

0030-0100 – Ignatius Antiochensis - Martyrium

The Martyrdom of Ignatius

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The lowly handmaid of Christ Jesus to Ignatius, her beloved fellow-disciple.

The things which thou hast heard and learned from John concerning Jesus are true. Believe them, cling to them, and hold fast the profession of that Christianity which thou hast embraced, and conform thy habits and life to thy profession. Now I will come in company with John to visit thee, and those that are with thee. Stand fast in the faith,¹³⁹³ and show thyself a man; nor let the fierceness of persecution move thee, but let thy spirit be strong and rejoice in God thy Saviour.¹³⁹⁴ Amen.



Introductory Note to the Martyrdom of Ignatius

The learned dissertation of Pearson, on the difficulties of reconciling the supposed year of the martyrdom with the history of Trajan, etc., is given entire in Jacobson (vol. ii. p. 524), against the decision of Usher for a.d. 107. Pearson accepts a.d. 116. Consult also the preface of Dr. Thomas Smith,¹³⁹⁵ in the same work (p. 518), on the text of the original and of the Latin versions, and on the credibility of the narrative. Our learned translators seem to think the text they have used, to be without interpolation. If the simple-minded faithful of those days, so near the age of miracles, appear to us, in some degree, enthusiasts, let us remember the vision of Col. Gardiner, accredited by Doddridge, Lord Lyttleton's vision (see Boswell, *anno* 1784, chap. xi.), accepted by Johnson and his contemporaries, and the interesting narrative of the pious Mr. Tennent of New Jersey, attested by so many excellent and intelligent persons, almost of our own times.

The following is the Introductory Notice of the translators:—

The following account of the martyrdom of Ignatius professes, in several passages, to have been written by those who accompanied him on his voyage to Rome, and were present on the occasion of his death (chaps. v. vi. vii.). And if the genuineness of this narrative, as well as of the Ignatian Epistles, be admitted, there can be little doubt that the persons in question were Philo and Agathopus, with Crocus perhaps, all of whom are mentioned by Ignatius (*Epist. to Smyr.*, chap. x.; *to Philad.*, chap. xi.; *to Rom.*, chap. x.) as having attended him on that journey to Rome which resulted in his martyrdom. But doubts have been started, by Daillé and others, as to the date and authorship of this account. Some of these rest upon internal considerations, but the weightiest objection is found in the fact that no reference to this narrative is to be traced during the first six

¹³⁹³ 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

¹³⁹⁴ Luke i. 47.

¹³⁹⁵ He published an edition of Ignatius, Oxford, 1709.

centuries of our era.¹³⁹⁶ This is certainly a very suspicious circumstance, and may well give rise to some hesitation in ascribing the authorship to the immediate companions and friends of Ignatius. On the other hand, however, this account of the death of Ignatius is in perfect harmony with the particulars recounted by Eusebius and Chrysostom regarding him. Its comparative simplicity, too, is greatly in its favour. It makes no reference to the legends which by and by connected themselves with the name of Ignatius. As is well known, he came in course of time to be identified with the child whom Christ (Matt. xviii. 2) set before His disciples as a pattern of humility. It was said that the Saviour took him up in His arms, and that hence Ignatius derived his name of *Theophorus*;¹³⁹⁷ that is, according to the explanation which this legend gives of the word, *one carried by God*. But in chap. ii. of the following narrative we find the term explained to mean, “one who has Christ in his breast;” and this simple explanation, with the entire silence preserved as to the marvels afterwards connected with the name of Ignatius, is certainly a strong argument in favour of the early date and probable genuineness of the account. Some critics, such as Usher and Grabe, have reckoned the latter part of the narrative spurious, while accepting the former; but there appears to be a unity about it which requires us either to accept it *in toto*, or to reject it altogether.¹³⁹⁸



The Martyrdom of Ignatius

Chapter I.—Desire of Ignatius for martyrdom.

When Trajan, not long since,¹³⁹⁹ succeeded to the empire of the Romans, Ignatius, the disciple of John the apostle, a man in all respects of an apostolic character, governed the Church of the Antiochians with great care, having with difficulty escaped the former storms of the many persecutions under Domitian, inasmuch as, like a good pilot, by the helm of prayer and fasting, by the earnestness of his teaching, and by his [constant¹⁴⁰⁰] spiritual labour, he resisted the flood that rolled against him, fearing [only] lest he should lose any of those who were deficient in courage,

¹³⁹⁶ [A most remarkable statement. “References” may surely be traced, at least in Eusebius (iii. 36) and Irenæus (*Adv. Hæres.* v. 28), if not in Jerome, etc. But the sermon of St. Chrysostom (Opp. ii. 593) seems almost, in parts, a paraphrase.]

¹³⁹⁷ [See on this matter Jacobson’s note (vol ii. p. 262), and reference to Pearson (*Vind. Ignat.*, part ii. cap. 12). The false accentuation (Θεόφορος) occurs in some copies to support the myth of the child Ignatius as the *God-borne* instead of the *God-bearing*; i.e., carried by Christ, instead of carrying the Spirit of Christ within.]

¹³⁹⁸ [But see the note in Jacobson, vol. ii. p.557.]

¹³⁹⁹ The data of Trajan’s accession was a.d. 98.

¹⁴⁰⁰ The text here is somewhat doubtful.

or apt to suffer from their simplicity.¹⁴⁰¹ Wherefore he rejoiced over the tranquil state of the Church, when the persecution ceased for a little time, but was grieved as to himself, that he had not yet attained to a true love to Christ, nor reached the perfect rank of a disciple. For he inwardly reflected, that the confession which is made by martyrdom, would bring him into a yet more intimate relation to the Lord. Wherefore, continuing a few years longer with the Church, and, like a divine lamp, enlightening every one's understanding by his expositions of the [Holy¹⁴⁰²] Scriptures, he [at length] attained the object of his desire.

Chapter II.—Ignatius is condemned by Trajan.

For Trajan, in the ninth¹⁴⁰³ year of his reign, being lifted up [with pride], after the victory he had gained over the Scythians and Dacians, and many other nations, and thinking that the religious body of the Christians were yet wanting to complete the subjugation of all things to himself, and [thereupon] threatening them with persecution unless they should agree to¹⁴⁰⁴ worship dæmons, as did all other nations, thus compelled¹⁴⁰⁵ all who were living godly lives either to sacrifice [to idols] or die. Wherefore the noble soldier of Christ [Ignatius], being in fear for the Church of the Antiochians, was, in accordance with his own desire, brought before Trajan, who was at that time staying at Antioch, but was in haste [to set forth] against Armenia and the Parthians. And when he was set before the emperor Trajan, [that prince] said unto him, “Who art thou, wicked wretch,¹⁴⁰⁶ who settest¹⁴⁰⁷ thyself to transgress our commands, and persuadest others to do the same, so that they should miserably perish?” Ignatius replied, “No one ought to call Theophorus¹⁴⁰⁸ wicked; for all evil spirits¹⁴⁰⁹ have departed from the servants of God. But if, because I am an enemy to these [spirits], you call me wicked in respect to them, I quite agree with you; for inasmuch as I have Christ the King of heaven [within me], I destroy all the devices of these [evil spirits].” Trajan answered, “And who is Theophorus?” Ignatius replied, “He who has Christ within his breast.” Trajan said, “Do *we* not then seem to you to have the gods in our mind, whose assistance we enjoy

¹⁴⁰¹ Literally, “any of the faint-hearted and more guileless.”

¹⁴⁰² This word is of doubtful authority.

¹⁴⁰³ The numeral is uncertain. In the old Latin version we find “the fourth,” which Grabe has corrected into the nineteenth. The choice lies between “ninth” and “nineteenth,” i.e., a.d. 107 or a.d. 116.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Literally, “would choose to submit to.”

¹⁴⁰⁵ Some read, “fear compelled.”

¹⁴⁰⁶ Literally, “evil-dæmon.”

¹⁴⁰⁷ Literally, “art zealous.”

¹⁴⁰⁸ Or, “one who carries God.”

¹⁴⁰⁹ Literally, “the dæmons.”

in fighting against our enemies?” Ignatius answered, “Thou art in error when thou callest the dæmons of the nations gods. For there is but one God, who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that are in them; and one Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, whose kingdom may I enjoy.” Trajan said, “Do you mean Him who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?” Ignatius replied, “I mean Him who crucified my sin, with him who was the inventor of it,¹⁴¹⁰ and who has condemned [and cast down] all the deceit and malice of the devil under the feet of those who carry Him in their heart.” Trajan said, “Dost thou then carry within thee Him that was crucified?” Ignatius replied, “Truly so; for it is written, ‘I will dwell in them, and walk in them.’”¹⁴¹¹ Then Trajan pronounced sentence as follows: “We command that Ignatius, who affirms that he carries about within him Him that was crucified, be bound by soldiers, and carried to the great [city] Rome, there to be devoured by the beasts, for the gratification of the people.” When the holy martyr heard this sentence, he cried out with joy, “I thank thee, O Lord, that Thou hast vouchsafed to honour me with a perfect love towards Thee, and hast made me to be bound with iron chains, like¹⁴¹² Thy Apostle Paul.” Having spoken thus, he then, with delight, clasped the chains about him; and when he had first prayed for the Church, and commended it with tears to the Lord, he was hurried away by the savage cruelty¹⁴¹³ of the soldiers, like a distinguished ram¹⁴¹⁴ the leader of a goodly flock, that he might be carried to Rome, there to furnish food to the bloodthirsty beasts.

130

Chapter III.—Ignatius sails to Smyrna.

Wherefore, with great alacrity and joy, through his desire to suffer, he came down from Antioch to Seleucia, from which place he set sail. And after a great deal of suffering he came to Smyrna, where he disembarked with great joy, and hastened to see the holy Polycarp, [formerly] his fellow-disciple, and [now] bishop of Smyrna. For they had both, in old times, been disciples of St. John the Apostle. Being then brought to him, and having communicated to him some spiritual gifts, and glorying in his bonds, he entreated of him to labour¹⁴¹⁵ along with him for the fulfilment of his desire; earnestly indeed asking this of the whole Church (for the cities and Churches of Asia had welcomed¹⁴¹⁶ the holy man through their bishops, and presbyters, and deacons, all hastening to meet

¹⁴¹⁰ The Latin version reads, “Him who bore my sin, with its inventor, upon the cross.”

¹⁴¹¹ 2 Cor. vi. 16.

¹⁴¹² Literally, “with.”

¹⁴¹³ Or, “beast-like.”

¹⁴¹⁴ [Better, “like the noble leader,” etc.; remitting κριὸς to the margin, as an ignoble word to English ears.]

¹⁴¹⁵ It is doubtful if this clause should be referred to Polycarp.

¹⁴¹⁶ Or, “received.”

him, if by any means they might receive from him some¹⁴¹⁷ spiritual gift), but above all, the holy Polycarp, that, by means of the wild beasts, he soon disappearing from this world, might be manifested before the face of Christ.

Chapter IV.—Ignatius writes to the churches.

And these things he thus spake, and thus testified, extending his love to Christ so far as one who was about to¹⁴¹⁸ secure heaven through his good confession, and the earnestness of those who joined their prayers to his in regard to his [approaching] conflict; and to give a recompense to the Churches, who came to meet him through their rulers, sending¹⁴¹⁹ letters of thanksgiving to them, which dropped spiritual grace, along with prayer and exhortation. Wherefore, seeing all men so kindly affected towards him, and fearing lest the love of the brotherhood should hinder his zeal towards the Lord,¹⁴²⁰ while a fair door of suffering martyrdom was opened to him, he wrote to the Church of the Romans the Epistle which is here subjoined.

(See the Epistle as formerly given.)

Chapter V.—Ignatius is brought to Rome.

Having therefore, by means of this Epistle, settled,¹⁴²¹ as he wished, those of the brethren at Rome who were unwilling [for his martyrdom]; and setting sail from Smyrna (for Christophorus was pressed by the soldiers to hasten to the public spectacles in the mighty [city] Rome, that, being given up to the wild beasts in the sight of the Roman people, he might attain to the crown for which he strove), he [next] landed at Troas. Then, going on from that place to Neapolis, he went [on foot] by Philippi through Macedonia, and on to that part of Epirus which is near Epidamnus; and finding a ship in one of the seaports, he sailed over the Adriatic Sea, and entering from it on the Tyrrhene, he passed by the various islands and cities, until, when Puteoli came in sight, he was eager there to disembark, having a desire to tread in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul.¹⁴²² But a violent wind

¹⁴¹⁷ Literally, “a portion of.”

¹⁴¹⁸ The Latin version has, “that he was to.” [But compare the martyr’s Epistle to the Romans (cap. 5); “yet am I not thereby justified,” — a double reference to St. Paul’s doctrine, 1 Cor. iv. 4 and 1 Cor. xiii. 3. See also his quotation (*Sept.*, Prov. xviii. 17). Epistle to Magnesians, cap 12.]

¹⁴¹⁹ The punctuation and construction are here doubtful.

¹⁴²⁰ Or, “should prevent him from hastening to the Lord.”

¹⁴²¹ Or, “corrected.”

¹⁴²² Comp. Acts xxviii. 13, 14.

arising did not suffer him to do so, the ship being driven rapidly forwards,¹⁴²³ and, simply expressing his delight¹⁴²⁴ over the love of the brethren in that place, he sailed by. Wherefore, continuing to enjoy fair winds, we were reluctantly hurried on in one day and a night, mourning [as we did] over the coming departure from us of this righteous man. But to him this happened just as he wished, since he was in haste as soon as possible to leave this world, that he might attain to the Lord whom he loved. Sailing then into the Roman harbour, and the unhallowed sports being just about to close, the soldiers began to be annoyed at our slowness, but the bishop rejoicingly yielded to their urgency.

Chapter VI.—Ignatius is devoured by the beasts at Rome.

They pushed forth therefore from the place which is called Portus;¹⁴²⁵ and (the¹⁴²⁶ fame of all relating to the holy martyr being already spread abroad) we met the brethren full of fear and joy; rejoicing indeed because they were thought worthy to meet with Theophorus, but struck with fear because so eminent a man was being led to death. Now he enjoined some to keep silence who, in their fervent zeal, were saying¹⁴²⁷ that they would appease the people, so that they should not demand the destruction of this just one. He being immediately aware of this through the Spirit,¹⁴²⁸ and having saluted them all, and begged of them to show a true affection towards him, and having dwelt [on this point] at greater length than in his Epistle,¹⁴²⁹ and having persuaded them not to envy him hastening to the Lord, he then, after he had, with all the brethren kneeling [beside him], entreated the Son of God in behalf of the Churches, that a stop might be put to the persecution, and that mutual love might continue among the brethren, was led with all haste into the amphitheatre. Then, being immediately thrown in, according to the command of Cæsar given some time ago, the public spectacles being just about to close (for it was then a solemn day, as they deemed it, being that which is called the thirteenth¹⁴³⁰ in the Roman tongue, on which the people were wont to assemble

131

¹⁴²³ Literally, “the ship being driven onwards from the stern.”

¹⁴²⁴ Literally, “declaring happy.”

¹⁴²⁵ [Of which we shall learn more when we come to Hippolytus. Trajan had just improved the work of Claudius at this haven, near Ostia.]

¹⁴²⁶ Literally, “for the.”

¹⁴²⁷ Literally, “boiling and saying.”

¹⁴²⁸ Or, “in spirit.”

¹⁴²⁹ i.e., in his Epistle to the Romans.

¹⁴³⁰ The Saturnalia were then celebrated.

in more than ordinary numbers¹⁴³¹), he was thus cast to the wild beasts close beside the temple,¹⁴³² that so by them the desire of the holy martyr Ignatius should be fulfilled, according to that which is written, “The desire of the righteous is acceptable¹⁴³³ [to God],” to the effect that he might not be troublesome to any of the brethren by the gathering of his remains, even as he had in his Epistle expressed a wish beforehand that so his end might be. For only the harder portions of his holy remains were left, which were conveyed to Antioch and wrapped¹⁴³⁴ in linen, as an inestimable treasure left to the holy Church by the grace which was in the martyr.

Chapter VII.—Ignatius appears in a vision after his death.

Now these things took place on the thirteenth day before the Kalends of January, that is, on the twentieth of December,¹⁴³⁵ Sura and Senecio being then the consuls of the Romans for the second time. Having ourselves been eye-witnesses of these things, and having spent the whole night in tears within the house, and having entreated the Lord, with bended knees and much prayer, that He would give us weak men full assurance respecting the things which were done,¹⁴³⁶ it came to pass, on our falling into a brief slumber, that some of us saw the blessed Ignatius suddenly standing by us and embracing us, while others beheld him again praying for us, and others still saw him dropping with sweat, as if he had just come from his great labour, and standing by the Lord. When, therefore, we had with great joy witnessed these things, and had compared our several visions¹⁴³⁷ together, we sang praise to God, the giver of all good things, and expressed our sense of the happiness of the holy [martyr]; and now we have made known to you both the day and the time [when these things happened], that, assembling ourselves together according to the time of his martyrdom, we may have fellowship with the champion and noble martyr of Christ, who trod under foot the devil, and perfected the course which, out of love to Christ, he had desired, in Christ Jesus our Lord; by whom, and with whom, be glory and power to the Father, with the Holy Spirit, for evermore! Amen.

¹⁴³¹ Literally, “they came together zealously.”

¹⁴³² The amphitheatre itself was sacred to several of the gods. [But (παρὰ τῷ ναῷ) the original indicates the *cella* or shrine, in the centre of the amphitheatre where the image of Pluto was exhibited. A plain cross, until the late excavations, marked the very spot.]

¹⁴³³ Prov. x. 24.

¹⁴³⁴ Or, “deposited.”

¹⁴³⁵ [The Greeks celebrate this martyrdom, to this day, on the twentieth of December.]

¹⁴³⁶ To the effect, viz., that the martyrdom of Ignatius had been acceptable to God.

¹⁴³⁷ Literally, “the visions of the dreams.”