

REGENT COLLEGE

**IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH AND HIS EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY:
GRAMMATICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON *EPHESIANS***

AN ESSAY SUBMITTED BY

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3.1 Introduction¹

During Ignatius of Antioch's stay at Smyrna he wrote four letters: one to the church of Magnesia, another to the church of Tralles, a third to Rome, and a fourth to the famed Ephesians – a church just a few days' journey south. It is this church which received the lengthiest of the Ignatian epistles, whose praises were matched only by his letter to the Romans, and whose ministers won such an affection from Ignatius that he made known his intention to write another letter to them (a letter that does not survive, or was never written: *Eph.* 20.1). The Ephesians' apostolic roots were familiar to this Antiochene bishop, and so he could celebrate them as “a church that is famous forever” (8.1), as a congregation that has “always been in agreement with the Apostles by the power of Jesus Christ,” (11.2) and who are remembered in “every epistle” under St. Paul's name (12.2).

Ignatius' letter to this Ephesian church is marked by the characteristic themes of the whole Ignatian collection: unity, heresy, and martyrdom. Although, while the eucharist will appear in connection to heresy in a letter like *Smyrnaeans* and to martyrdom in *Romans*, here in *Ephesians* its usage is essentially Pauline: it underlines the solidarity of the gathered Christian community (cf. 1 Cor 10:17). There are two candidates for references to the eucharist in the letter, one in chapter 5, and the other in chapter 20; we treat each passage here in turn.

¹ This essay is taken from chapter 3 of my master's thesis entitled *The Eucharistic Theology of Ignatius of Antioch: Sacramental Realism Reconsidered*, which is currently being completed under the supervision of Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh at Regent College. All translations of primary sources, except where stated otherwise, are the work of the author. This article uses the edition provisioned by Karl Bihlmeyer as its base text for the Apostolic Fathers: Karl Bihlmeyer, *Die Apostolischen Vater*, Vol. 1 (Tubigen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956).

3.2 *Ephesians 5.2*

The introductory matter to Ignatius' letter is a celebration of unity around the bishop. On his westward journey Ignatius was met by various delegates of the Ephesian church (1.1-2.2; 21.1), and most notable among these was Onesimus their bishop, in whom he had met their whole congregation by proxy (1.3). Ignatius exhorts the Ephesians to obey him (2.2) and to run together both in the mind of God and of their bishop (3.2). The presbyters are to be attuned to the bishop as strings are to a lyre (4.1), and the whole Church must be united to him as he is to Christ and as Christ is to the Father, so that everything might be harmonious in unity (5.1).

Ignatius continues:

5.1 For if in such a short time I had such fellowship with your bishop (one that was not human, but spiritual), how much more do I congratulate you who are united to him, as the church is to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is to the Father, so that everything might sound in unity. 2 Let no one be deceived: if anyone is not within the sanctuary, they lack the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two has such power, how much more that of the bishop and all the church! 3 Thus, the one who does not gather in the same place is already proud and passes judgment upon themselves. For it is written: "God opposes the proud." Therefore, let us be eager to not oppose the bishop, so that we may be subject to God (*Eph.* 5.1-3).

In this exhortation the "bread of God" functions as an orienting feature of the church alongside meeting "within the sanctuary" and being in communion with the bishop. These are the elements which mark the difference between obedience to God and opposition to God. The

pericope is structured in two movements, each beginning with a ‘lesser to greater’ argument and followed by a warning:

***Minore ad maius* Argument A (5.1)**

- If I enjoyed such unity with Onesimus, how much more you who have him as bishop!

Warning A (5.2a)

- If one is not within the sanctuary, they lack the bread of God.

***Minore ad maius* Argument B (5.2b)**

- If the prayers of a few are powerful, how much more that of the bishop and the church!

Warning B (5.3)

- The one who does not gather with the church is prideful and comes under judgment.

Conclusion (5.3b)

- Let us therefore be subject to the bishop and to God.

Table II: Rhetorical Structure of *Eph. 5.2*

The function of both of the *a fortiori* arguments is to appeal for a united congregation under the bishop, and ultimately under God. Both of the subsequent warnings describe the same person, namely s/he who does not heed Ignatius’ appeal and does not gather with the church: they are “proud,” under “judgment,” and not “within the sanctuary” and they therefore lack “the bread of God.” Thus, by presenting the advantages of gathering and the disadvantages of

forsaking the gathering, Ignatius has clearly drawn the boundaries for membership in the church; one is either within the sanctuary, or without it.

Meeting in the same place (ἐρχόμενος ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ),² the ‘sanctuary’ (or ‘altar’), the prayers of the bishop with the church,³ and “the bread [of God]” together form a description of the Christian eucharistic meal, elsewhere called the ‘agape’ meal (*Smyrn.* 8.2). The “bread of God,” then, – a properly Johannine phrase (Jn 6:33)⁴ – is the eucharist. On this reading, to not participate in the “episcopal eucharistic assembly”⁵ is to lack the eucharistic bread.

Robert Grant reasons to a eucharistic reading based upon Ignatius’ use of θύσιαστήριον, here usually translated as “sanctuary” (BDAG 3:463), though elsewhere commonly used for a sacrificial altar.⁶ He compares the logic of the passage to Paul’s discussion of the pagan sacrifices in 1 Corinthians: “only those within the sanctuary eat what belongs to the sanctuary (cf. 1 Cor 9:13) – that is, what is sacrificed there.”⁷ On Grant’s reading, the consequence of being outside the sanctuary is to lack the sacrifice of the altar, the eucharist.⁸ This interpretation is probably warranted given that the eucharistic elements are elsewhere associated with an altar in the letters (*Phld.* 4.1), and the term θύσιαστήριον carries strong sacrificial connotations in other passages (e.g., *Rom.* 2.2).⁹ Seeing the eucharist, and specifically eucharistic sacrifice in this

² On this phrase see: Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2023), 71.

³ Andrew McGowan takes these to be liturgical prayers: McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 41.

⁴ If one adopts the reading of τοῦ θεοῦ.

⁵ To use Klawiter’s language in his reading of this passage: Frederick Klawiter, *Martyrdom, Sacrificial Libation and the Eucharist of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Fortress Academic, 2022), 18.

⁶ E.g., James 2:21; 1Clem. 41.2.

⁷ Robert Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 37. This observation is made more compelling by the fact that Ignatius was intimately familiar with 1 Corinthians.

⁸ Regarding the eucharist as a sacrifice was common in early Christianity: *Didache* 14.1; *Dial. Tr.* 41. See further: J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 196.

⁹ Allen Brent properly unpacks this passage: Allen Brent, “Ignatius of Antioch and the Imperial Cult,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 52, no. 1 (1998): 33-34; Also see: Ibid., “The Ignatian Epistles and the Threefold Ecclesiastical Order.” *The Journal of Religious History* 17, no. 1 (June 1992): 21-22, 29.

passage is simply a product of the logical connection: “if anyone is not within the θῦσιαστήριον, they lack the bread of God” (5.2). No altar, no eucharist.

While we recognize the sacrificial overtones in the passage, Ignatius’ use of θῦσιαστήριον should not be limited to a physical altar. The phrase “within the altar” (ἐντὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου) calls for such an interpretation (how can one be ‘within’ an altar?). This is why scholars generally opt for a metaphorical reading: Corwin writes that ‘altar’ here means a gathering space, namely “the part of the church containing the altar, or perhaps the whole meeting room”¹⁰; similarly with Lightfoot, the altar is “the enclosure in which the altar stands” and it is used “metaphorically for the Church of Christ”¹¹; Schoedel also suggests that it is a metaphor for the church and for unified worship.¹² Ignatius’ other letters also bear out this same usage and yet retain their sacrificial implications.¹³ Therefore, gathering within the altar-room or the ecclesial body is the necessary condition for receiving the eucharistic bread, the sacrifice of the Church.

But a metaphorical reading of θῦσιαστήριον prompts some scholars to question a straightforward eucharistic reading of the phrase “bread of God.” Lightfoot proposes that eucharistic bread is not contemplated exclusively in this passage, and that instead the “bread of God” more broadly refers to “the spiritual sustenance which God provides for his people.”¹⁴ Schoedel and others follow in this line of thinking.¹⁵ There are also those who with Robert Grant

¹⁰ Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 171.

¹¹ Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 43, 44.

¹² William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 55.

¹³ *Magn.* 7.2; *Trall.* 7.2; cf. *Pol. Phil.* 4.3.

¹⁴ Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 45.

¹⁵ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 55; Andrew McGowan, “Meals in the Apostolic Fathers,” in *T&T Clark Handbook to Early Christian Meals in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 72.

identify the eucharist as the primary referent for “bread of God.”¹⁶ At this level of nuance, it probably goes beyond our ability to tell either way; the context and grammar permit both readings, though the use of the Johannine phrase (which in chapter 2 we determined was originally eucharistic) and the apparent adoption of Pauline reasoning from 1 Corinthians 9:13 may favor Grant’s plain reading.

There is a relevant textual variant that we might consider here. In the phrase “bread of God,” τοῦ θεοῦ is a disputed reading.¹⁷ One witness, the Armenian version of the middle recension, preserves only τοῦ ἄρτου. Lightfoot points to a parallel case in *Rom.* 4.1 where Ignatius expresses his desire to be “pure bread [of God],” and it is here that some scholars express more certainty that θεοῦ (along with another variant, τοῦ Χριστοῦ) is not original to the autograph.¹⁸ For the *Romans* passage I adopt this omission of θεοῦ (and τοῦ Χριστοῦ), which perhaps should inform a decision concerning the parallel disputed reading in *Ephesians*. Supposing we omit θεοῦ in both cases, our *Ephesians* passage then reads: “if anyone is not within the sanctuary, they lack *the bread*.” With τοῦ ἄρτου standing alone, in addition to the fact that because it is articular, it is therefore particularized, a straightforward reference to the eucharistic bread would be virtually certain. The abstract interpretation of Lightfoot et. al. does

¹⁶ Henk Jan De Jonge, “Origins of the Sunday Eucharist,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 92 (2016): 559; Robert Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 37; Valeriy Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 93.

¹⁷ According to: Bart Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 225; Karl Bihlmeyer, *Die Apostolischen Vater*, Vol. 1 (Tubigen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956), 84; Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 45; Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 186.

¹⁸ Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 208. Holmes and Schoedel follow Lightfoot, though Grant and Bihlmeyer do not: Karl Bihlmeyer, *Die Apostolischen Vater*, Vol. 1 (Tubigen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956), 98; Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 228; Robert Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 89; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 175-6.

not account for this possibility. In any case, a primarily eucharistic reading probably accounts best for both readings.

3.3 *Ephesians* 20.2

After a brief aside on the incarnation of Christ (chp. 19), Ignatius makes his intentions known to write a second letter, a theological tract on love and faith in “the new man, Jesus Christ” (20.1). He promises to do this especially if the Ephesians

gather together in grace, by name, in one faith and one Jesus Christ, who according to the flesh is a descendant of David, who is Son of Man and Son of God, in order that you may obey the bishop and the presbytery with an undistracted mind, breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote (we take) in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ. (*Eph.* 20.2)

As in *Ephesians* 5.2, the unity expressed by the eucharistic gathering here is central to Ignatius’ thinking. In the ensuing paragraphs we will pursue two topics: first, the text and the syntax of the passage, and second, its meaning. First, a proper understanding of the eucharist in this passage rests upon what the referent is for the neuter relative pronoun (“breaking one bread, *which* [ὃ] is the medicine of immortality”). Three common readings are that it either refers to (1) the breaking of the bread, (2) to the bread alone, or (3) to the whole previous list. Authorities preserve two readings for the relative pronoun, ὃ [gL] and ὃς [G], and though some critical texts still opt for ὃς,¹⁹ the less natural reading should probably be adopted for reasons that cannot be detailed here;²⁰ the addition of ὃς is likely the effort of a scribe to make ἄπτον (masc.) and ὃ (neut.) agree in gender.

¹⁹ Bart Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 240; Karl Bihlmeyer, *Die Apostolischen Vater*, Vol. 1 (Tubigen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956), 88.

²⁰ See: Graydon F. Snyder, “The Text and Syntax of Ignatius Προς Ἐφεσίωνος 20:2c,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22, no.1 (1968): 9; Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company,

Relative pronouns sometimes break the basic rules of agreement with respect to their gender. This is observable both in the New Testament²¹ and in the Ignatian epistles.²² Therefore ἄρτον remains a potential antecedent for ὃ ἐστίν. This being said, Graydon Snyder has already shown that the ὃ ἐστίν construction in Ignatius' letters regularly does not take a direct antecedent,²³ and that instead it refers back to a larger unit of text containing a verbal idea. The more likely reading of *Eph.* 20.2, then, is that “ὃ does not refer to ἄρτον, but to the action ἔνα ἄρτον κλῶντες.”²⁴ Reading *Eph.* 20.2 alongside Ignatius' other uses of the neuter relative pronoun shows that the neuter pronoun in *Eph.* 20.2c – regardless of whether or not it is functioning by attraction to φάρμακον²⁵ or only accidentally²⁶ – connects a verbal idea to its predicate substantive. “Breaking one bread,” and not merely the “bread” alone, is the “medicine of immortality.”

The other proposal that might be offered is that the antecedent for ὃ ἐστίν should be the whole preceding list in addition to ἔνα ἄρτον κλῶντες. In *Magn.* 7.1, the neuter relative pronoun functions in precisely this way: “(let there be) one prayer, one petition, one mind, one hope in love with blameless joy, *which is* (ὃ ἐστίν) Jesus Christ.” Christ here is said to be hope, love in

1981), 87; Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 198.

²¹ John 4:22; Phlm 10; Acts 26:17; 1 Cor 4:17; Col 2:19; Gal 4:19; 2 Pet 2:17; 2 John 1; Rev 13:14. This list is taken from: Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1996), 338.

²² For a record of all occurrences see: Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 98. For an analysis of the texts see: Graydon F. Snyder, “The Text and Syntax of Ignatius Προς Ἐφεσίωνς 20:2c,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22, no.1 (1968): 8-13.

²³ With only two exceptions out of the eleven total occurrences in Ignatius' writings (*Eph.* 18.1 and *Smyrn.* 5.3): *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁴ Graydon F. Snyder, “The Text and Syntax of Ignatius Προς Ἐφεσίωνς 20:2c,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22, no.1 (1968): 10.

²⁵ According to: Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 87.

²⁶ According to: Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 98. On this issue see further: Graydon F. Snyder, “The Text and Syntax of Ignatius Προς Ἐφεσίωνς 20:2c,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22, no.1 (1968): 9-10.

joy, and unity all at once.²⁷ This passage is plausibly a reliable guide for reading *Eph.* 20.2 correctly, since both passages are a string of appeals made for a united congregation, each closing with a predicate statement using the neuter relative pronoun. By the recurring use of “one” in the *Magnesians* passage, Ignatius means to say that *unity* is Jesus Christ. Perhaps *Ephesians* 20.2 should be read similarly: ‘gathering together in unity’ would be the “medicine of immortality.” But despite the appeal of this reading, I would like to propose that there is an immediate structural clue in *Eph.* 20.2 that favors Snyder’s hypothesis.

There are actually two parallel ‘asides’ in this passage. First, with respect to Christ, Ignatius exhorts the Ephesians to gather in “one Jesus Christ,” and then begins one of his regular, incarnational subordinate clauses, “*who according to the flesh is a descendant of David, who is Son of Man and Son of God.*” Second, he introduces the eucharist with the phrase “breaking one bread,” and then proceeds with yet another subordinate clause: “*which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote (we take) in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ.*”

gather together in grace, by name, in one faith and one Jesus Christ,
<i>who according to the flesh is a descendant of David,</i>
<i>who is Son of Man and Son of God,</i>
in order that you may obey the bishop and the presbytery with an undistracted mind,
breaking one bread,
<i>which is the medicine of immortality,</i>
<i>the antidote (we take) in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ.</i>

Table III: Discourse Analysis of *Eph.* 20.2

²⁷ Snyder also takes this view: Graydon F. Snyder, “The Text and Syntax of Ignatius Προς Ἐφεσίωνος 20:2c,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22, no.1 (1968): 9.

Both ‘subjects’ – “Jesus Christ” and the “breaking one bread” – are hinge points that each have two subordinate, explanatory clauses in apposition. The first of these subordinate clauses applies to a single referent; the “descendant of David” and “Son of Man and Son of God” refer only to “one Jesus Christ.” The second statement probably parallels this structure, with the “antidote” and “medicine” being in apposition to “breaking one bread.” A basic discourse analysis of Ignatius’ concluding appeal here reveals that the medicine of immortality clause most likely does not recall the full content of *Eph.* 20.2. The referent for the relative pronoun is instead “breaking one bread.”

With the syntax and grammar behind us, our second task is to ask what “breaking one bread” means. Most scholars have taken this to be speaking of the eucharistic bread per se.²⁸ But this can only be half of the picture. The phrase “breaking one bread” is properly a verbal idea, adverbially modifying the charge to gather. It is an expression standing for the Christian eucharistic meal – that is, the act of *doing* the eucharist as a united congregation within the church. By commanding the Ephesians to break one bread, Ignatius is not telling them to break one literal loaf; he is telling them, as he told the Philadelphians, to “participate in one eucharist” (*Phld.* 4.1). Andrew McGowan²⁹ and Frederick Klawiter³⁰ have come to similar conclusions.

²⁸ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 45; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 197-8; Raymond Johanny, “Ignatius of Antioch,” in *The Eucharist of the Early Christians* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), 61; Robert Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 53.

²⁹ McGowan, “Meals in the Apostolic Fathers,” in *T&T Clark Handbook to Early Christian Meals in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 72.

³⁰ Klawiter, *Martyrdom, Sacrificial Libation and the Eucharist of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Fortress Academic, 2022), 18-19.

This also appears to be the usage of the phrase in Paul’s discussion of the Christian banquet in 1 Corinthians,³¹ as well as for other kinds of Christian meals in Luke-Acts.³²

I conclude this chapter by now considering the meaning of the final relative clause: “*which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote (we take) not to die, but to live forever in Jesus Christ* (ἕνα ἄρτον κλώντες, ὃ ἐστὶν φάρμακον ἀθανασίας, ἀντίδοτος τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν, ἀλλὰ ζῆν ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ διὰ παντός).” Ignatius presents three ideas that are essentially synonymous for *eternal life*: (1) it is the medicine of immortality, (2) it is not dying, (3) and it is life forever in Christ. Scholars regularly point out what Ignatius does not intend by ‘eternal life,’ namely, that the eucharistic bread literally and mechanically confers immortality, the rationale being that Ignatius is anticipating his death (*Rom.* 7.2) and the corresponding medical language in *Eph.* 7 and *Trall.* 6.2 is used figuratively.³³ But having described what Ignatius is not saying, these treatments typically neglect to provide any positive account for what ‘immortality’ means here.

I think what Ignatius means to say in this passage is actually quite literal; “to live forever in Jesus Christ” is literally *resurrection life*. ‘Immortality’ generally seems to have been the subject of several eucharistic prayers in the second century: a set prayer according to the *Didache* 10.3 reads, “but to us you have gifted spiritual food and drink and eternal life [ζωὴν αἰώνιον]”; in

³¹ τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλώνμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν; ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν (1 Cor 10:16-17).

³² Scholars are divided on whether the relevant passages in Acts (2:42, 46, 20:7, 11) are eucharistic. For a review and analysis, see: Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2023), 60-4. ‘Broken bread’ is also a phrase used specifically of the eucharistic bread in the *Didache* 9.3, 4.

³³ McGowan, “Meals in the Apostolic Fathers,” in *T&T Clark Handbook to Early Christian Meals in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 72; Robert Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 53; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 97-8. After the writing of this chapter, I have discovered that Corwin has made the connection to resurrection life here, though only briefly and in passing: Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 210.

the *Acts of John* 109 the apostle blesses the bread and prays, “for you alone are the root of immortality [ἀθανασίας] and the well of incorruption”;³⁴ the *Acts of Thomas* 133 is more direct in immortality’s association with the eucharist: “Bread of life, those who eat of which will be imperishable [ἄφθαρτοι]” and “those who eat you become immortal [ἀθάνατοι]”;³⁵ Clement of Alexandria’s theology is also candid: eating of the “bread of the heavens... nourishes heavenly men in order to lead them to incorruptibility” (*Paed.* 1.47.1), and “to drink the blood of Jesus is to share in the Lord’s incorruptibility” (*Paed.* 2.2.19).³⁶ Paul, to whom Ignatius owes much of his own thinking, uses ἀθανασίας as a synonym for the resurrection body in 1 Cor 15:53 (“this mortal body must put on immortality [ἀθανασίαν]”), and in John’s bread of life discourse all three elements of Ignatius’ thought are present at once: “the one who chews on my flesh and drinks my blood (*eucharist*)³⁷ has eternal life [ζωὴν αἰώνιον] (*immortality*), and I will raise him on the last day (*resurrection*)” (Jn 6:54).³⁸

Lightfoot helpfully points to another text in Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies*: “οὕτως καὶ τὰ σώματα ἡμῶν μεταλαμβάνοντα τῆς εὐχαριστίας μηκέτι εἶναι φθαρτὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἔχοντα.”³⁹ Irenaeus here tries to expose an internal contradiction within the theological system of some heretics who held (apparently) both that the body and blood of the eucharistic species was truly nourishing but also that, in the end, the human body went to corruption. On the contrary for Irenaeus: for when “our bodies receive the eucharist they are no longer corruptible, having the

³⁴ Richard A. Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha post Constantinum Tischendorf*, Vol. II (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1898), 208.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. III (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1903), 240.

³⁶ Translation by André Méhat, “Clement of Alexandria,” in *The Eucharist of the Early Christians* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978), 112-3 and 114.

³⁷ See my section on John’s Gospel in chapter 2 for a defense of a eucharistic reading.

³⁸ Robert Grant points instead to Jn 6:57, missing this closer comparison: Robert Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 53.

³⁹ *AH* 4.18.5 (*SC* 100:613). Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 87.

hope of resurrection.” The key lines of continuity between Irenaeus and Ignatius are the movement from death and corruptibility (Irenaeus, φθαρτὰ; Ignatius, ἀποθανεῖν) to immortality and resurrection hope (Iren., ἀναστάσεως ἔχοντα; Ign., φάρμακον ἀθανασίας) through participation in the eucharist per se in Irenaeus (μεταλαμβάνοντα τῆς εὐχαριστίας) and in the eucharistic gathering in Ignatius (ἓνα ἄρτον κλώντες). It is before Ignatius in John’s Gospel and after him in Irenaeus that eucharist and resurrection is like what a seed is to its fruit; you reap only if you sow.⁴⁰

In the letter to the *Smyrnaens* we see yet another iteration of this same idea. The heretics who fail to confess that “the eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ” should practice love “so that they might also rise [ἀναστῶσιν],” but instead, “they die [ἀποθνήσκουσιν]” (6.2-7.1). The failure to submit to this ancient confession of the Christian meal and participate in the love feast has consequences for participation in the resurrection. The Gnostics forsake the breaking of the bread and “they die [ἀποθνήσκουσιν]” (7.1), but Christians “break one bread... not to die [μὴ ἀποθανεῖν] but to live forever in Christ” (*Eph.* 20.2). This is, again, a very intimate association between life in Christ in eternity being contingent upon life in Christ now through the meal, a meal which is within the Church and under the bishop.

3.4 Conclusion

If this is the correct way to read Ignatius, any direct reference to the Isis cult (*Diodorus Sic.* 1.25.6) and the inferences to a ‘magical’ eucharistic theology which follow are very implausible indeed (though this proposal has not been generally well received on other

⁴⁰ Cf. *AH* 5.7.1-2; 1 Cor 15:42.

grounds).⁴¹ Resurrection hope was simply the natural corollary to participation in the eucharist.⁴² This view neglects neither the corporate dimension of the passage⁴³ nor the significance for the bread itself,⁴⁴ without which there can be no “breaking one bread.” It is in breaking the bread of God (*Eph.* 5.2), in the same place (13.1; *Phld.* 6.2), within the altar-room (*Eph.* 5.2), and under the bishop and ultimately under God (*Eph.* 5.2, 20.2; *Smyrn.* 8.1-2) that Christians find the promise of resurrection life. This reality was becoming all too real for Ignatius – indeed, for him it was just across the western horizon.

⁴¹ See: Robert Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 53; Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 210; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 97.

⁴² Cf. resurrection generally in *Rom.* 4.3; *Trall. Sal.*; *Smyrn.* 1.2.

⁴³ So emphasized by: Frederick Klawiter, *Martyrdom, Sacrificial Libation and the Eucharist of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Fortress Academic, 2022), 17-19.

⁴⁴ Probably over-emphasized by: Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Pt. 2, Vol. 2 (1889; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 87.

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