
In the early second century church in Antioch the more egalitarianly minded charismatics and the more hierarchically ordered bishops, also called ‘presbyters’, clashed over the issue of leadership. Seeking to resolve the matter, Ignatius advocated a single authority figure, one bishop, in contradistinction with a plurality of bishops, to be a focus of ministry. His suggestion was not, however, well received. What peace that there had been was shattered. Ignatius, deemed to be the catalyst for the disturbance, was arrested, removed from Antioch, sent, overland, to be part of the entertainment in the Roman amphitheatre.

At the time pagan processions were led by priests bearing images of the gods, *theophoroi*, who so made the gods ‘sacramentally present’ (p. 75). Not being private processions, others, both from the same city and from neighbouring towns and villages, participated; and in doing so, they became ‘joint sacrificers’ in a rite that became a ‘joint sacrifice’ (p. 75). As a consequence, these processions united both the people of the city where the procession occurred, and these people with those of the neighbouring, autonomous towns, in a confederation.

Such thinking, Brent suggests, Ignatius adopted. Certainly Ignatius described himself as *theophoros*. He saw himself as a ‘scapegoat’ sacrifice, offered for the peace of Antioch. Further, he presented his progress to Rome as a Christian procession, in which he both, as *theophoros*, made ‘sacramentally present’ the one God, and united the communities which he visited, or whose representatives he welcomed, with his, through a Christian version of a *homo-noia* treaty. So, Brent concludes, Ignatius’ ‘construction of his martyr procession and the rhetoric with which he proclaimed it, his demand for clerical ambassadors to spread his construction of their social reality along the imperial highway, derived its force from parallels with the contemporary movement for pagan, Hellenistic unity, the Second Sophistic’ (p. 79).

Polycarp, in his *Letter to the Philippians*, it would seem, represented a different world from Ignatius’. Though he called himself a *theophoros*, he did not call himself a bishop; and when, in his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius called Polycarp a bishop, Polycarp probably, Brent proposes, thought of himself as a presbyter amongst presbyters, or a bishop amongst other bishops, their *de facto* leader, but not one singled out either by his bearing an image which the others did not bear, or by his being able to do anything which they could not.
Certainly, it would seem that Polycarp did not think of himself as Ignatius did, as a single bishop, *the* bishop, *the* focus of a single ministry with presbyters and deacons.

Given both Polycarp’s thinking and that of the more charismatic leaders of the church in Antioch, Brent maintains that Ignatius’ letters were not describing an existing ecclesial reality. Rather, in and through his rhetoric and actions, Ignatius was attempting to create a new ecclesial reality, wherein a presbyter, *primus inter pares*, moved from being *a* bishop to being *the* bishop. Brent therefore will not place Ignatius’ letters in the second half of the second century or later, precisely because, if the letters were so dated, ‘their view of the legitimacy of single bishops would depend on a doctrine of the apostolic succession that they simply do not have’ (p. 150). In short, they are too early to display the later successionist view.

So Brent proposes a strong argument for accepting the authenticity of the middle recension, written at the end of the apostolic period; and, by setting Ignatius’ augments concerning church governance by a single bishop in the context of the Second Sophistic, he offers his readers a fresh and vital perspective through which to review Ignatian studies.

He also raises certain questions for current ecclesial studies. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, assumed, Brent asserts, that the church of the first century was organised just as the church of Eusebius’ own time was. So Eusebius fused the past and the present into an ongoing present. Brent rightly challenged this perspective, arguing strongly for historical development, even in the short time which ranged from that of the apostle Paul, through that of Ignatius, to that of Irenaeus and Cyprian. By extension, Brent therefore challenges those who would maintain that episcopacy is *semper eadem*, assuming that episcopacy now is the norm, and that episcopacy then was as episcopacy now is. Brent’s resisting finding in Ignatius’ thought a successionist view of episcopacy perhaps should prompt readers to engage more readily in the ecumenical debate which sees historic episcopacy, less as a guarantee of apostolicity, and more as a sign. It may even encourage that generosity which allows churches which in the past have not preserved the historic episcopal succession to embrace it, without having to pretend that, prior to such an embracing, they were not apostolic. Brent also argues that in Ignatius we glimpse a model of episcopal governance not wedded to a defined geographical domain. This, Brent then suggests, may suggest a possible way forward in the present crisis in the Anglican Communion over issues of sexuality. For, in place of a territorially based episcopacy, which Brent maintains ‘is failing to secure the unity of the church’ (p. 161), the Anglican Communion may wish