

Ignatius of Antioch: Authenticity and Subapostolic Christology

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Early Christian writings have been cited for nearly two thousand years for us to make sense of what the early church believed as to help form our own conclusions on what the Bible teaches. The earlier the writing, the more likely it is to be viewed as an authoritative source. That is certainly the case for Ignatius of Antioch and the writings that are attributed to him. Ignatius of Antioch was an enigmatic church leader in the early second century firmly in the subapostolic age. Being one of the earliest post-New Testament Christian writings, what the texts have to say could unlock a great deal of understanding as to what early Christians thought and believed.

What makes Ignatius such a crux in the patristic and historiographical landscape is the content that the writings attached to his name cover. The chief doctrine that appears in the broader context of Ignatian letters is what appears to be an early attestation to the doctrine of the Trinity, or at the very least, extraordinarily high Christology. The other doctrine that is important, although will not be largely covered in this work, is the doctrine of ecclesial hierarchy in the church and the separation of the offices of deacon, elder and bishop.

The purpose of this essay therefore, is to establish which of Ignatius's letters are most authentic and to examine and compare the christology of the authentic and spurious letters. To make sense of Ignatius, it is vital to understand the history, circulation and discovery of the letters.

There are fifteen letters that bear the name Ignatius but not all of the letters were written by Ignatius. It's important to separate these letters into different categories that have historically been based on the language, length, manuscript and transmission history of each of the letters. There are three different recensions for the epistles: the short, middle and long versions. Each of the recensions were developed in different periods of time, there is no question about this. But it does beg the question, which letter collection is the authentic one, if any?

The short recension, also known as the Curetonian letters, or the three letter collection, exists only in Syriac and consists of the shortest versions of the epistle to Polycarp, the epistle to the Ephesians and the epistle to the Romans. The middle recension, also known as the Vossian collection, or the seven letter collection, includes the a longer version of the epistle to Polycarp, the epistle to the Ephesians and the epistle to the Romans, but also four additional letters: an epistle to the Magnesians, the epistle to the Trallians, the epistle to the Philadelphians, and the epistle to the Smyneans. The seven letter collection in the middle recension is also only found in Greek.

The long recension is a longer version of all the aforementioned letters in both Greek and Latin, but it also includes six additional letters: the epistle to the Tarsians, the epistle to the Antiochians, the epistle to Hero a deacon of Antioch, the epistle to the Philippians, the epistle from Mary of Cassobola, and the Epistle to Mary of Cassobola. The additional letters are all considered spurious by all scholastic sources. There is no debate of this.

There are four additional letters that can only be found in Latin and those are: the first epistle to St. John, the second epistle to St. John, an epistle to the virgin Mary and a response from the virgin Mary. These are clearly pseudepigraphical forgeries¹ and therefore I will not take the time to expound them, but it is important to note how many writings have historically been attributed to Ignatius of Antioch, and the apparent authority that his name carries.

I will start out by laying down the history of the transmission of the epistles, looking first in the early modern era and working in both directions. The first epistles that bear the name of Ignatius that were published were three of the undisputed spurious letters: the two addressed to the Apostle John and the other addressed to the mother of the Lord, Mary. Just three years later

¹ Schoedel, William R. *Ignatius of Antioch*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 4

eleven additional letters were printed.² All of the letters that were circulated in the course of those few years were done so only in Latin.

In 1557 Valentinus Paceus (Hartung Frid) published a collection of twelve Ignatian epistles that contained some spurious letters but also the long recension of the seven letter collection, however this time it was in Greek. It's important to note that up until this point these letters were just being published and there had been no thorough examination of the text nor was there any textual criticism.³

The forerunner of textual criticism regarding Ignatian epistles was Nicolaus Videlius who in 1623⁴. His goal was to make a distinction in the epistles - to separate and organize the epistles into two categories: genuine and spurious. The labor of Nicolaus Vedelius and then Bishop James Ussher would ultimately set the stage for scholars in the coming centuries for they discovered what would become known as the middle recension of the Greek text.⁵

In the mid 1800's a museum curator by the name of William Cureton (hence the Curetonian three letter collection) discovered a copy of an Ignatian letter in the Syriac language. Upon this discovery he assumed that more letters must have existed in Syriac and thus started a riveting expedition supported by the British museum in hopes of collecting documents on saints and martyrs. Along with many other documents, Cureton's quest was successful in finding two additional letters bearing the name Ignatius. The most notable feature of these letters was how short they were in nature compared to the other letters having the same recipients in the other languages. Cureton would then go on to study these texts and make them available to public to make up their own minds about Ignatius and his writings.⁶

² Cureton, William. *Corpus Ignatium*. (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1849), i-ii

³ Cureton. *Corpus Ignatium*. iii-iv

⁴ Cureton. *Corpus Ignatium*. vi-vii

⁵ Brent, Allen. "The Enigma of Ignatius of Antioch", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 57, No. 3, (July 2006), 429-430. DOI:10.1017/S0022046906007354

⁶ Cureton. *Corpus Ignatium*. i

Cureton's hypothesis, which stood until after his death, was this: that the three letter collection in the Syriac short recension were the authentic letters of Ignatius and the other letters with the same recipients in the longer recension as well as the rest of the collection were all interpolated to one degree or another. It is clear that "Cureton argues...that the preference for the Syriac version is not only the epistemologically the safe bet, it is the only critically responsible choice".⁷ Cureton's weary view of the longer recensions sets the tone and battlefield on which Ignatius of Antioch and his letters will be fought from that point forward.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, after the death of Cureton, the tides of consensus were beginning to shift in the work of Theodore Zahn and J. B. Lightfoot. The conclusion that they would ultimately come to is that the seven letter collection in the Greek middle recension was the authentic letters of Ignatius. This view of the seven letter collection being authentic still stands today as the scholastic majority position. What's important to note is that Lightfoot admits that he was originally a supporter and proponent of Cureton's theory but later changed his mind for his own view.⁸

There have been some attempts in the twentieth century to displace the seven letter collection as the authentic writings of Ignatius, however none have bore much fruit. The colossal status of J.B. Lightfoot and his historiographical views and findings have dominated the field for the last two centuries. However, in light of new scholarship, and developments in the field of historical criticism of ancient writings, the flaws in Lightfoot's theories become apparent where before they had been well concealed.

⁷ Given, James Gregory. *"Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity."* Dissertation, Harvard, 2019. 125

⁸ Given. *Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity*. 130

Lightfoot's theory asserts that the seven letter collection of the Ignatian epistles were original letters that became modified and redacted to become the three letter collection⁹ and then again expanded in later centuries to become the seven letters in the long recension as well as the totally spurious letters. This theory is problematic for several reasons.

Firstly, the manuscripts for the seven letter collection were never transmitted as a stand alone complete set.¹⁰ There were always more or less than the seven letters in the Greek middle manuscripts. Saying that the seven letter collection was definitely the original writings cannot be done based on transmission history alone, but it is an interesting fact that could play into the overall understanding and strategy that goes into selecting which are the authentic letters.

Lightfoot is partially accurate in his view of transmission history, however. He is correct when he claims that the seven letter collection expanded into the longer spurious and interpolated letters of the long recension; in fact there are not many people who would deny this fact. Lightfoot's theory of the seven letter collection being abbreviated and redacted into the three letter collection causes several questions.

If Lightfoot's theory asserts that the seven letter collection was abbreviated into the three letter collection for monastic purposes¹¹ then it begs the question: what purpose would a group of monks have with redacting a second century set of documents when the primary job of monks was to transcribe historical writings accurately? In fact, I have not been able to find a single case in historiography where longer writings were shortened and abbreviated by a group of monks. With the collection of documents procured by the British museum, it came with not only a tenth century receipt but a stern warning to anyone who would tamper with the integrity of the

⁹ Schoedel, William R., Ignatios, and Helmut Koester. *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the letters of Ignatius of Antioch*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. 3

¹⁰ Given, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity*. 30

¹¹ Schoedel. *Ignatius of Antioch*. 3-4

included documents. The front page states: “This book belongs to the monastery of Deipara, of the desert Scete of the Syrians. Whosoever taketh this book and maketh any fraudulent use of it, or taketh it out of the convent, or cutteth anything from it, or eraseth this memorial, may he be accursed and estranged from the Holy Church of God. Amen”.¹² This certainly demonstrates how seriously the monks took their job in procuring, protecting and not modifying the texts they were given.

The second issue raised with Lightfoot’s claims is that he bases the seven letter collection being the authentic writings due to Eusebius quoting them in the fourth century as Ignatian epistles. The major issue with this theory is the sheer time that exists between Eusebius and Ignatius - roughly two hundred years separates them. The evidence would have been much stronger had the timeline been smaller, but using a fourth century authority to answer a second century question seems a bit awkward at best. In the course of two hundred years, there’s plenty of chances for changes and interpolations to enter the text.

Lightfoot also cites other external witnesses that exist earlier than Eusebius to verify an early transmission of Ignatius. Those quotations and attestations of Ignatius do not provide strong evidence for the seven letter collection being the original, however. All of the quotes that can be found from Origen, Irenaeus and others can be found in the seven letter collection as well as the three letter collection. This means that the earliest transmissions of Ignatius are grounded firmly in the letters found in the three letter collection and gives no primacy to the longer seven letter collection.¹³

The age of the manuscripts for the different letters and the differing lengths and languages play a part in this as well. Lightfoot gives notice to how early the Syriac text by

¹² Cureton. *Corpus Ignatium*. xxix

¹³ Given. *Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity*. 22-27

saying: “the Syriac version would therefore have been invaluable as an independent check, if we had possessed it entirely, since it cannot have been made later than the fourth or fifth century, and would have exhibited the text much nearer to fountain-head than either the Greek or Latin”.¹⁴ He does go on to say: “[u]nfortunately...only a few fragments belonging to this version are preserved...but this defect is made up to a considerable extent...we have a rough abridgement or collection of letters from this Syriac version”.¹⁵

Lightfoot implements circular reasoning concerning the three letter collection - he asserts that since it is only fragmentary and does not contain the rest of the seven letters that he knows to be authentic they must therefore be an incomplete production of the true Ignatian texts. Or more to his fashion, they are copies of a “rough abridgment”. This is hardly a convincing argument, but rather, putting the cart before the horse. He draws conclusions without offering much explanation other than stating the facts in a way that suits his theory.

Finally, the fatal blow to the seven letter collection being the authentic and original Ignatian epistles is the fact that Lightfoot in his translation of the text is actually pulled from all sources available to the seven letter collection - the long and short recensions in both Greek and Latin. He states that occasionally the longest recension of the text is more faithful than the middle recension.¹⁶ He pulls directly from a text that has known spurious points and strong interpolations to provide the foundation and structure of his translation of the “authentic texts of Ignatius”. As the scholar Dr. Gregory Given states in his dissertation, “the chimerical ‘genuine’ text of Ignatius’s letters [were] synthesized out of a vast and heterogeneous set of data”.¹⁷

¹⁴ Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and J. B. Lightfoot. *The Apostolic Fathers ... by the late J.B. Lightfoot*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1889. 3

¹⁵ Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Lightfoot. *Apostolic Fathers*. 3

¹⁶ Given. *Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity*. 164

¹⁷ Given. *Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity*. 174

Lightfoot presents a hand constructed multi-faceted work and calls it an original second century document.

Lightfoot demonstrates a great hesitancy to the historical critical method as a whole when it comes to the Ignatian texts. Although the historical critical method of exegeting ancient texts is often the most scrupulous system, this was especially true in the late nineteenth century. One of Lightfoot's biggest challengers to his conclusions on the Ignatian texts was Ferdinand Christian Baur. Baur sets the stage for Lightfoot to grow more defensive and protective of his understanding of Christianity and the historiography of Ignatius.

When Ignatius enters the mainstream conversation, Baur comes to the conclusion that nothing attributed to Ignatius could be considered an early second century text, but something of a later production. Baur was not unique in believing that all of Ignatius was a late second century forgery. Baur, with the conclusion that all of Ignatius is a forgery, submits the notion that the New Testament canon can no longer firmly be placed in the first century, but rather at least a second century set of documents.¹⁸

Many scholars were under the impression that Ignatius was a key part of keeping the canon texts firmly in the first century - using what appears to be Ignatius clearly quoting the New Testament in his letters to the various churches. With a much later dating of Ignatius being presented it created an inherent threat to not only Lightfoot's conclusion of the seven letter collection being authentic, but rather an all out assault on the reliability and dating of the New Testament.

For Lightfoot, Baur's later dating of Ignatius would only create more issues, not least of which would be bishopric priority in the church. While Lightfoot was conducting his research, working on his translation of Ignatius, he also occupied one of the highest ranking positions in

¹⁸ Given. *Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity*. 113-114

the church of England - the bishop of Durham. Having a later dating of the texts would provide significant issues, if the threefold offices of the church were not clearly taught in the early second century and in the subapostolic era, but rather a late second century invention. The strongest extra biblical evidence for the bishopric priority now hung in the balance.

With Baur's criticisms reaching Lightfoot loudly and clearly, Lightfoot had more reason than ever before to defend the earliest possible dating for the Ignatian epistles. Not just for his view to become the dominant view of Ignatian historiography but to defend the integrity of the New Testament as well as defend the existence of the office that he occupied in the Anglican church. The stakes were now higher than ever for Lightfoot to solidify his view of Ignatius as correct.

Cureton, who was also a distinguished clergyman in the Anglican church (chaplain in ordinary to Queen Victoria) did not allow his Episcopal views to hinder his reading and understanding of Ignatius, nor to persuade him away from the manuscript evidence that demonstrates the authenticity of the three letter collection. Lightfoot was hindered by his bias in the high stakes and immense pressure of defending the dating of the New Testament canon, bishopric priority and what he probably felt to be the very seams of the Christian faith altogether. Lightfoot was completely convinced that the Ignatian writings played one of the most significant roles in defending and justifying his Christian and more specifically Anglican beliefs.

I'm not suggesting by any means that Lightfoot was attempting to be dishonest in his research, however, anyone can fall victim to bias and that's unfortunately what happened to Lightfoot. The pressures of his day were clear and many Anglicans were looking to Lightfoot for the answers. Adding all of the evidence against Lightfoot's proposition shows some obvious

weaknesses in his presuppositions and in the arguments as a whole. So why aren't scholars speaking out against the obvious flaws in this scholarly consensus?

There's certainly a trend in the scholastic community to be quicker to disregard new scholarship and new potential findings that would allow for a consensus to be overturned. We have seen this many times throughout church history, however, the "usurpers" are often disregarded in the process. The few times that Ignatian consensus has been questioned since Lightfoot's consensus, in recent memory, it is often swept under the rug as another failed coup. However there are some brave scholars who continue to challenge the Ignatian consensus, one of whom is Markus Vinzent.

In his 2019 book: *Writing the History of Early Christianity - from Reception to Retrospection* he covers different historiographies and how they originated, were transmitted and possibly developed over time. In this book he includes a lengthy section on the development of the Ignatian writings and the differences between the three letter collection and the seven letter collection. As you'll be able to clearly see, his approach can only be described as forensic.

He begins this process by selecting a letter in the Greek alphabet and then comparing all of the uses of that word and marking its usage in the three letter collection and the seven letter collection. Since the three letter collection is only found in Syriac, Vinzent uses the well known Greek counterpart translation of what it would say while being compared to the Greek seven letter collection. The results are very telling about the probability of the three letter collection expanding into the seven letter collection and not the other way around.

He begins by only looking at the letter alpha in the three letter collection and the seven letter collection, compiling the number of uses and comparing the findings between the two recensions. Alpha is an excellent letter to start with, because one of the most important words in

the Greek language is found here and that's the word anastasis which is most often translated to mean resurrection; one of, if not the most, central doctrines to the Christian faith.

What is clearly seen from the differences between the three letter collection and the seven letter collection is not only frequency of different words but also stylistic choices as well. Content is fairly standard to mimic, however it is much more difficult to cover your own personal preferences towards which conjunctions and personal pronouns you use compared to the source material. When we begin to peel back the multiple layers that comprise the letters, especially the longer recensions, we see someone carefully attempting to imitate the original Ignatius source material while having the inability to cover up their own personal writing preferences.

A great example of this would be the Greek word *alla*, which is a conjunction and is most often translated as the conjunction *but*. There's another conjunction that often is translated the same way and that is the conjunction *de*. More or less it is a stylistic choice for you to choose one conjunction over the other. It's not as clear in the English since there is only one word that can mean *but*, however when we look at the frequency used in the Greek, it begins to paint an obvious picture.

The conjunction *alla* is used two times in the short recension and fifty-eight times in the middle recension.¹⁹ We cannot leave it solely up to the fact the middle recension is longer and contains four more letters, the choice of *alla* as the preferred conjunction demonstrates someone trying to imitate and expand the original three letters of Ignatius, and redact every usage of the word *alla*. Let's imagine for a moment that a monastic redactor was reducing the letters of Ignatius to the three shortest variations of the letters, why would they take out fifty-six

¹⁹ Vinzent, Markus. *Writing the History of Early Christianity: from Reception to Retrospection*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). 294

occurrences of the conjunction alla and leave the other two? Something to ponder and you weigh the evidence.

This is not only for conjunctions that start with alpha but also personal pronouns. All of the commonly used personal pronouns show up in the letters of Ignatius but the frequency of the uses is once again very telling. Autou shows up once twice in the short recension and sixty-four times in the middle recension. Auto shows up once in the short recension and thirteen times in the middle recension. Auton is written once in the short recension and is written twenty-two times in the middle recension. Autwn is exists once in the short recension and eighteen times in the middle recension. Finally autois is in the short recension one time where it shows up in the middle recension fourteen times.²⁰

The exceeding amount of times these similar words show up in the middle recension versus the short recension demonstrates clear stylistic choices being made in the middle recension versus the short recension. This evidence swings strongly in the favor of the middle recension being an expanded version of the three letter collection and not the three letter collection being an abridged version of the seven letter collection.

Lastly we will examine the aforementioned anastasis, which as previously mentioned, relates to the most important doctrine in the Christian faith. In the middle recension of the seven letter collection the word anastasis appears thirteen times.²¹ The word for resurrection does not appear at all in the three letter collection. So I ask the question, which is more likely? Is it more likely that a Christian monk in the first few centuries went through and removed every occurrence of the word resurrection for “monastic purposes” or is it more likely that Ignatius was

²⁰ Vincent. *Writing the History of Early Christianity*, 294

²¹ Vincent. *Writing the History of Early Christianity*, 297

writing using language that was not yet popularized through the widespread availability of the New Testament?

Having gone through the numerous issues that surround giving the seven letter collection priority over the three letter collection, we will now do a detailed analysis comparing the Christology of the two letter collections. This comparison will be telling as to what Ignatius of Antioch believed concerning the Lord Jesus and his relationship with God the Father. More so, it will give us a clearer picture of what an early second century Christian leader believed concerning Christ. We will follow the claims made in the seven letter collection (Lightfoot's translation) to the three letter collection (Cureton's translation from the Syriac).

The first letter that appears in Lightfoot's translation is Ignatius's letter to the Ephesians. The salutation offered in the letter, a common preface before chapter one, includes a Christological framework. It states "Ignatius the Image-bearer to the church at Ephesus in Asia, blessed with greatness through the fullness of God the Father, predestined before the ages for lasting and unchangeable glory forever, united and elect through genuine suffering by the will of the Father and of Jesus Christ our God".²² This text clearly attributes the title of deity to Jesus very straightforwardly. Its counterpart is a little less clear, however.

Cureton's translation is largely the same, with one key change. The translation from Syriac states: "Ignatius, who is Theophorus, to the church which is blessed in the greatness of God the Father, and perfected...by the will of the Father of Jesus Christ our God".²³ This seems to be a slight difference, however you'll notice that where it is not ambiguous in the middle recension it is grammatically ambiguous in the short recension. The Greek clearly denotes that "of Jesus Christ our God" whereas the short version "the Father of Jesus Christ our God". The

²² Holmes, Michael W., J.B Lightfoot, and J.R Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek texts and English translations*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. 183

²³ Cureton, *Corpus Ignatium*, 228

reading of the shorter recension that is totally viable could be - “the Father of Jesus Christ, our God” - still attributing the title of deity to the Father and not to Jesus.

The second occasion is not nearly as ambiguous. In chapter seven of the seven letter collection to the Ephesians says: “there is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord”.²⁴ This is an elaborate, well thought out and illustrative depiction of the incarnation, however, is it authentic to Ignatius? The answer has to be no. In fact, there is no way for us to even compare it to the three letter collection, because the three letter collection lacks the entirety of Ephesians chapter seven. This point might be surprising, however, it must be stated that there are over one thousand more words in the middle recension of Ignatius to the Ephesians than are in the short recension. This is a massive incongruence, so we must ask ourselves the question again: did a monk take out an explicit reference to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, or is it more likely that it was an interpolation that was added at a time later than the original writing?

The second to last explicit example in the middle recension of Ignatius to the Ephesians appears in chapter eighteen verse two and it states: “[f]or 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”.²⁵ Another example of the deification of Christ that is completely absent from the short recension.

The final example from Ignatius to the Ephesians is found in the third verse of chapter nineteen. Chapter nineteen has many names, including the star hymn, and contains apocalyptic, mystical and astrological language.²⁶ As in the other examples of the middle recension of

²⁴ Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 189

²⁵ Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 197

²⁶ Schoedel. *Ignatius of Antioch*. 93

Ignatius to the Ephesians the middle recension is much longer and more elaborated. The Christological passage in question is the second half of verse three. It states: "...when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life".²⁷ This verse does not appear in the short recension of the text.

The first two Christological examples that show up in the middle recension of Ignatius's letter to the Romans are both found in the salutation. Both occurrences show up as the phrase "Jesus Christ our God".²⁸ What is particularly strange about this phrase is that in the short recension the name Jesus does not appear, the title Christ does, but the name does not. The salutation for the middle recension letter to the Romans is over two times longer than the salutation in the short recension. There is no deification found for Jesus, or even deification for the title Christ, that exists in the short recension.

The only other time that Jesus is referred to as God in middle recension of Ignatius's letter to the Romans is in chapter three and verse three where it states: "[f]or our God Jesus Christ, is more visible now that he is in the Father".²⁹ This phrase is missing altogether in the short recension with no clear parallel referring to either the Father or the son at all.

The final letter that we come to comparing the middle recension of Ignatius to the shorter recension is Ignatius's letter to Polycarp. The first example is a little less obvious than the other examples that we've contended with, however, this passage has Christological implications. The middle recension of Ignatius's letter to Polycarp says this in chapter three: "[w]ait expectantly for the one who is above time: the Eternal, the Invisible, who for our sake became visible; the Intangible, the Unsuffering, who for our sake suffered, who for our sake endured in every

²⁷ Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 199

²⁸ Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 225

²⁹ Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 229

way”.³⁰ The wording of this passage strongly implies incarnation theology, but what does the shorter recension say?

The short recension of the same passage states: “[e]xpect Him who is above the times, Him to whom are no times, Him who is unseen, Him for our sakes was seen, Him who is impalpable, Him who is impassible, Him who for our sakes suffered, Him who endured every thing in every form for our sakes”.³¹ The difference between the two passages is slightly different wording that changes the way the passage can be understood. In the middle recension we see the language of the eternal and the invisible becoming visible in history. In the short recension, we do not see the eternal and invisible incarnating in time, we see him who is above the times and him who is unseen to become seen.

Polycarp three in the short recension does not demonstrate incarnation theology whatsoever. It certainly talks about the passion events with the suffering of Jesus, but not the eternal God coming in the form of a man. Those points could be argued from the middle recension, but it would be a stretch to say that the short recension reading teaches clear incarnation theology.

The final Christological passage that we will examine is Polycarp chapter eight in the middle recension. In the final farewells is a list of personal names that are mentioned to be greeted as such as the widow of Epitropus and Attalus. Verse three begins with the phrase: “I bid you farewell always in our God Jesus Christ”.³² This is another explicit passage deifying Christ, but the short recension is missing this phrase completely. In fact, the short recension ends two chapters before the middle recension and also misses all of the personal greetings of Ignatius.

³⁰ Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 265

³¹ Cureton. *Corpus Ignatium*. 227

³² Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 271

What is more likely: that a scribe removed these names and the deification of Christ, or that these were simply added at a later time?

We have explored the history surrounding Ignatius of Antioch, the shifting of consensus as well as compared finer points of Christology as laid out in the texts but what can we conclude? The first conclusion is that the middle recension cannot be trusted as the primary source of Ignatian texts and that the shorter recension in the Syriac is in all likelihood much closer to the original material. Lightfoot's theory of monastic redaction work of the seven letter collection rather than the expansion of the three letter collection loses its foothold under the immense weight of evidence for the latter.

The Christology that exists in the seven letter collection middle recension is not indicative of what an early second century subapostolic Christian believed about Christ. The differences in the approach and language used of Jesus between the recensions are eons apart, or more likely, centuries apart. As Christology developed over the first few hundred years of the church, the Christological language that is found in the middle and longer recensions of the texts are much longer, more convoluted and strikingly unlike that of the shorter recension. It is much more likely for these documents to have evolved into a higher Christology with the evolving theological landscape than for them to have become abridgements of their authentic form.

Lightfoot and his conclusions were made during a difficult time with considerable pressure. He took upon himself to defend the whole faith, New Testament canon and his office as bishop. The demands for his answers were clear, he gave them. His findings have been blindly received and accepted for nearly one hundred and fifty years.

For the many issues that surrounded the troubling landscape of Ignatius in the mid to late nineteenth century, we should be able to revisit, reexamine and take on the new evidence to make

certain that what we believe about this ancient writing is correct. Questioning the scholarly consensus on any topic requires a bit of nerve as well as the ability to look past our own bias and come to appropriate conclusions based on the data. It is paramount that we take the task of historiography seriously and pursue the truth no matter what the popular opinion may be.

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