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Book Review: Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways

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an eternal spring the life of heavenly beings." A Greek inscription of one Macaria, who "lived three years, three months, sixteen days," claims that "she died a believer." On the other hand, he evenhandedly reveals how other Christian infant inscriptions lack such claims, concluding no pattern of routinely baptizing infants shortly after birth (pp. 376–77). Ferguson's analysis rightly includes him engaging the influential 1958 work of Jeremias, who argued that infant baptism was normative for the Christians in the first three centuries.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the book is the indispensable theology surrounding baptismal acts, particularly those seemingly minor practices included in the often variable rite of baptism. Exorcism, the Trinity, healing, nudity, typology, blood and martyrdom, and Christological imagery arise in patristic writings, liturgy, and art, as well as ideas of crucifixion, purification, resurrection, new life, and eternal life. Several examples can illustrate the multiplicity of topics associated with early church baptism. Basil recognizes the place of raising hands, kneeling, and standing (p. 619). Tertullian and the Pseudepigraphal *Acts of Paul* offer the earliest evidence of triple immersion that became customary from the third to fifth centuries and is still practiced in Eastern Orthodoxy today. Syriac sources display a practice of spitting at the devil in renunciation early in the baptism ceremony. Justin suggests how the rite was followed immediately by the opportunity to receive the Eucharist with the congregation for the first time. Ambrose refers to an "opening of the ears" in the liturgy whereby the priest would touch the ears of the baptizand in a ceremony the night before her baptism, that she would be "open to his words" (p. 636).

Ferguson provides architectural and theological attention in a special section on baptisteries in both East and West. He includes the earliest dated Christian baptistery of Dura Europus in Syria, and the Greek graffiti in the room, "Christ Jesus be with you," is a reminder of the central place of Christ in Christian baptism (pp. 442–43). He presents twenty-four pictures of early baptisms on sarcophagi, carvings, and illustrated manuscripts in the third to sixth centuries, in addition to pictures of baptismal fonts with various features of shape and function.

Eerdmans has done a great service to publish this high-quality work, and the value to the field is obvious. *Baptism in the Early Church* is the most thorough, detailed handbook on baptism in the early church, surpassing all other single treatments of the topic. Its literature review plus its bibliographical material is bounteous, it deals with every considerable patristic figure, and its various motifs and applications receive due attention. In addition, it could serve as an excellent graduate study in the development of doctrine, and libraries with interests in Christian history must have this work. Cost will be a factor, but this almost thousand-page work will profit academic audiences with historical, theological, and social interests in one comprehensive volume. Perhaps its contents will help the church appreciate even more this historic and biblical rite, and so appreciate the unity and mystery prompting Paul's adage: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

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Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways: Early Jewish-Christian Relations. By Thomas A. Robinson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009, xiv + 285 pp., \$27.95 paper.

Ignatius of Antioch has long been an underused and undervalued contributor to the development of earliest Christianity. The reasons for this oversight vary from questions of the validity of his claim to be the bishop of Antioch in any meaningful sense

in early Christian history, to challenges of his sanity in light of his quest for martyrdom. Fortunately, this neglect has been remedied by some important recent works regarding the bishop of Antioch and his seven letters. Thomas A. Robinson's *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways* is a particularly welcomed analysis from a seasoned scholar who is not new to this terrain. His first monograph was *The Bauer Thesis Examined: the Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (SEBE 11; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1988), in which Robinson confronted numerous assumptions of Bauer's thesis for the Mediterranean world not long after this seminal work was translated into English (Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971]). The current work is a challenge to newer consensus in modern scholarship, particularly with reference to Ignatius's treatment of Jews and Judaism in his correspondence.

Robinson defends the significance of Ignatius and his devotion of a full volume to him in the opening chapter. Most crucial is that "Ignatius's writings speak forcefully to almost every issue in our contemporary debates about the early Christian movement, from the shaping of Christian self-understanding and its perception of the 'parting of the ways' from Judaism to the question of the diversity of early Christian assemblies, to the numerous developments that came to characterize the Christian movement by the mid-second century" (p. 5). The primary area of concern for Robinson, however, is the light that Ignatius's correspondence sheds on Christian identity and Jewish-Christian relations in this early period. In sum, Robinson asserts three main points: Ignatius presents Christianity as a movement entirely separated from Judaism and far more distinct than what the current scholarly debate admits; Ignatius's "pointed assessment of Judaism is much more dismissive and uncompromising" than what is often portrayed; and Ignatius represents a mainstream rather than a lone or novel position (p. 6).

To set the context of Ignatius, Robinson provides an enlightening analysis of the city of Antioch, its history, population, and cultural and religious mix, with a special focus upon the status of Jews and Judaism. Robinson is careful not to overstate evidences and cautions against such methodological errors as assuming parallels between Hellenistic cities in the Mediterranean world—a common temptation in light of the paucity of evidence for Antioch—and taking ancient sources at face value, particularly Josephus who, while a critically important voice, is an "apologist" for Judaism in Antioch (p. 30). The conclusion that emerges is that Antioch was a revitalized city in the Roman period as an imperial capital and strategic military center in the East. It was also a religiously diverse city with a significant Jewish population (estimates range from 22,000 to 45,000) that had maintained a presence in this city very likely for the entire four centuries of its history. The status of the Jewish community in Antioch was influenced by a variety of historical and social factors, including the Maccabean revolt of the second century BC, the first Judean revolt of AD 66–74, various waves of Jewish and pagan immigrants to the city, as well as the early presence and advance of Christians and Christianity.

Robinson tackles numerous thorny issues regarding Jews and their status, addressing questions of citizenship, as Josephus contended, or their constituting a *politeuma*, a self-governing community, in Antioch. Each of these options is dismissed due to a lack of verifiable evidence, the latter due essentially to questions of the real existence of such a category for Jews in the ancient world (p. 29). Robinson posits the Jews as a relatively stable population in Roman Antioch, somewhat at odds with the native population due in large part to the Jewish revolt of AD 66–74. For example, Josephus contended that the citizens of Antioch twice petitioned Titus to expel the Jewish residents from the city, but he refused (see Josephus, *J.W.* 7.100–103, 109; p. 36, n. 131). Robinson raises some important questions regarding how and to what degree the local Jewish community controlled admission to its circle, particularly in light of Jewish immigrants and Gentile converts, most pointedly after the Jewish revolt. If the native population was suspicious

of the Jewish population and Jewish immigrants to their city, then this issue would set the two communities at odds, a factor which would likely have implications for Jewish-Christian relations in Antioch as well.

Robinson addresses the topic of "Christian Conversion in Antioch" in chapter two. He provides an excellent analysis of such categories as proselytes and God-fearers, a vitally important study in light of modern theories regarding the growth of Christianity from these sub-groups and reconstructions which identify converts from these groups as the primary opponents of Ignatius. In short, Robinson challenges a number of concerns of these views: the numerical strength of each of these categories; the social and religious instability of Jewish proselytes; the position of Judaism as a "way station for pious Gentiles on their way to Christianity" (p. 48); and, most importantly, the likelihood that God-fearers and Jewish proselytes would continue to be a source for Christian conversion at Ignatius's point in history. On the latter point, it is clear from Acts that God-fearers were attracted to the new faith; however, what must be kept in mind is that the situation of Acts was decades prior to Ignatius's time, and the movement of individuals within these groupings from interest in Judaism to interest in Christianity is unlikely, particularly if Ignatius's writings are used as indicators.

What is quite fascinating from Ignatius's letters is that God-fearers and Jewish proselytes do not seem to be in view in any real sense. Ignatius is concerned about both Jews and Gentiles coming to faith in Christ; however, what seems to concern the bishop most in his polemical sections is individuals who come to the Christian faith from pagan backgrounds and then take special interest in Judaism. Thus, the Judaizers—if Ignatius's opponents can be identified as such—are not Jewish converts to Christianity seeking to retain and advance Jewish practices among Christians (though certainly such issues would concern our bishop); rather, they are Gentile converts to Christianity who have been introduced to Judaism through the new faith and have taken a special interest in Judaism, promoting its theology and practices. It is on this point that Robinson makes one of his most significant observations: "If we want to speak of a middle ground, *both* Christianity and the God-fearers should be considered such between paganism and Judaism, providing for some pagans a pathway to Judaism" (author's emphasis, p. 61). It is this context that creates the most likely situation in early second-century Antioch, where established Judaism and emerging Christianity competed for converts.

In this engaging discussion, Robinson challenges a number of consensus held among scholars of early Christianity and calls for more nuanced positions or their abandonment, including: the "age of anxiety" promoted by Dodds (p. 62); the urban nature of Judaism and Christianity in this era; the social and financial status of Jews; the continued attraction of Hellenized Jews, God-fearers, and Jewish proselytes to Christianity in the early second century; and the division of Judaism and Christianity into multiple "Judaisms" and "Christianities." Robinson argues that by the turn of the century, Christianity was still a fledgling movement struggling for legitimacy within an empire where scandalous rumors and threats of persecution were developing, while Judaism, still a legal religion, was developing its own response to the Christian movement and very likely advancing its own mission to Gentiles. In many senses, Judaism was an attractive option over Christianity because of its antiquity, legality, and established position in the Mediterranean world, its negative reputation notwithstanding.

As stated, Robinson laments the modern scholarly trend of multiplying "Judaisms" and "Christianities" in the ancient world. While he is willing to admit to the unique perspectives of various documents and collections of Jewish and Christian writings in this period, he does not see these diverse perspectives as the basis for a separate community for each document. Such a trend is not good historical method and often creates a picture of a fragmented religious world out of sorts with ancient realities. Using Ignatius again as an indicator, Robinson observes that he had two extreme positions within his church,

Judaizers on the one hand and Docetists on the other. Given this diversity within the Christian community that he served as bishop, Ignatius is a signal for the unity versus the fragmentation of early Christian communities. This point is further supported by the fact that Ignatius gives the impression that the schism within his church in Antioch was recent rather than a long-standing condition. Robinson argues, “groups were able to function with a range of options within single communities” (p. 75). What is more, “Those who contend that there were numerous theologically distinctive Christian communities in the year 100 must rest their argument on communities mostly without histories or futures” (p. 78). Similar arguments can be made for Judaism. The picture that emerges is that Judaism and Christianity were distinct and separate religions in the early second century AD, and Ignatius writes his letters as bishop of the church at Antioch, addressing as one of his primary concerns the threats he perceives from those who would have Christians move back toward Judaism.

Robinson provides a rather clear image of Ignatius and his church’s situation in light of numerous contemporary scholarly debates. He challenges Magnus Zetterholm’s recent analysis on numerous points (*The Formation of Christianity in Antioch* [New York: Routledge, 2003]), including the payment of the temple tax (*fiscus judaicus*) and the identity of the Christian church as a *collegium*. He places Ignatius’s church in continuity with Matthew’s community as well as that of the *Didache*. Robinson also challenges the revisionist portrayal that mutes the hostility between Christianity and Judaism in this early period. His portrait includes the following distinguishing features: the Christian church in Antioch was essentially unified, not divided into numerous “denominational” groups with little relationship and no shared authority structure; Ignatius was the primary bishop of the Christian church in Antioch, representing an early presence of “monepiscopal” church structure; Ignatius had a positive relationship with the presbyters and deacons of his church; opposition to Ignatius’s leadership does not seem to derive from the leadership, but rather from a marginalized group or groups within his church or from a smaller body outside his assembly; the schism that is of concern to Ignatius seems to be a rather recent development; and lastly, much of Ignatius’s trouble and polemic is related to Judaism, and even his arrest and martyrdom appear to have resulted from civil unrest rather than schism within his Christian community.

Each of these points addresses significant debates in early Christian studies, and Robinson provides excellent engagement with and documentation of the varied discussions. In all of this, he proves a careful scholar, respectful of ancient sources (though not naïvely so), and a challenger of current scholarship especially when modern sensibilities drive contemporary academics to restructure the past to make it more palatable. Nowhere does this show up more clearly than in his final chapter, “Boundaries, Identity, and Labels.” Here, Robinson shows deference to the literary works and terminology of the ancient sources in a way that is uncharacteristic of some current trends in modern scholarship. If the terms “Christian” and “Jew,” “Christianity” and “Judaism,” were meaningful categories to Ignatius, then it is the task of the historian of religion to understand what he understood and meant rather than reconstructing his meaning based upon modern sensibilities. Obviously, the contemporary debate over terminology and its usage in the process of separation between Judaism and Christianity and identity-making is significant and should not be abandoned; nevertheless, it is incumbent upon modern scholars to allow the voices and language of the ancients to be heard rather than dismissing them as imprecise and even useless. What has resulted is that reconstructions generated in our “post-Holocaust world” and “post-colonial era” (p. 239) have muted and obscured ancient voices, including that of the bishop of Antioch.

While this review has focused upon the many excellent features of Robinson’s careful analysis, the book does exhibit several rather minor deficiencies or disappointments, some ironically due to Robinson’s cautious scholarship. Having argued quite convincingly against the two- and three-heresy interpretations of Ignatius’s opponents,

Robinson does not offer a proposal as to how Docetic and Judaizing conceptions might have been united in one particular group or opponent. In fact, he distances himself “from all camps that try to identify the particular heretical character of Ignatius’s opposition” (p. 117), because such identifications require precision that Ignatius’s letters and the historical evidences do not provide. Likewise, having argued against the self-martyrdom of Ignatius or his betrayal by an opposition group, Robinson does not offer an explanation of why the civil authorities in Antioch chose to arrest the bishop and find him guilty of a crime that was worthy of execution. What is more, he does not tie in how the Jewish community, with which Ignatius was likely at odds, fits into this scenario. He does offer a word of explanation: “We would be better off to admit that Ignatius’s situation remains unexplained than to settle for a hypothesis that starts from a weak central premise about the cause of Ignatius’s anxiety and ends with so many issues unresolved” (p. 202). Though one must respect Robinson for this guardedness in a day of bold reconstructions, one would ask that he bring his cautious ways to bear by helping the reader imagine what might possibly have been the case. In the absence of a better hypothesis, the default position is most often that of the consensus.

Several other concerns and deficiencies bear mentioning. In his discussion of the Ignatian corpus and its status historically, he does not address recent debates regarding the authenticity and dating of the seven letters, accepting generally the Lightfoot consensus of seven letters from near AD 110. Quite recently, Paul Foster has accepted a date of AD 125–150 for Ignatius based upon modern challenges (“The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch (Part I),” *ExpTim* 117 [2006] 487–92). Though I agree with Robinson’s position, the debate needs to be acknowledged in an academic work of this nature, especially because an early second-century date for Ignatius is pivotal to many of Robinson’s arguments. In addition, in several cases, he avoids some thorny issues of dating and authorship for canonical works. While not relevant to his thesis, he side-steps the debate on the authenticity of the Pauline letters (p. 69, n. 84). More pertinently, Robinson dates both Matthew and Acts to the AD 80s or 90s, when an earlier dating would lend greater support to his thesis that Matthew’s community represents an earlier group in continuity with that of Ignatius rather than a competing contemporary community. Finally, for those less familiar with the geography and history of Antioch throughout the four hundred years of its existence, a map of the region related to its political status in the various eras would be helpful.

These issues aside, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways* is a wonderful volume, useful to scholars in NT, early Christian, and Jewish-Christian studies. The book provides a wealth of critical information and carefully reasoned arguments from a seasoned scholar, unafraid to challenge consensus, yet careful and nuanced in his judgments. His website at the University of Lethbridge, where he serves as Professor of Religious Studies, advertises that Robinson is working on a project related to rural Christianity in the first three centuries of the Christian movement. I anticipate that this work will provide further challenges to modern scholarly consensus that will likewise enable us to see the early Christian world with greater clarity and precision.

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What Americans Really Believe: New Findings from the Baylor Surveys of Religion. By Rodney Stark et al. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008, 209 pages, \$24.95.

In the comedy-drama *Dan in Real Life* (Touchstone Pictures, October 26, 2007), released slightly before the publication of Rodney Stark’s *What Americans Really Believe*,