatius, bishop and martyr. [10](#)

[1](#)Literally, "by their injury."

[2](#)Literally, "and not as that which is afraid of some other men." So Cureton translates, but remarks that the passage is evidently corrupt. The reference plainly is to the fact that the beasts sometimes refused to attack their intended victims. See the case of Blandina, as reported by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, v. 1.).

[3](#)Cureton renders interrogatively, "What is expedient for me?" and remarks that "the meaning of the Syriac appears to be, 'I crave your indulgence to leave the knowledge of what is expedient for me to my own conscience.' "

[4](#)Literally, "nothing."

[5](#)Literally, "and."

[6](#)The Latin version translates the Greek here, "He adds gain to me."

[7](#)Chap. viii. of the Greek is entirely omitted in the Syriac.

[8](#)The following passage is not found in this Epistle in the Greek recensions, but forms, in substance, chaps. iv. and v. of the Epistle to the Trallians. Diverse views are held by critics as to its proper place, according to the degree of authority they ascribe to the Syriac version. Cureton maintains that this passage has been transferred by fabrication by introducing a part of the genuine writing of Ignatius; while Hefele asserts that it is bound by the "closest connection" to the preceding chapter in the Epistle to the Trallians.

[9](#)Or, as in the Greek, "Fare ye well, to the end."

[10](#)[N.B.—The aphoristic genius of Ignatius seems to be felt by his Syrian abbreviator, who reduces whole chapters to mere maxims.]