

The Connection Between Salvation, Martyrdom and Suffering According to St. Ignatius of Antioch

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Summary

Ignatius of Antioch passed on many of his ideas about salvation, martyrdom and suffering through the epistles which he wrote shortly before being martyred. The author did not articulate the relationship between salvation and martyrdom very clearly, probably because he had little time to do so. Thus, should some of the expressions he uses, such as “to attain unto God” and “now I am perfected”, be correlated with martyrdom, it would seem that martyrdom is the only way for a Christian to attain unto God and to be perfected. This paper proves that Ignatius did not see martyrdom as a means to achieve salvation, but as the right way for a Christian to leave this earthly life in order to be with God for eternity through the salvation given by Christ.

Key words: Ignatius, martyrdom, salvation, suffering, attainment, deeds, Christ, perfection, resurrection, reward.

Introduction

My aim in what follows is to analyze and comment on, from the perspective of contemporary thinking, Ignatius' concept regarding the connection between salvation, suffering and martyrdom.

This is because Ignatius uses a series of interesting expressions to refer to martyrdom – which he considers, along with suffering, to be a great blessing. Moreover, according to him, through suffering and martyrdom, the Christian

“attains unto God” and becomes the perfect disciple.

In the following sub-chapters, I endeavor to analyze a number of the aforementioned expressions in order to be able to observe more clearly what the connection between salvation, suffering and martyrdom is according to St. Ignatius.

Biography

Ignatius of Antioch, also known as Theophorus, was one of the notable figures in the history of the early church. According to the writings of some church fathers, the Apostle Peter was the first Bishop of Antioch (Origen, 1996, 24), and Ignatius was the third,¹ and held this position from 70 to 107 A.D (Fecioru, 1979, 147).

Ignatius is considered one of the apostolic fathers² as he lived during the early decades of the church and was in direct contact with the Apostles Peter and John (Ladrierre, 256). Not much is known about him; however, some details about his life can be gathered from his epistles as well as from the few references made to him by ancient writers.

He was named Ignatius at birth, but on his baptism he was given the name *Theophorus*.³ He died a martyr during the persecution of Christians initiated by the Roman Emperor Trajan.

Historians say that as an act of gratitude to the gods for his great victory against the Dacians (105-106), Emperor Trajan unleashed a massive campaign of persecution against Christians who refused to bring sacrifices to the gods. In the midst of this great trial, many Christians, Ignatius included, became martyrs and died torn apart by beasts in Roman amphitheaters, or crucified, burnt at the stake, etc. (Bodogae, 1987, 139-140).

Trajan wanted to have at least one famous person for his festivities, which were to last 123 days, and thus Ignatius was brought all the way from Syria to

1 Eusebius of Caesarea claims that Ignatius was the second follower of Peter in Antioch, hence the conclusion that Ignatius was the third bishop of Antioch after Evodius (see Eusebiu, 1987, 137). Most researchers nowadays reject this idea, deeming Origen's proposal to be closer to the truth.

2 There is a difference between the *apostolic fathers* and the *church fathers*. The apostolic fathers are those leaders of the church that had direct contact with the first apostles. It could be said that they were the second generation of Christians. The church fathers were church leaders that lived starting with the second century and had no direct contact with the first apostles.

3 *Theophorus* translates either as “the one that God bears” - Ignatius being the child that Christ took in his arms (Matthew 18:2-4), or as “God-bearer”, meaning that only Christ is in his heart. Posterity took this farther by saying that after his death, Ignatius' heart was cut into several pieces and the name of Christ was written in gold on each one (*Scrierile părinților apostolici*, 147).

Rome in order to be martyred (Fecioru, 1979, 148-149).

Ignatius himself describes the voyage to Rome in his epistles. The venerable bishop had to travel the distance, sometimes on land, sometimes on water, chained and surrounded by ten soldiers: “From⁴ Syria unto Rome I am fighting with wild beasts by land and sea, by night and day, bound to ten leopards, that is, a company of soldiers, whose usage grows still harsher when they are liberally treated” (*Romans*, V, 1).

In Seleucia, Ignatius, surrounded by soldiers, embarked on a ship that went as far as Cilicia or Pamphylia. From there, they traveled on foot to Smyrna, passing through Philadelphia, leaving behind Ephesus, Tralles, and Magnesia. During their stopover in Smyrna, Ignatius was received by Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna as well as by other Christians in the area. This is also where he wrote four of his seven epistles: the epistles to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, and Romans. The next stop was in Troad where he wrote three more epistles: to the Philadelphians, to the Smyrnaeans, and to Polycarp (Fecioru, 1979, 148).

The epistle to the Romans is the most impressive of all of Ignatius’ epistles, and it is considered to be a jewel of the Christian literature of the first centuries. It stands apart from the others because of its purpose. While in Smyrna, Ignatius found out that the church in Rome wanted to make an appeal to the authorities in order to have his sentence overturned. However, due to the fact that Ignatius believed that God Himself required him to go to Rome, and because he saw martyrdom as a great honor and an exceptional opportunity to attain unto God, he wrote to the Romans to not cause him this great evil and to let him be martyred because he wished to attain unto Christ as soon as possible. In the same epistle, Ignatius also explains his views on martyrdom which will be used in developing this paper.

But before elaborating more on this matter, following are some of Ignatius’ most famous quotes which remain for all Christians as a clear proof of his faithfulness and courage:

“For I fear lest your very love should do me wrong. For you may easily do what you will. But for me it is difficult to attain unto God, unless you spare me” (*Romans*, I, 2).

“For I shall never have such an opportunity of attaining unto God, nor can you, if you keep silent, be credited with a nobler deed” (*Romans*, II, 1).

4 Because this article was translated from Romanian to English, for the Romanian version, Ignatius’ writings came from: *Scrierile părinților apostolici*, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1979, but all quotes in English are taken from: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/srawley/index.html>, accessed 15.03.2012. For English text, you may also use the book of C. C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 64-88.

“(…) I die willingly for God, if you hinder not. I intreat you, do not unseasonably befriend me. Suffer me to belong to the wild beasts, through whom I may attain unto God. I am God’s grain, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread. Rather entice the wild beasts to become my tomb and to leave naught of my body (…). Then shall I truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not see even my body. (…) But if I suffer, I am Jesus Christ’s freedman, and in Him I shall arise free” (*Romans*, IV, 1-3).

“(…) May I have joy of the beasts that are prepared for me. (…) I will even entice them to devour me expeditiously (…). And even though they are not willing without constraint, I will compel them. Pardon me. I know what is expedient for me. Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May naught of things visible or invisible seek to allure me; that I may attain unto Jesus Christ. Come fire and cross and conflicts with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of the whole body; come grievous torments of the devil upon me, – only may they aid me in attaining unto Jesus Christ” (*Romans*, VII, 2.3).

“(…) Him I seek Who died for us. Him I desire, Who rose [for our sakes]. My travail-pains are upon me. Forgive me, brethren. Hinder me not from entering into life: desire not my death. Bestow not upon the world him who desires to be God’s; nor tempt me with the things of this life. Suffer me to receive pure light. When I come thither then shall I be a man indeed. Suffer me to be an imitator of the passion of my God. (…)” (*Romans*, VI, 1-3).

“(…) Even though I should come and intreat you, hearken not even to me, but rather trust these words which I write unto you. For I write unto you in the midst of life, enamoured of death. (…)” (*Romans*, VII, 2).

Ignatius is also known for introducing a few new terms into the Christian language which facilitated a clearer understanding of some Christian concepts. For instance, the word *Christianity* (*Magnesians* X, 1, 3; *Romans* III, 3) is a word used for the first time by Ignatius in order to show the new situation in the world which was created by the teaching of Christ. Another term is *Catholic Church* (*Smyrnaeans* VIII, 2) – meaning the ecumenical, universal church which spoke of unity of doctrine within the true church as opposed to heretical communities (Feciouru, 1979, 151-152). Moreover, historian Mark A. Noll (2008, 49) believes that the first Christian creed which we have in writing from our Eastern fathers is also a legacy of Ignatius of Antioch. The creed was passed on in writing through the entire ninth chapter of Ignatius’ epistle to the Trallians⁵.

“*Stop your ears then when any one speaks unto you apart from Jesus Christ,*

5 M. A. Noll, *Momente Cruciale in istoria Bisericii* (Title in English: *Turning Points*), Logos, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, 49.

Who is of the race of David, the child of Mary, Who was truly born, and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died, before the eyes of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth; Who also was truly raised from the dead, since His Father raised Him up, Who in like manner will also raise up us who believe on Him – even His Father will raise us in Christ Jesus, apart from Whom we have not that life which is life indeed” (Trallians, IX, 1-2).

Analysis and Comments

Attaining unto God Through Martyrdom

There are several passages where Ignatius uses the expression “*attain unto God*”.⁶ For instance, in his epistle to the Trallians (XII, 2), Ignatius asks of them, both him and his bonds, to support him in prayer so that he may “*attain unto God*”. When faced with such a request, it begs the question as to what he is referring when he says he wants to “*attain unto God*”. Is he referring to salvation? If so, then why does he need prayer support? Does not Ignatius know that God can be attained by any person who has faith in Christ, and that this matter must be resolved individually?

There are several answers to this question, but two of them will be illustrated in what follows, attempting at the same time to present the most plausible one in the end.

Salvation Through Deeds

First of all, it would seem that to Ignatius, martyrdom was the way to salvation; therefore, to him salvation can also be achieved through deeds.

Good Deeds, Suffering and Martyrdom Help Achieve Salvation

In his epistle to Polycarp (VI, 2), he says, “*Let your works be your deposit, that you may receive the sums credited to you as your due,*” after which he goes on to say that he hopes that through his suffering he may “*attain unto God*” (Polycarp VII, 1). In the epistle to the Smyrnaeans (IX, 2), we find Ignatius again encourag-

6 See *Ignatius to the Magnesians* XIV, 1, *Ignatius to the Trallians* XII, 2, *Ignatius to the Ephesians* V, 1, and *Ignatius to Polycarp* VII, 1.

ing his addressees by saying to them, “*May God reward you, and as you endure for His sake, so shall you attain unto Him.*” From this, it can be gathered that what gives a Christian the strength to endure suffering to the end is precisely the divine reward, and that suffering is just a means to attain unto God. So it could be said that we are talking about salvation through deeds.

At the same time, in his epistle to Polycarp, Ignatius says, “*And above all for God’s sake we ought to endure all things, that He also may endure us*” (Polycarp, III, 1). Another famous quote is that which he wrote to the Romans when he writes, “*Suffer me to belong to the wild beasts, through whom I may attain unto God. I am God’s grain, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread*” (Romans, IV, 1). We see, thus, that to Ignatius, purity is gained through martyrdom. Here is one last quote from his epistle to the Romans (VI, 2) which illustrates his idea about salvation and martyrdom: “*Hinder me not from entering into life: desire not my death.*” It must be understood that this is a play on words which can be deciphered only in context. The idea behind it is that Ignatius is asking the Romans to let him die as a martyr, which is why he says, “*Hinder me not from entering into life;*” when he says, “*desire not my death,*” he is essentially asking them not to oppose his martyrdom because that, to him, would truly mean death, not physically, but spiritually. In other words, he was saying, if I don’t die as a martyr, I lose eternal life. The previous quotes are some of the most important quotes which reveal the theology of salvation through deeds in which Ignatius seemed to believe. At the same time, it can be noted that to Ignatius, death as a martyr brings with it the certainty of eternal life.

Not Yet Worthy of Salvation

Ignatius also states several times that he is not yet worthy of God, in other words, he cannot yet attain unto God because he had not yet been martyred. For instance, in the epistle to the *Trallians* (XII, 3), he questions his worthiness and therefore his possibility to attain unto God, and in *Trallians* (V, 1), he says, “*For we suffer lack of many things, that we may not come short of God.*” In *Ephesians* (XII, 2), Ignatius speaks of the Apostle Paul who suffered martyrdom and was thus worthy of congratulation which is why he wants to follow in the apostle’s footsteps: “*(...) Paul, who was sanctified and well approved, who is worthy of congratulation; in whose footsteps may I be found closely following (...)*”.

All these arguments, along with many others, seem to indicate the fact that in Ignatius’ view, worthiness and attaining unto God can be achieved through martyrdom. Hence, salvation becomes more certain if one dies an honorable death such as that of a martyr. At the same time, Ignatius felt that “*unless we are ready of our own accord to die unto His Passion then His life is not in us*” (Magnesians, V, 2). If we take this idea to the extreme, we may easily fall into the trap of desiring at all costs a death in the name of Jesus Christ, lest we miss out on eternal life.

By correlating these affirmations with those in *Romans* (I, 2) where he states that he hopes to “*receive his inheritance without hindrance,*” after which he goes on to say, “*For I fear lest your very love should do me wrong. For you may easily do what you will. But for me it is difficult to attain unto God, unless you spare me,*”⁷ we are led to believe that Ignatius believes that his unworthiness stems precisely from the fact that he has not yet been martyred, and he is troubled by the thought that the brothers in Rome might deprive him of this major opportunity. To him, it is almost like losing the possibility of salvation which is why he asks them not to intervene on his behalf because it would not be a favor to him, but a great evil. He even goes as far as to say, “*Even though I should come and intreat you, hearken not even to me, but rather trust these words which I write unto you*” (*Romans*, VII, 2).

Martyrdom at All Costs

The previous quotes make most people believe that Ignatius did not clearly understand the difference between martyrdom and suicide. It appears that to him it was more important than anything to gain at any cost the death to which he had already been condemned, no matter what he would have thought at the moment of his death. Continuing with this theme, Ignatius states in *Romans* (V, 2), “*I will even entice them to devour me expeditiously, and not to refrain, as they have refrained from some, through fear. And even though they are not willing without constraint, I will compel them.*” These are some of the passages that complicate our understanding of Ignatius’ concept of martyrdom. He speaks as if it is of utmost importance to die while Christians are being persecuted, as if disregarding all other aspects related to true martyrdom, as Clement of Alexandria would later describe it (Clement, 1982, 245).

In this case, it begs the question as to what the point is in dying as a “martyr” if rationally one is ready to give up martyrdom. That is to say, can an individual be considered an authentic martyr if he ends up dying because his sentence is irrevocable, but if it were not so he would have long given up dying as a martyr? In other words, can we still call a martyr a person who is afraid of death, but the context has brought him face to face with it and now he cannot turn back? Some would say that as long as you come to die for such a noble cause, whether you are afraid of death or not, that death is still beneficial because through it you attain unto God which is everyone’s desire.

Up to this point, it could be said that to Ignatius, martyrdom is the way to salvation; in other words, salvation can be achieved through deeds.

In what follows, I will debate a second position on this issue and follow its

7 These words were said within the context of the brothers in Rome wanting to intervene on Ignatius’ behalf, an idea which he vehemently opposed.

arguments, so that in the end a conclusion may be drawn as to Ignatius' true idea on martyrdom and salvation.

Salvation Through Christ

The second answer that can be given to the question posed in the beginning is that to Ignatius, to attain unto God in the context of martyrdom does not in the least refer to salvation, but to a way for Christians to attain eternal life more speedily. In this case, Ignatius' attitude in asking the Christians in Rome not to intervene on his behalf seems right because he would rather die and be with God than have his body and soul tormented in this world of sins. If we consider this, then we cannot absolutely state that Ignatius believed that salvation can be achieved through deeds, but only that martyrdom is the passage way from the limited human space to the eternal and divine one, and that this way has been offered to us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (see Țon, 1999, 352).

Salvation is Achieved Through Christ

All that is left is to demonstrate that in the opinion of Ignatius, salvation is achieved through Christ, and to clarify the meaning of his words which have caused confusion up to this point. This will also be the means to counter argue the position according to which Ignatius believed that salvation can be achieved through deeds.

It is true that if read superficially, Ignatius' epistles could tempt one to believe that he saw martyrdom as a way to reach perfection in the sense of salvation, but upon searching more closely, one can notice that Ignatius was aware that life can be received only by the suffering of Christ, and not that of humanity.

There are numerous passages⁸ which prove that Ignatius knew that eternal life could only be achieved through Christ, and a number of those will be mentioned in what follows. For instance, in *Ephesians* (XX, 2), Ignatius states that a person can "live forever in Jesus Christ." In order to strengthen the role of Christ even more, he states in the epistle to the *Magnesians* (VIII, 2) that even "the Divine prophets lived a life in accordance with Christ Jesus," and because of that they were persecuted, like Christians, but even more than that, they were "inspired by [His] grace" just as Christians today also live by his grace, and not by the law. These are words which help us see that Ignatius believed that neither those from the past, nor those from the present can receive salvation through the acts of the

8 See: *Ignatius to the Ephesians*: I,1; II,2; VII,2; IX,1; XVIII,2; *Magnesians* I,2; XI,1; *Trallians*: Introduction; II,1; IX,2; *Philadelphians*: V,2; *Smyrnaeans*: II,1; V,3.

law, but by the grace shown to us through Christ. Consequently, we would not be permitted to come to erroneous conclusions regarding Ignatius' theology.

Martyrdom Does Not Offer Salvation, Only a Special Status

We do not mean to conceal the fact that to Ignatius dying as a martyr meant more than dying an ordinary death. He says in several different passages that “*through martyrdom he becomes the perfect disciple.*”⁹ Thus, in Ignatius' thinking, this perfection is an attribute specific to martyrdom, and as such, even though martyrdom cannot give salvation to a person (T̄on, 1999, 350), it perfects them. Here are some passages to illustrate this: Ignatius tells the Ephesians that he is hoping, through their prayers, to “*attain my purpose of fighting with wild beasts at Rome, that through my attaining I may be enabled to be a disciple*” (*Ephesians*, I, 2). From the same epistle, it seems that his bonds grant him a particular authority and that although he has not yet reached perfection, meaning martyrdom, the road on which he set out makes him privileged: “*I do not command you, as though I were somewhat. For even though I be bound in the Name, I have not yet become perfected in Jesus Christ. For now I am making a beginning of discipleship*” (*Ephesians*, III, 1). In one passage, Ignatius seems to imply that those who take the road of martyrdom will be initiated into the mysteries of the Scriptures and of the kingdom (T̄on, 1999, 161). In a different one, when he compares himself to the brothers he left at the church in Syria, he humbly claims himself “*unworthy to be counted as one of them,*” but he could indeed be “*somebody if he attained unto God*” - meaning to attain by way of martyrdom (*Romans*, IX, 2). In another passage where he talks about the fearful attitude that the disciples had at the resurrection, he says that in that moment, their fear turned into courage, and then “*they despised death, and were found to rise above death*” (*Smyrnaeans*, III, 2). This is an argument in favor of the fact that Ignatius believed that the person who has the courage to stare death in the eye (Macculloch, 2011, 168), the way the disciples did and the way he eventually did himself, becomes *special*. So we see that in Ignatius' view, martyrdom may not lead to salvation, but it will grant a privileged status.

I Die to be with God

The question still remains: What did Ignatius mean when he asked the churches to pray that he “*attain unto God*”? I believe that this request, which is made to the *Trallians* (XII, 2), *Magnesians* (XIV, 1), and *Smyrnaeans* (XI, 1) alike, still has to do with the Roman brothers' unwanted intervention. What frightened Ignatius was not the thought that if he did not die as a martyr he would lose his salvation, but the fact that if he did not become a martyr, he would have to con-

9 See: *Ignatius to the Romans* V,3, *Trallians* V,2 and *Ephesians* I,2; III,1.

tinue living in the physical world apart from that perfect communion with God which the Christian obtains only after death or at the second coming of Christ. So when he says he wants to attain unto God, he is not referring to obtaining salvation through martyrdom, but to that communion with God.

This idea is very well supported in his epistle to the Romans; when Ignatius explains why he does not wish that the church intervene on his behalf, he says that no matter how atrocious his coming death will be, he is not afraid because communion with Christ is much more important to him: “*May naught of things visible or invisible seek to allure me; that I may attain unto Jesus Christ. Come fire and cross and conflicts with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of the whole body; come grievous torments of the devil upon me,—only may they aid me in attaining unto Jesus Christ*” (Romans, V, 3). As he continues, his argument becomes more and more passionate and clear. His statements plainly show that he desires martyrdom because death itself entails abandoning the physical realm and entering the spiritual (Cairns, 2007, 68). The idea of remaining in the material world is terrifying, which is why he wants to leave it at all costs in order to be with God:

“The furthest bounds of the universe, and the kingdoms of this world shall profit me nothing. It is better for me to die for the sake of Jesus Christ than to reign over the boundaries of the earth. Him I seek Who died for us. Him I desire, Who rose [for our sakes]. My travail-pains are upon me. Forgive me, brethren. Hinder me not from entering into life: desire not my death. Bestow not upon the world him who desires to be God’s; nor tempt me with the things of this life. Suffer me to receive pure light. When I come thither then shall I be a man indeed. Suffer me to be an imitator of the passion of my God (...)” (Romans, VI, 1-3).

To Ignatius, it is an oxymoron to speak of Christ and at the same time to love the physical world and this life; it is a contradiction: “*Use not the words ‘Jesus Christ’ yet desire the world*” (Romans, VII, 1), he says. At the same time, he shows his disgust for this world and its fleeting pleasures by saying, “*I have no pleasure in the food of corruption nor in the pleasures of this material life. I desire God’s bread, which is the flesh of Christ (...)*” (Romans, VII, 3). To him, a true Christian must be ready at all times to give up this life for the sake of Christ, no matter how cruel a death he or she would suffer. Christians must understand that the beauty of eternal communion with God is infinite, therefore it is not worth missing an opportunity to abandon the physical life.

If we grasp what he truly meant by attaining unto God, then it is much easier to comprehend why he made that request to the churches. At the same time, we will be able to understand the counter arguments to the supposition that Ignatius believed that salvation can also be obtained through martyrdom.

Pray that I be Able to Face the Pressure

We have found that Ignatius was aware that salvation can be received only through grace and not through deeds, but if that is the case, then in order to give a final answer to the matter that was announced in the beginning, it must first be asked: *Why, then, was it necessary for the churches to support Ignatius in prayer?*

First of all, his request to the churches must be viewed within Ignatius' context. Ignatius thought that he could reach God sooner if he was martyred. However, due to the fact that the brothers in Rome were trying to prevent that, he was increasingly fearful of not being able to have that honorable death and of being forced to live in the material world. This is the reason for which he asked them to pray that his martyrdom not be prevented, and with it the possibility to *attain unto God sooner*.

I do not believe that Ignatius was asking the churches to pray that he would be martyred in order to become worthy of salvation because he already thought himself worthy of it through the grace he had received from God through Christ, and there are quotes to support this statement. For instance, in his epistle to the *Ephesians* (XXI, 2), Ignatius says that he "*was deemed worthy to be found destined for the honour of God*" - so it is not a question of unworthiness. Furthermore, from his words in the epistle to the *Trallians* (XII, 3), "pray for me too, for I have need of your love in the mercy of God, that I may be deemed worthy," it can be gathered that he does not think himself unworthy of salvation, but that he realizes that the salvation of God is in God's mercy. Consequently, it may be inferred that he already thought himself worthy of meeting with God, and there was no actual need for him to die a martyr in order to be saved.

It may be assumed that Ignatius was asking for prayer because he knew he would be put under much greater pressure than he had encountered up to that point. He was probably expecting the pressure to be so great that he would want to renounce the Lord, making it thus impossible for him to ever attain unto God. I believe that this was the very thought which troubled him more than any other, and why he knew that he could face the possible external and internal (from his own mind) temptations only through the prayers of the brothers and sisters.

Hence, when Ignatius asks them to "*pray that he may attain unto God*," he is not asking for intercession for his salvation, nor is he referring to some worthiness he would receive through martyrdom; instead, he is talking of the constancy of faith which would grant him entry into the kingdom of God.

Perfection Through Martyrdom

Ignatius uses expressions such as "*now I become a disciple*" or "*now I am perfected*." It must be asked what he means by these kinds of statements.

Now I am Perfected

In order to tackle this issue regarding perfection, it is necessary to return to the matter of *unworthiness* in the eyes of Ignatius, a point which has already been partially discussed in the previous sub-chapter. The expression “*I am not worthy*” in the context of Ignatius’ writings may tempt us to assume that he refers to unworthiness regarding salvation, and that this unworthiness stemmed from the fact that he had not yet been martyred. Nonetheless, we have already proven that Ignatius did not deem himself unworthy of salvation, and that this matter was connected to something else.

I believe that this unworthiness was first and foremost related to the battle he had to fight to the end with his own body and his own temptations just as Paul said in 1 Cor. 9:27: “No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”; or in Philippians 3:12: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (NIV ‘84). Within the same lines, Ignatius says, “*All things I endure, since He, the perfect Man, makes me strong*” (*Smirnaeans*, IV, 2). It can be seen, thus, that to Ignatius, his perfection goes hand in hand with worthiness. If he were unable to fight temptation and thus not take the process of being perfected to the end, he would become unworthy, making all of his efforts futile. But were this process to end well, it would bring him worthiness to stand face to face with his God.

In order to fully tackle the question of Ignatius’ conception of perfection, the two kinds of expressions he uses must be joined into one.

Now I Become a Perfect Disciple

The idea that Ignatius had about perfection is very closely related to his understanding of the profile of a true disciple. Ignatius believed that in order to be a true disciple, one had to be able to imitate Christ in all aspects of life and death, just as Christ’s disciples had done (Ton, 1999, 351). As such, for someone to become a perfect disciple, they necessarily had to die like Christ and his disciples.

Both Christ and the disciples had to face suffering and martyrdom which means that every Christian that dies as a martyr becomes in this way a perfect disciple. As a result, when Ignatius talks about being perfected through martyrdom, he also includes in it the idea of perfection in discipleship, that is, in imitating Christ. For instance, when Ignatius cautions the Ephesians about false teachers, he teaches them that those are not the people they should imitate; instead we ought to “*endeavour to be imitators of the Lord*” (*Ephesians*, X, 3).

Being in chains was an important step for Ignatius toward discipleship, but it took more than those bonds and the understanding of Scripture to make him

a perfect disciple. He says, “*For even though I am in bonds and am able to understand heavenly things and the ordering of angels and the musterings of heavenly rulers, things visible and invisible, yet am I not thereby already a disciple. For we suffer lack of many things, that we may not come short of God*” (Trallians, V, 2). As we can see, Ignatius still deems himself unworthy because he had not yet succeeded in imitating Christ fully (Bowersock, 1995, 77); he had not yet completely crucified his flesh, and had not yet paid the price for his faith with his life.

Another argument to support the aforementioned position is found in his epistle to the Trallians when he warns them against the heresy of Doceticism. There were voices among the unbelievers that claimed that Christ only seemed to suffer, an idea that Ignatius wanted to fight, which is why he states that if Christ “*suffered in semblance (...) why am I in bonds? Why moreover do I pray that I may fight with the wild beasts? Then I die for naught*” (Trallians, X, 1). From this line of reasoning, it can be understood that to Ignatius only the person that could follow Christ entirely in suffering and death could be a perfect disciple. If Christ only seemed to suffer, then Ignatius’ real suffering would make it impossible for him to follow in the footsteps of Christ. The issue is not that Christ had not suffered, but that he did so only apparently, which would be impossible for any human to do, and as a result, achieving that perfection through suffering and death would be equally impossible.

There is another passage in the epistle to the Smyrnaeans where Ignatius speaks of becoming worthy. This passage may also be understood in the light of perfect discipleship. The author says, “*In accordance with the will of God I have been deemed worthy, not of my own conscious act, but by God’s grace, which I pray may be given to me completely, that by your prayer I may attain unto God*” (Smyrnaeans, XI, 1). Ignatius recognizes that all the opportunities he may receive in this life and the next are due entirely to the will of God. He also recognizes that through the prayers of the church, he can fight the battle to the end (Ṫon, 1999, 351), thus imitating Christ in all aspects of both life and of death, and by this, attain unto God.

Coming back to the broader picture of this discussion, we will look at one last passage from the epistle to the *Philadelphians* (V, 1): “*(...) therefore I fear the more, since I am not yet perfected. But your prayer unto God shall perfect me, that I may attain unto that lot, in which I have obtained mercy.*” These words clearly show a combination of several ideas which have already been discussed. Ignatius is essentially saying that in spite of the fact that he has not yet been perfected in discipleship, he can fight to the end through the prayer support of the church, be martyred, and in this way become perfect from the point of view of faithfulness and discipleship, only to ultimately receive the salvation that has been prepared for him and at the same time attain unto God, as he wished.

This is why Ignatius asked the churches to pray for him and what he meant

by “*attaining unto God*”. All of this gives an even clearer insight into how Ignatius saw the combination of deeds and faith in Christ which lead to salvation.

The Hope of Resurrection

Another idea that Ignatius briefly tackled in his epistles, and which will be shortly discussed in what follows, is the idea of *resurrection*.

Ignatius eagerly awaited being martyred because he was aware that he would be with God forever, but what gave him courage besides that was the hope of resurrection. There are a few passages where he discusses this matter, but we must keep in mind that to Ignatius, resurrection belongs to the same plan of eternal coexistence with God.

First of all, Ignatius acknowledged that there would be no hope of resurrection if it were not for Christ. Christ gives any Christian hope and courage because he suffered, died and then rose again. In the beginning of his epistle to the *Trallians*, he says, “(...) *through the passion of Jesus Christ, Who is our hope through the resurrection unto Him*”. Therefore the passion of Jesus Christ gives Christians hope for two reasons; first of all, he did not only suffer and die, but he also rose again and his resurrection gives us hope that one day we will be with him. Second of all, because Christ rose again, so shall we, as Paul told the Corinthians:

“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost” (1 Corinthians 15:12-18).

Apparently, Ignatius knew and understood these words very well. That is why he does not face death like someone whose faith is futile, or as one who dies and is lost forever, but as one who has the hope of an eternal resurrection.

One last passage where Ignatius touches on this topic is found in the epistle to Polycarp. He says that thanks to the prayers of the church, he will attain unto God, and at the resurrection he will be a disciple of the church (*Polycarp*, VII, 1).

Admittedly, it is difficult to grasp Ignatius' view on the world after the resurrection, but it is obviously a time of reunion, joy and hope, and because of such thinking, Ignatius does not find it hard to accept martyrdom without fear.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to mention again that Ignatius was one of the Eastern apostolic fathers who saw martyrdom as an act of grace from God. Because of that, he speaks enthusiastically in his epistles on the subjects of suffering and martyrdom. Martyrdom was not a frightening matter to him, but something that increased his joy because it leads to attaining unto God.

Ignatius speaks beautifully on these topics in his seven epistles. He calls his chains “*spiritual pearls*” (*Ephesians*, XI, 2), or he sees them as instruments through which he “*sings the praises of the churches*” (*Magnesian*, I, 2). When he speaks of the way he would be martyred, he creates images that are specific to the Roman arenas, saying that he would be “*fighting with wild beasts at Rome*” (*Ephesians*, I, 2). This proves that to him the moment of martyrdom is not one to cause fear (Macculloch, 2011, 168), but it is described instead as a gladiator’s fight which brings victory and glory to the warrior. The beasts that he mentions could very well be the wild beasts, the Roman authorities, or evil spirits that would try to steal his hope and faith in Christ.

Although a well articulated theology cannot be found in the writings of Ignatius, such as Paul’s, and that at times it would seem that he is inconsistent with his ideas, after a longer and more detailed study, some clearly drawn ideas can be found. Ignatius acknowledges that martyrdom is not the solution for his salvation, but the right way to quickly leave this earth which is subject to sin in order to gain Christ and heaven. He also acknowledges that both salvation and the resurrection of Christians at the resurrection of the righteous are only possible because of the passion and resurrection of Christ.

Another reason why Ignatius wanted to be martyred is because every Christian must be an imitator of Christ in life as well as in death, and as a result of that imitation, the Christian becomes the perfect disciple.

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Ruben Ioan Ivan

Povezanost spasenja, mučeništva i trpljenja prema sv. Ignaciju Antiohijskom

Sažetak

Ignacije Antiohijski prenio nam je velik dio svojih ideja o spasenju, mučeništvu i trpljenju poslanicama koje je napisao nedugo prije svog mučeništva. Autor nije baš jasno artikulirao odnos između spasenja i mučeništva, vjerojatno zbog toga što nije imao dovoljno vremena da to učini. Stoga, ako uzajamno povežemo neke od izraza koje upotrebljava kao što su “doseći Boga” i “sada sam usavršen” sa činom mučeništva, činilo bi se da je mučeništvo jedini način za kršćanina da dođe do Boga i da postane savršen. Ovaj rad dokazuje da Ignacije ne smatra mučeništvo sredstvom za postizanje spasenja, već ispravnim načinom kojim kršćanin treba živjeti zemaljski život kako bi bio s Bogom u vječnosti, zahvaljujući spasenju koje mu je dano po Kristu.