IGNATIUS TO THE ROMANS 2:1c

BY

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Approximately in the year A.D. 108, Roman authorities forcibly removed Ignatius from his post as bishop of the church in Antioch of Syria, taking him in chains to Rome to face martyrdom in the Roman arena. During his forced journey, Ignatius was able to visit the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna in the province of Asia, receiving delegations as well from three other churches—Ephesus, Magnesia, and Tralles. Ignatius wrote to all five churches and, in addition, he sent a letter to the church at Rome and also a semi-personal letter to Polycarp, bishop of the church of Smyrna. All seven letters are extant today, thereby enriching our Christian heritage. My main concern is with the letter to the church at Rome. Similar to Paul’s letter to the same church fifty years earlier, Ignatius writes to Christians whom he had not previously known but whom he hopes soon to see. He speaks quite openly of his anticipated struggle with wild beasts in the Roman arena (Rom 5:2, cf. Eph 1:2'), a fate which he views as both his destined lot (κληρος — Rom 1:2, cf. Trall 12:3; Philad 5:1) and the will of God (Rom 2:2). Therefore, he requests the Christians in Rome not to intercede with the ruling authorities to secure his release (Rom 4:1-2). The request startles the serious reader and yet, at the same time here and there, the letter appears to raise the haunting question: as he arrives at Rome, will Ignatius stand firm in his purpose or will he flinch in fear before his impending fate? In answer, the bishop of Antioch reveals uncommon candor and frankness as he writes, “Even if, when I am present (with you), I plead with you [i.e. “intercede for me’’], do not be persuaded by me; be persuaded much more by the things which I am (now) writing to you” (Rom 7:2). What an honest, personal assessment coming from a stalwart seasoned Christian!

Over against this brief descriptive background, my essay aims to understand the third sentence of Rom 2:1 (= Rom 2:1c). The printed texts of J. B. Lightfoot, G. Bosio, and K. Bihlmeyer—based on versional evidence—have produced the following reading:
While the alternation between *logos* and *phōné* is common to all the versions, the question remains as to whether—in the first apodosis—the future form *γενήσομαι* is to be read with manuscripts S Sm (cf. also Zahn’s text and Schoedel’s translation) or to be omitted with manuscripts L (Am) C (cf. the texts of Lightfoot and Bihlmeyer). On the surface at least, a future form in the first apodosis corresponds fittingly with the uncontested future *έσομαι* in the second apodosis. The difference between the readings, apparently, is between a future and a present reality. “I shall be a word of God” suggests the new life of the bishop after his martyrdom in the presence of the living God. “I am a word of God” implies an “incarnation” of that word in the actual martyrdom of the bishop. In either case, only the resolute silence of the church in behalf of Ignatius can allow the event to happen.

But from the versional reading, it is the alternation between (or the distinction of) *λόγος* and *φωνή* which claims our attention. Lightfoot affirms that the *logos* of God is the manifestation of the Divine purpose in the martyrdom of Ignatius. Should that purpose be thwarted by an untimely intercession of the church, the Divine plan “will be reduced to a mere inarticulate meaningless cry.” An appeal is made to philosophical literature (Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch) and to Christian theologians (Melito, Origen, John the Monk and others) where a clear distinction is made between *λόγος* and *φωνή.* There is, however, obvious unevenness in the sources cited. For example, although Origen accepts the distinction between Jesus the *λόγος* (John 1:1) and John the *φωνή* (John 1:23), John’s “voice” is certainly no “inarticulate meaningless cry” or “irrational cry”, as he announces the Coming One. As for John the Monk (4th century), after quoting the text of Rom 2:1c as the versions render it, his lengthy excursus reveals no less than three distinct ideas behind the alternation of *λόγος* and *φωνή.* First, he implies that “I shall be a word of God” refers to the world to come for while the saints of God are in the world, they are “men of the Voice; but after they are gone out of the world of the Voice they will be men of the Word and not of the Voice.” Second, however, John the Monk affirms that the *λόγος* and the *φωνή* are mixed together in the human being—“as the soul is mixed with the body, the Word is mixed with the Voice.” And third,