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SYNTHETIC IGNATIUS: RECOVERING PAGAN AND JOHANNINE INFLUENCES IN THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES

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Abstract: Scholars have long noted similarities to Matthew and Paul in the epistles of Ignatius. However, only in recent decades has much thought really been given to both Greco-Roman and Johannine influences in the Ignatian corpus. By highlighting both pagan and Johannine contributions to the writings of Ignatius, much can be determined about Ignatius's own self-understanding as a martyr for God and the early Christian community, as well as his theological conception of Christ's salvific role.

INTRODUCTION

The epistles of Ignatius of Antioch are primarily occupied with themes of martyrdom, ecclesiastical authority, and unity.¹ Students of and experts in Ignatian scholarship have often followed a similar or related trajectory with their work. Only in recent decades has the Antiochene bishop's Greco-Roman context been emphasized. Further, while attention has been given to some Christian sources for the Ignatian epistles, only a small amount has been devoted to what appears to be a primary source of Ignatius's, the Fourth Gospel traditionally ascribed to John. However, by observing Ignatius's synthesizing of his Greco-Roman and Johannine backgrounds, much can be determined

1. Bart Ehrman, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers 1: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache*, LCL 24 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 203, notes: "The letters of Ignatius have received far more scholarly attention than any of the other writings of the Apostolic Fathers. In part this is because of the inherent intrigue surrounding their composition: these are letters written by an early second-century church leader, the bishop of Antioch, who was literally en route to his martyrdom in Rome. In part the scholarly interest derives from the letters' historical significance: they embody concerns that came to characterize the early Christian movement towards orthodoxy—in particular the quest to root out heresy from the churches and to stress the importance of the church's hierarchy, with a sole bishop exercising ultimate authority and presbyters and deacons serving beneath him."

about Ignatius's theological reckoning of the term *theophoros* (θεοφόρος), which in turn influences his own self-understanding.² The purpose of this paper, then, is to show that Ignatius employs a mixture of pagan cultic terminology and Johannine motifs in order to convey to his audience not only Christ's salvific role but his own as well.³

A REVIEW OF IGNATIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Much has been said and written about Ignatius of Antioch and his epistles.⁴ J. B. Lightfoot and Theodor Zahn are credited, and appropriately so, with laying the foundation of important elements of Ignatian scholarship, especially in regards to the historicity and inclusivity of the so-called genuine

2. For information on accentuation, see William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 36.

3. This paper uses the term "pagan" to describe non-Christians whose ritual and cultic vocabulary and activities inform the writings of Ignatius of Antioch.

4. An exhaustive list of Ignatian scholarship that touches upon all aspects of the Antiochene bishop and his epistles is far beyond the bounds of this work. What follows, however, are those scholarly contributions which are most relevant to this paper moving forward, and that serve as a solid foundation upon which I have built my argument. For information regarding Ignatius and his epistles generally, see Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*; Michael Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 166–271; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*; Paul Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch," in *The Writing of the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Paul Foster (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 81–107; Gregory Vall, *Learning Christ: Ignatius of Antioch & The Mystery of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013); Timothy D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*, Tria Corda 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); and Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature—A Literary History*, vol. 1: *From Paul to the Age of Constantine*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 105–9. In regards to the larger cultural context surrounding Ignatius and his works, see Allen Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 45 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Philip A. Harland, "Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates: Local Cultural Life and Christian Identity in Ignatius' Letters," *J ECS* 11 (2003): 481–99; and George Heyman, *The Power of Sacrifice: Roman & Christian Discourses in Conflict* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007). For further information on ancient martyrdom and suicide, see Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Idem, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, ed. Mark Goodacre, LNTS 307 (London: T&T Clark, 2006); G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

epistles.⁵ William Schoedel's *Ignatius of Antioch*, while several decades old, examines many aspects of the epistles, some of which are relevant to this paper.⁶ Continuing in that scholarly tradition, Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes have published collections of patristic writings (including Ignatius's seven traditional epistles) which offer helpful introductions to primary sources, in addition to summaries of prior and current scholarship.⁷ Recently, more and more scholars are recognizing the value of the Greco-Roman cultural context of the Ignatian letters.⁸ For instance, Philip Harland expertly weaves together

5. For more on the work of Lightfoot and Zahn, see Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, ix–xx; Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius,” 82–84; Christine Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria and Asia*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 29 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992), 9–15; and Moss, *The Other Christs*, 41. While matters of historicity and authenticity are of extreme importance in other areas of Ignatian scholarship, such issues pose less of a problem for the present paper. However, some critics of this work might argue that a lack of Ignatian historicity would limit the effectiveness (and, perhaps, the necessity) of determining pagan and Johannine influences that impacted the Antiochene bishop. So as not to detract from the main purpose of the paper, some information on the complicated process of dating and Ignatian recensional history will be provided in this note. The traditional dating of the Ignatian epistles is around 110–117 CE, during the reign of Trajan (based upon Lightfoot's scholarship, which still holds scholarly consensus today; see Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 170), though there are proponents for both earlier and later estimates. Foster wryly notes that the “majority of scholars retain the traditional dating . . . without showing awareness of its flimsy basis” (Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius,” 88). For further information, see Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius,” 84–89, esp. 88–89 (wherein he posits potential dates for *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, which would help with the dating of the Ignatian epistles, while also suggesting 125–150 CE as the most likely time of Ignatius's writing and subsequent martyrdom); Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 4–7 (he notes the traditional date, though he is clearly skeptical of it); Vall, *Learning Christ*, 52–54; Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 3–9, esp. 9 (suggesting a compositional date sometime around 107 CE); Heyman, *The Power of Sacrifice*, 183 (proposing 108 CE); Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, 14–19, esp. 19 (on the opposite side of the spectrum, suggesting a date sometime during the reign of Antoninus Pius [138–161 CE]); and Moss, *The Myth of Persecution*, 16 (cf. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 14–19, esp. 19; and Idem, *The Other Christs*, 41—Moss is highly skeptical of the authenticity, and therefore the historicity, of the Ignatian epistles). As for epistolary recensions, Ignatian scholars recognize three—short, middle, and long (see Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 3–7; Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 170–77; and Moss, *The Other Christs*, 41). Foster offers a welcome summation of Ignatian recensional history: “[The] consensus which has emerged in modern scholarship and is reflected in printed editions is that the seven epistles of the Middle Recension [i.e., *To the Ephesians* (Ign. Eph.), *To the Magnesians* (Ign. Magn.), *To the Trallians* (Ign. Trall.), *To the Romans* (Ign. Rom.), *To the Philadelphians* (Ign. Phld.), *To the Smyrnaeans* (Ign. Smyrn.), *To Polycarp* (Ign. Pol.)] represent the genuine form of the epistles of Ignatius, though perhaps it would be better from a text-critical perspective to say that they represent the earliest recoverable stage of the textual transmission of the Ignatian letters.” Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius,” 84.

6. Specific examples from Schoedel that either enhance or contrast with this work will be examined below.

7. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, ix–xx; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 209–13.

8. Harland notes that Lightfoot used what information was available to him in his day: “Over a century ago, J. B. Lightfoot devoted attention to Ignatius' ‘vivid appeal to the local experiences of an Ephesian audience,’ particularly regarding the Christ-bearer

ancient archaeological and epigraphic evidence to support his conclusion that Ignatius was deliberately using pagan terminology when describing his journey to Rome.⁹ Allen Brent largely researches Ignatius's appropriation of pagan language to establish monarchical episcopacy.¹⁰ Gregory Vall, whose study of Ignatius admits a theological perspective,¹¹ attaches value to the cultural context of the epistles, but he is also wary of Brent's tactics: "[Brent] seems so eager to find pagan religious imagery in Ignatius's letters that he frequently overlooks the biblical background to Ignatius's vocabulary."¹²

Drawing upon the work of these scholars, as well as other research that is relevant to this paper, it will be shown that Ignatius was both a man of the Greco-Roman world, as well as a faithful Christian bishop bound for martyrdom. While there are many factors which influenced the composition of his epistles, this paper will examine the use of the pagan term *theophoros*, and the divine titles for Jesus and the literary theme of unity from the Fourth Gospel. Ignatius synthesizes pagan and Christian imagery and terminology in order to

metaphor and local evidence for processions, but there is far more archeological evidence now available. Other scholars have since given some attention to these metaphors, but often in a cursory way and rarely, if ever, with reference to local cultural life as attested in archeological evidence from Roman Asia. William R. Schoedel's commentary, for instance, rightly understands the Christ-bearers in terms of a Greek religious procession, noting that 'bearers' of sacred things can be found within this context (citing Plutarch, *Moralia* 352B, where the image is also used metaphorically); he also notes the importance of the background of the mysteries for understanding Ignatius' use of 'fellow-initiates.' Yet Schoedel and other scholars largely ignore an abundance of artefactual remains that can illuminate what, concretely, these passages would spark in the imaginations of Ignatius and the addressees of his letters." Harland, "Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates," 482. Schoedel, hesitant of the proposal of *theophoros* and Johannine influence on the Ignatian epistles, does give credit where it is due: "Hellenistic Judaism rather than Gnosticism often provides the background for an understanding of Ignatius' spirituality." Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 17. Holmes adds, "The character of Ignatius's debt to Hellenistic culture is much debated. Gnostic affinities have been alleged on the basis of mythological elements in such passages as *Ephesians* 19 [i.e., its hymn] or the themes of 'oneness' and 'silence,' but recent investigations have indicated that these elements are also found in the wider popular culture. These investigations, together with observations about the form and style of his letters, suggest that Ignatius mirrors more the popular culture of his day than any specific esoteric or gnostic influences." Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 175.

9. See Harland, "Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates," 482–83.

10. The following are publications of Allen Brent's that deal with Ignatius and *theophoros* to one degree or another: *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order* (full citation in note 4); *A Political History of Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); *Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic: A Study of an Early Christian Transformation of Pagan Culture*, ed. Christoph Markschies, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); *Cultural Episcopacy and Ecumenism: Representative Ministry in Church History from the Age of Ignatius of Antioch to the Reformation, With Special Reference to Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Marc R. Spindler, Studies in Christian Mission 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

11. See Vall, *Learning Christ*, 1–26.

12. Vall, *Learning Christ*, 83 (see also 79–87).

conceptualize his own understanding of who he and Christ were and why they did what they did.¹³

“PAGAN” IGNATIUS

In writing to his audiences throughout Asia Minor,¹⁴ Ignatius was somewhat familiar with the milieu of pagan terminology that described significant processions and rites.¹⁵ Ignatius appropriated some of this terminology in his epistles, the most prominent instance of such being *theophoros*,¹⁶ which was used at the beginning of each epistle in a very formulaic manner.¹⁷

Today, scholars like Brent and Harland help to illustrate what *theophoros* would have meant to a Greco-Roman audience.¹⁸ Of note is the fact that *theophoros* was a title, not a surname,¹⁹ and was used to describe the “image-

13. This paper’s Greek and English text and translations from the Ignatian epistles come from Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, while New Testament translations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

14. Schoedel proposes a potential chronology for the composition of the letters: Ignatius would have traveled to Philadelphia and Smyrna (where *Philadelphians*, *Smyrnaeans*, *Polycarp*, and *Romans* would have been written), where he also received embassies from the Christian communities in Ephesus, Magnesia, and Tralles (to whom *Ephesians*, *Magnesians*, and *Trallians* were written)—all under the guard of ten soldiers. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 11. For the purposes of this paper, there is no need to refute Schoedel’s proposal.

15. “Ignatius’ characterization of Christians at Ephesos as fellow-processionists bearing sacred objects alludes to aspects of cultural life that would be familiar not only in Syria but also in the cities of western Asia Minor.” Harland, “Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates,” 490; cf. 497–99. Harland offers a helpful introduction to Greco-Roman processions, complete with a lengthy list of appellations and positions that includes *theophoros*. “Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates,” 488–89. Another similar and interesting list of cultic titles in relation to a Bacchic *thiasos* from around 160 CE (just a few years following the dating of the Ignatian epistle; cf. note 5) is recorded in an inscription. Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 128–29. This list also includes the title and position of *theophoros*.

16. For further information on the appropriation of other “pagan” terms in the Ignatian epistles, see Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic*, and Harland, “Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates.”

17. See Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 7, 35–37; cf. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 174. See also note 20.

18. For instance, see Harland, “Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates,” 487: “Ignatius’ characterization of the Christian group at Ephesos as ‘companies’ or ‘fellow-travellers, God-bearers, temple-bearers, Christ-bearers and holy-object-bearers adorned in every respect with the commandments of Jesus Christ’ . . . clearly evokes images from the world of processions (*Eph.* 9.1–2). So, too, his brief, but perhaps no less significant, summary of the Smyrnaeans’ identity as, among other things, ‘the holy-object-bearing’ assembly that is ‘most fitting for its God’ . . . Ignatius was, of course, not the first to draw on the analogy of processions to express (metaphorically) devotion to the gods, or to the Jewish (-Christian) God specifically, as is clear from Philo, and the analogy (including the term ‘Christ-bearer’) was to persist within Christian circles long after Ignatius as well.”

19. Schoedel claims: “[*Theophoros*] may designate him as a martyr in the same way that later martyrs were said to be *χριστοφόροι* (“bearers of Christ”). . . . It is more likely that

bearer”²⁰ who carried the emblem of the god(s) in cultic processions.²¹ Even Schoedel agrees that Ignatius’s journey through Asia Minor was “staged” not only to garner local Christian attention and support but to send a message of “mythic proportions.”²² Brent further fleshes out this mythic journey, using many archaeological and epigraphic sources to reconstruct what he argues is the origin of monarchical episcopacy in the Ignatian epistles. A multitude of large and small images and icons mark the presence of the god in a pagan procession, and a variety of persons with just as many designations and titles bear them.²³ While this paper will not deal with the intricacies of terminology that Brent explores in several of his works,²⁴ it is critical to understand the basic

Theophorus is a name adopted by Ignatius at his baptism despite the fact that the adoption of Christian names was not common until the middle of the third century. . . . The meaning of the name Theophorus is best elaborated in terms of other expressions in the letters . . . Thus Ignatius shares with a wide range of pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic writers a conception of God dwelling within human beings” (Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 36–37). Schoedel’s assumption that *theophoros* as a second name was simply an adopted title rests upon his admitted caveat that this practice “was not common until the middle of the third century,” which was one hundred years *after* Ignatius’s martyrdom (cf. note 5).

20. Cf. *Eph.* Salutation (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 183), *Magn.* Salutation (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 203), *Trall.* Salutation (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 215), *Rom.* Salutation (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 225), *Phld.* Salutation (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 237), *Smyrn.* Salutation (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 249), and *Pol.* Salutation (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 263), where it is rendered “the Image-bearer” (ὁ καὶ Θεοφόρος).

21. See Harland, “Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates,” 488–89. Ignatius does refer to the Ephesians as *theophoroi* as well (*Eph.* 9.1–2), but he does not distinguish them as having been “judged worthy” (*Smyrn.* 11.1; Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 259) as he has been. It is the coupling of these two honors—being a *theophoros* as well as a special witness—that sets Ignatius apart from his fellow Christians.

22. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 11–12.

23. For an introduction to this thesis, see Brent, *Imperial Cult*, 210–50. In another work, Brent argues that Ignatius’s appropriation of pagan vocabulary allows him to construct his threefold order of the Church (*Political History*, 195–208). He says that “[it] is directly on such a pagan political theology of ritual that Ignatius draws, as a ‘man constrained to unity,’ when he describes the bishop, presbyters and deacons as ‘projecting an image’ of, respectively, Father, Spirit-filled apostolic council and Jesus Christ. Those who join his procession, and those who elect ambassadors to proclaim peace, are not only participating in a joint sacrifice or proclaiming its significance as they accompany the martyr bishop wearing the τύπος of the suffering Father-God. They are specifically acting in the Christian liturgy by analogy with those who bear or wear divine imagery appropriate to the ritual to secure such *homonoia* or to celebrate such a *συνθυσία*. The bearing and wearing of images had of course a role in the dramatic re-enactment of the sacred story of a cult, such as that of Dionysus. In his case, as we have argued, we have the sacred story of the Father-God represented by the bishop sending his diaconal Son in the Johannine scene in the Upper Room, with its Spirit-filled circle of the apostles looking on.” *Political History*, 204. It is important to remember the warning given by Vall that Brent tends to focus heavily on the pagan influences on Ignatius, sometimes at the cost of equally important Christian contexts. Vall, *Learning Christ*, 83.

24. See the following by Brent: *Imperial Cult*, 210–50; *Cultural Episcopacy and Ecumenism*, 64–101; *Political History*, 142–51; *Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic*, 38–230.

concept of the arguments made by Brent and Harland in order to contextualize Ignatius's use of *theophoros*.

What, then, is the function of *theophoros* in the Ignatian epistles? Scholars like Brent and Harland are right to argue that *theophoros* is a cultic term taken from pagan ritual processions, and is meant to situate Ignatius in a kind of mystical journey that takes him through Asia Minor to Rome, and from there to heaven. Ignatius calls Ephesian Christians *theophoroi* (θεοφόροι) as well, but does not give them (or any other Christians, for that matter) the sacred trust entitled to him by God.²⁵ Similarly, Jesus can be considered to be an exceptional person sent by God, sacrificing himself on the cross in order to extend grace to all mankind. Thus, while minor *theophoroi* are noted in Ephesus, the two major *theophoroi* of the Ignatian epistles are Ignatius and Jesus himself. Ignatius is the *theophoros* of Jesus, just as Jesus is the *theophoros* of God the Father. Ignatius's use of pagan terminology to establish the role of Jesus is expanded upon, however, when he incorporates Johannine influences into his epistles.

“JOHANNINE” IGNATIUS

There are many instances where Ignatius apparently quotes from or alludes to phrases found in other early Christian texts.²⁶ While academics typi-

25. Cf. *Smyrn.* 11.1.

26. Says Holmes: “Whereas Ignatius makes very little use of the Old Testament, he is deeply indebted to early Christian tradition, which has pervasively shaped his vocabulary and thought. His heavy use of Pauline tradition (the way Paul responded to rejection likely offered a model for Ignatius) was shaped both by a more ‘mystical’ tradition (represented also in the Gospel of John) and by a concern for order and discipline (cf. Matthew). Ignatius likely knew a wide range of early Christian literature, but whatever that range was, we can demonstrate with certainty his use of only a few writings. He probably worked with the Gospel of Matthew (e.g., *Smyrn.* 1.1); there is no evidence of Mark, and only minimal (and not conclusive) evidence of Luke (*Smyrn.* 3.2). *Use of John* (cf. *Rom.* 7.3; *Phld.* 7.1) is unlikely. He has read 1 Corinthians and probably Ephesians and 1 and 2 Timothy. There are numerous echoes of other Pauline documents (his collection may have included 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 and 2 Timothy), but it is difficult to determine whether these echoes reflect literary dependence or the use of traditional elements.” *Apostolic Fathers*, 174–75; emphases added. It is possible that Holmes is simply building on the work of Schoedel: “[It] is also unlikely that Ignatius was acquainted with the Gospel of John.” Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 9–10, esp. 9. Charles E. Hill debates against these opinions vigorously, however, affirming that Ignatius was well aware of the Fourth Gospel. See *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 421–43. See also Vall, *Learning Christ*, 40–51; Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 15–27; Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius,” 103–7 (wherein Foster is only willing to conclude that scholars can reliably assert Matthean and Pauline evidence in the Ignatian epistles); Moreschini and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, 105–9.

cally recognize the employed Matthean and Pauline material,²⁷ there are clear Johannine motifs and themes in Ignatius as well.²⁸ In addition to claims of Ignatius's being a disciple of the author of the Fourth Gospel (traditionally "John"),²⁹ there are multiple factors that signal the authenticity of at least Ignatius's theological dependence on John, including matters ranging from dating and provenance to theological and literary influences.³⁰ What follows,

27. See Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 174–75; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 9–10; Vall, *Learning Christ*, 40–49; Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 15–20, 22–23, 40–51; Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius," 103–7; Moreschini and Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, 105–9.

28. For an examination of Ignatius's relationship to the Fourth Gospel, see Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 421–43.

29. Old traditions noted Ignatius to be a disciple of John, if sometimes only indirectly. See Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 20–21; Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 722–23; Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius," 82, 84. Cf. Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius," 85–86, where a potential relationship between Ignatius and Peter is discussed.

30. While in-depth discussions regarding issues of dating, provenance, and historicity of the Fourth Gospel are beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to briefly touch upon them. Critics of Johannine traditional material in Ignatius might argue that because Ignatius never mentions the name of his source, any similarities in phraseology become circumstantial at best (for instance, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 23). Vall counters that Ignatius was writing, or dictating, these epistles en route to Rome, and would not have gone to the trouble to find and cite his sources, since he was likely quoting from memory. Ignatius may not cite his Johannine source material, but neither does he reference his Pauline or Matthean sources (see Vall, *Learning Christ*, 43; cf. Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 15–19; contra Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 23–24). Hill seconds this opinion, stating that "[it] is surprising how routinely scholars assume that Ignatius, if he knew any NT books, had to have them in front of him as he wrote and must have held to the ideal of precise literal transcription, or perhaps that he had to reproduce exactly each source for his thoughts." *Johannine Corpus*, 427; see also 421–27. Naturally, this discussion further extends to matters of Johannine dating—if the Fourth Gospel were not written until perhaps the mid-second century, then there is no plausible way that Ignatius would have been referring to them. However, numerous scholars have come to the conclusion that the Fourth Gospel was most likely composed sometime around 80–100 CE—for instance, see Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 23–44, esp. 41–44; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Apollos; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 82–87; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 215; Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 335–37; Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 17–22; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 6–8; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, SP 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 1–6; and Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 421–43 (cf. his material on Polycarp [416–20], the dating of whom would also help to secure the dating of the Ignatian epistles). Further, Ignatius and John are connected with the Christian community at Ephesus (see Brown, *Introduction to John*, 199–206; Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 336; Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 430–31; Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 174, 182–201), making even more plausible this paper's claim that Ignatius was influenced by the Fourth Gospel. Trevett remarks that there appears to be some form of connection between the Johannine tradition and the epistles of Ignatius (see Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 20–22, 125–26); and Marianne Meye Thompson notes similarities of content between John and Ignatius that strengthen

however, will focus on two major areas of Johannine emphasis in Ignatius: status and names of Christ, and the Johannine theme of unity.³¹

In both the epistles and the Johannine tradition, Jesus holds a variety of titles that distinguish him from ordinary men. Many of Jesus's Johannine titles have found their way into Ignatian vocabulary.³² For instance, in both Ignatius

this paper's argument (see Thompson, *John*, 20). See also Brent, *Cultural Episcopacy and Ecumenism*, 72–80; cf. Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius," 98–100. For scholarly discussion on the dating and composition of the Ignatian epistles, see note 5.

31. While not a main topic of this paper, worthy of note here is an instance of especial connection to the Johannine tradition, *Phld.* 7.1 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 241): "Nevertheless the Spirit is not deceived, because it is from God; for it knows from where it comes and where it is going, and exposes the hidden things" (cf. John 3:8: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."). Vall notes this as the "strongest echo [of the Gospel of John in Ignatius] . . . at least at first blush." Vall, *Learning Christ*, 42. He further says: "Elsewhere Ignatius uses distinctively Johannine phrases such as 'living water,' 'the bread of God' (with eucharistic overtones), and 'the gift [δωρεά] of God,' as well as the more vaguely Johannine expression 'the door of the Father.' The imagery of shepherd, sheep, and wolves in *Philadelphians* 2:1–2 is reminiscent of John 10:11–14. Ignatius's affirmation that 'the Lord did nothing apart from the Father' echoes not only the diction but one of the central ideas of the Fourth Gospel. In the same context Ignatius explicitly affirms Christ's preexistence 'with the Father,' refers to him as God's 'Logos,' and says that he 'pleased the one who sent him in all things.' . . . [It] is especially in *Magnesians* 6–8 that Ignatius utilizes the basic Johannine summary of the Christ event: The Son came forth from the Father, accomplished the will of the Father, and returned to the Father. Ultimately, answering the question whether Ignatius knew the written Gospel of John or only Johannine oral tradition is not as important as the recognition that Johannine theology has deeply penetrated his thinking about the mystery of redemption." Vall, *Learning Christ*, 43.

32. Both Ignatius and John give Jesus a long list of names. In John, Jesus is called "the Word" (1:1); "the (true) light" (1:8–9); "the life" (1:4–5); "a father's only son" (1:14); "God the only Son" (1:18); "the Lamb of God" (1:29, 35); "the Son of God" (1:34, 49; 3:18); "Rabbi" or "teacher" (1:38, 49; 3:2 [contrast with Nicodemus in 3:10]; 4:31; 6:25; 13:13); "the Messiah" (1:41; 4:25–26, 29; 7:26–27); "him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote" (1:45); "the King of Israel" (1:49); "the Son of Man" (1:51; 3:13–14; 6:53); "the one who descended from heaven" (3:13–15); "his only Son" (3:16); "the Son" (3:17, 33–36; 5:19–24, 26–27); "the light that has come into the world" (3:19–21; cf. 8:12; 9:5); "the bridegroom" (3:29); "the one who comes from above (or heaven) is above all" (3:31); "a Jew" (4:9); "a prophet" (4:19, 44; 6:14 ["the prophet who is to come into the world"]); "the Savior of the world" (4:42); "the bread of life" (6:35, 48; cf. 6:32–58); "the Holy One of God" (6:60); "I am" (8:58); "the gate for the sheep" (10:7); "the good shepherd" (10:11); one with the Father (10:30; cf. 10:38); the "resurrection and the life" (11:25–27); "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6–7); and "the true vine" (15:1). The names given by Ignatius (as found in Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 182–271) include "Jesus Christ our God" (cf. *Eph.* Salutation; for variations on this title, see also *Eph.* 18.2, *Pol.* 8.2); "God" (*Eph.* 1.1); "the Name" (*Eph.* 3.1; 7.1); "the Master of the house" (*Eph.* 6.1); the "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" (*Eph.* 7.2); "faith" and "love" (*Eph.* 14.1; *Trall.* 8.1); "teacher" (*Eph.* 15.1; *Magn.* 9.1); "God's knowledge" (*Eph.* 17.2); "the new man" (*Eph.* 20.1); "our never-failing life" (*Magn.* 1.2); "the one who is unseen" (*Magn.* 3.2); the "Son, who is [God's] Word that came forth from silence" (*Magn.* 8.2); "the new yeast" (*Magn.* 10.2); "our hope" (*Magn.* 11.1; *Trall.* Salutation, 2.2); "an undivided spirit" (*Magn.* 15.1); the only "son of the Father" (*Rom.* Salutation); "water living and speaking" (*Rom.*

and the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is “God.”³³ Likewise, in both Jesus is the great teacher from God,³⁴ the life,³⁵ and the door or gate.³⁶ These titles reflect Christ’s divine status. Not only is he higher than the earth, but he preexisted before its creation with the Father. Jesus is the Word, the very revelation of God that allows for mankind to see the image of the Father.³⁷ Jesus is thus uniquely qualified to teach, judge, and atone, offering eternal life to the believing and damnation to the wicked.

Another compelling evidence of Johannine influence in Ignatius is his major theme of unity. Ignatius’s emphasis on unity is expressed so that, as Jesus is one with the Father, so might each Christian community be one with their ecclesiastical leadership and the church as a whole.³⁸ The five chapters in the Fourth Gospel devoted to the so-called Last Supper of Jesus and his apostles are rife with Jesus’s pleas for the unification of the apostles and those that heed their words.³⁹ Jesus calls himself “the true vine” and commands that his apostles are to be one in him, part and parcel of the “Father’s planting.”⁴⁰ Jesus’s Intercessory Prayer of John 17, recycling the theme of Father-Son unity that is diagnostic of the Fourth Gospel,⁴¹ pleads with God that the disciples may be

7.2–3); “the unerring mouth by whom the Father has truly spoken” (*Rom.* 8.2); the “bishop” of Syria after Ignatius’s departure (*Rom.* 9.1; cf. *Pol.* Salutation); the imitator of the Father (*Phld.* 7.2); the “archives” (*Phld.* 8.2); “the high priest” and the “door of the Father” (*Phld.* 9.1); “the Savior” (*Phld.* 9.2); “the beloved” (*Smyrn.* Salutation); “the God who made you so wise” (*Smyrn.* 1.1); “Son of God” (*Smyrn.* 1.1); “our true life” (*Smyrn.* 4.1); “the perfect human being” (*Smyrn.* 4.2); “the perfect hope” (*Smyrn.* 10.2); and 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 way” (*Pol.* 3.2). In certain instances, some Ignatian titles listed could refer not only to Jesus Christ, but also to the Father and/or the Holy Spirit, as well as other authorized representatives of God, like the bishop. Hill conducts a similar project, albeit unbeknownst to me until after my own research was completed. *Johannine Corpus*, 431–41.

33. For a sample, see John 1:1, 18; 8:58; *Eph.* 1.1; 18.2; *Pol.* 8.2; *Smyrn.* 1.1; etc. See also note 32.

34. John 1:38 and *Eph.* 15.1. See also note 32.

35. John 1:4–5 and *Smyrn.* 4.1. See also note 32.

36. John 10:7 and *Phld.* 9.1. See also note 32.

37. John 1:1, 18; 10:30, 38; *Eph.* 7.2; *Magn.* 8.2; *Pol.* 3.2. See also note 32. Vall, in *Learning Christ*, 260–61, states: “What Ignatius says about Jesus Christ is fully compatible with the Johannine Logos Hymn, which ends with these words: ‘No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared him.’ There can be little doubt that Ignatius learned the Christological use of the term λόγος from the Fourth Gospel, or at least from Johannine tradition.”

38. For a sample, see *Eph.* 5.1; *Magn.* 3.1; *Rom.* 3.3; *Smyrn.* 8.1–2; *Trall.* 3.1–3; and so forth.

39. John 13–17.

40. John 15:1; *Trall.* 11.1–2; *Phld.* 3.1.

41. See Vall, *Learning Christ*, 43.

one with him and the Father.⁴² These chapters all lead to the climax of Jesus's life, namely his passion, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Ignatius's writings echo the Johannine call for unity, as the Antiochene bishop teaches that the bishop is the mind of Jesus, just as Jesus is the mind of the Father.⁴³ The plea for unification is a plea to be joined as one with Christ and enter into the heavenly chorus which praises him.⁴⁴ This call for unity is a natural preface to Ignatius's own martyrdom, a subject that preoccupies his mind often as he is escorted to Rome.⁴⁵ That this construction of the narrative is patterned after Jesus's own journey to the cross and empty tomb is clear, and will be discussed below.

“SYNTHETIC” IGNATIUS

Ignatius uses pagan and Johannine sources to convey to his audience both Christ's salvific role as well as his own self-understanding as *theophoros*. Ignatius is the *theophoros* of Jesus (who, as the divine Word, is the *theophoros* of the Father) as he takes a mystical procession through Asia Minor in semblance of Christ's own journey to the cross. Adding Johannine influences to this pagan material, he describes Christ's salvific mission, as well as his own. Thus, what Ignatius says about Jesus can have meaning for himself.⁴⁶ The confluence and mixture of paganism and Johannine Christianity in his epistles lends a useful appellation for Ignatius: “synthetic.” This work will examine three instances from the Ignatian epistles that highlight “synthetic Ignatius”: Jesus as the “one teacher”; the function of the *Ephesians* 19 hymn; and the sacred journey of death and resurrection. In teaching about Jesus, Ignatius likewise discourses on his own special case of martyrdom. Naturally, Ignatius will not continually bring up the actual word *theophoros*, nor will he always cite a Johannine image with a pagan one. Instead, Ignatius expects his audience to

42. John 17:6–26. Cf. Vall, *Learning Christ*, 88–117.

43. Cf. *Eph.* 3.2.

44. Cf. *Eph.* 4.

45. Cf. *Rom.* 1–5.

46. It should be noted here that Ignatius doesn't insinuate that all of Jesus's characteristics are his as well. While Ignatius does claim for himself some amount of divine or, perhaps closer to his original intent, *semi*-divine powers (cf. *Trall.* 5.1–2), he doesn't fully equate himself with Jesus. For instance, Jesus was the product of a virgin birth (an important aspect of Ignatius's theology that he emphasizes strongly; cf. *Eph.* 18–19), though Ignatius never claims such a divine origin for himself. He further argues that Jesus is a physical descendant of the biblical King David, but never associates himself with that (in)famous monarch (cf. *Eph.* 19). Thus, Ignatius recognizes his synthesis of pagan and Johannine terminology is acceptable to a certain limit in proclaiming himself and Jesus as *theophoroi*—but he never attempts to breach that limit and make bolder, more heretic claims.

recall these previously associated symbols and to piece them together to form the cohesive, even “synthetic,” message he presents.

Jesus is the “one teacher” in the Ignatian epistles, the instructor sent from God.⁴⁷ Ignatius is insistent throughout his corpus that he himself is not a teacher, especially not one of Christ’s caliber, but is instead a student still learning how to be a disciple, just like the Christians he is writing to.⁴⁸ One of the most frequent appellations given to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is the title “Rabbi” or “Teacher.”⁴⁹ Ignatius takes this Johannine title and applies it to the pagan construction of *theophoros*: As teacher, Jesus is the *theophoros* of the Father, sent to instruct mankind and give them eternal life.⁵⁰ While Ignatius is a *mathētēs* (μαθητής) like everyone else in his audience, he singularly has been “judged worthy” of bearing the name of God in this procession through Asia Minor, to Rome, and ultimately to heaven.⁵¹ To help modern readers conceptualize this idea, perhaps Ignatius could be likened to a teacher’s assistant, having a special responsibility to represent and teach the will of the true teacher (Jesus) while still being a student (*mathētēs*) like everybody else. Thus, as *theophoros*, Ignatius represents Jesus and his divine will, with attendant authority, while still occupying the role of an imperfect student. This doesn’t limit Ignatius’s role as *theophoros* to simply instructional, however—he is the image-bearer of Jesus and is representative of him in more ways than one.

The hymn in *Eph.* 19 refers to the singular excellence of Jesus the “star” in the midst of other celestial bodies, including the sun and moon, and denotes his power over worldly institutions, like magic and political kingdoms.⁵² The hymn does not imply movement on the part of the “star,” though the phrase “when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life” (θεοῦ ἀνθρωπίνως φανερούμενου εἰς καινότητα αἰδίου ζωῆς) could imply

47. *Eph.* 15.1 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 195).

48. Cf. *Eph.* 3.1.

49. For a sample, see John 1:38. See also note 32.

50. Cf. John 1:9–13.

51. Cf. *Smyrn.* 11.1 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 259).

52. Holmes’s translation of the text of the hymn (*Eph.* 19.2–3) reads: “A star shone forth in heaven brighter than all the stars; its light was indescribable and its strangeness caused amazement. All the rest of the constellations, together with the sun and moon, formed a chorus around the star, yet the star itself far outshone them all, and there was perplexity about the origin of this strange phenomenon, which was so unlike the others. Consequently all magic and every kind of spell were dissolved, the ignorance so characteristic of wickedness vanished, and the ancient kingdom was abolished when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life; and what had been prepared by God began to take effect. As a result, all things were thrown into ferment, because the abolition of death was being carried out.” *Apostolic Fathers*, 199. For instances of astral imagery in the New Testament, see Matt 2, 2 Pet 1:19 (where Jesus is called the “morning star”), and Rev 22:16 (where Jesus is called the “bright morning star”; cf. Rev 2:28).

the movement of God from cosmic realms to earthly ones in order to manifest salvation to humanity.⁵³ The hymn could thus be interpreted as a sacred procession of Jesus, both as “star” and as “God appeared in human form,” to “bring the newness of life” to mankind. This “life” is the eternal life which Jesus brings from heaven to give to mankind on earth, as noted in John.⁵⁴ Similar to Ignatius’s own procession, there is a gathered congregation of persons about the *theophoros*—for Jesus the “star,” other heavenly luminaries encircle him, while Ignatius is surrounded by the faithful Christians (especially at Rome).⁵⁵ The surrounding congregations, both of stars and of mortal Christians, form “a chorus” about the respective *theophoros*.⁵⁶ The hymn by extension is a reference not only to Jesus’s sacred procession, but to Ignatius’s as well. The mixture of pagan and Johannine terminology and imagery allows for the hymn to teach further truths about the missions of both Jesus and Ignatius: both are uniquely chosen individuals who singularly represent God in important earthly functions that have eternal ramifications.

The sacred journey from passion to resurrection that both Jesus and Ignatius endure is also evidence of the synthetic nature of the epistles. Johannine Jesus’s discourses on unity and love are followed by the dark road to Calvary, which in turn gives way to heavenly resurrection.⁵⁷ It is in emulating this that Ignatius truly will, like Jesus, become “a word of God.”⁵⁸ Further, by accomplishing this mystical procession, Ignatius is making a sort of atonement or blood ransom for the Christian communities, similar to the crucifixion and

53. *Eph.* 19.2–3 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 199).

54. Cf. John 1; 6:27; etc.

55. *Rom.* 2.2 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 227): “Grant me nothing more than to be poured out as an offering to God while there is still an altar ready, so that in love you may form a chorus and sing to the Father in Jesus Christ, because God has judged the bishop from Syria worthy to be found in the west, having summoned him from the east. It is good to be setting from the world to God in order that I may rise to him.” Cf. *Eph.* 4.1–2.

56. *Eph.* 19.2 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 199). See also Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 51–53, 170–71.

57. See Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 124–25, where she lists the number of historical moments in the life of Jesus that Ignatius mentions in his epistles. Of those mentioned, three are particularly emphasized in the Ignatian letters: “Jesus had been a teacher, the ‘only’ teacher, who ‘spoke and it came to pass,’ the one to whom the prophets had looked. He had given commands and ordinances”; “[Jesus] had suffered persecution and had been crucified in the time of Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch. His death had been a ‘mystery’ and his own suffering had been efficacious for the resurrection of believers”; and “Jesus Christ had been resurrected and had appeared in the flesh. The Father had raised him, or he had raised himself, ‘for us.’” Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 124–25. Trevett’s final two historical moments (from the cross to the empty tomb) are combined together in this paper.

58. *Rom.* 2.1 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 227).

atonement of Jesus himself.⁵⁹ This sacred procession underlies Ignatius's self-deprecation, as well as his concerns with and commitment to martyrdom. He is almost being forced to a martyr's death. His nervousness and anxiety to bear the Name and be put on a pedestal akin to Jesus are evident in his epistles.⁶⁰ However, Ignatius anticipates this event to make perfect his own worship of Jesus, longing to be where God is—he has, after all, been “judged worthy” to bear the name of God and be *theophoros* in this (eventually fatal) procession to Rome and for Christ.⁶¹

These three instances of “synthetic Ignatius” show that, while Ignatius may not have necessarily cited pagan and Johannine materials together, the imagery of both is nevertheless coupled with the content and intent of the epistles. Jesus as the one teacher from God instructs men and gives them eternal life, singular among his peers on his sacred journey from the cross to heaven. Ignatius, as both a student and “teacher's assistant” of sorts, instructs about Jesus, all while on his own procession that will end in Rome and martyrdom, after which he will enter heaven to be with God and Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The epistles of Ignatius are complicated documents, with many facets of available study. This paper has examined one of those facets—namely, the synthetic nature of Ignatius in the mixture of both pagan and Johannine elements to convey his conceptualization of both his and Jesus's missions to his Christian audiences. This is accomplished by the use of *theophoros* and its various implications, which, when coupled with Johannine influences, enhances Ignatius's message and allow for greater cognition of what he believed Jesus to have done. This “synthetic Ignatius” is evident in his discussion of Jesus as the “one teacher,” in the *Ephesians* 19 hymn, and in the sacred procession from death to resurrection taken by both Jesus and Ignatius. A sense of his own self-deprecation and anxiety is also explainable when viewed in the light of “synthetic Ignatius.” Such a synthesis by Ignatius rings true to the Johannine theme of unity that serves as the hallmark of his epistles: “Therefore in your unanimity and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. . . .

59. See *Pol.* 2.3 (“May I be a ransom on your [Polycarp's] behalf in every respect, and my chains as well, which you loved”) and 6.1 (“I am a ransom on behalf of those who are obedient to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons; may it be granted to me to have a place among them in the presence of God!”) Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 265, 267.

60. See Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 13–14.

61. Cf. *Smyrn.* 11.1 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 259).

It is, therefore, advantageous for you to be in perfect unity, in order that you may always have a share in God.⁶²

62. *Eph.* 4.1-2 (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 187).