



Reviews

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH AND THE SECOND SOPHISTIC: A STUDY OF AN EARLY CHRISTIAN TRANSFORMATION OF PAGAN CULTURE by Allen Brent, *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 36*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2006, pp.377, €84

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH: A MARTYR BISHOP AND THE ORIGIN OF EPISCOPACY by Allen Brent, *T&T Clark*, London 2007, pbk 2009, pp.192, £17.99

Although the first-published of these books (hereafter *Second Sophistic*) is more formidably academic in presentation than the second (hereafter *Martyr Bishop*) this latter should not be seen as merely a popularisation of the first. The two books are, in fact, complementary. A reader of *Martyr Bishop* who wishes to test Brent's theory will need to come to grips with the detailed evidence set out in *Second Sophistic*, and the reader of *Second Sophistic* will gain from *Martyr Bishop* a clearer and, oddly enough, a fuller grasp of Brent's theory as a whole.

The letters allegedly written by Ignatius of Antioch in the second century have kept scholars of early Christianity fascinated, occupied, vexed, and entertained for centuries. In the medieval West as many as sixteen letters were known including exchanges between Ignatius and John the Evangelist and between Ignatius and the mother of Jesus. Beneath these lay collections of up to thirteen letters, preserved in both Greek and Latin manuscripts, which in the seventeenth century were shown to be reducible to seven letters that had been known to Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century, to which a late fourth century forger had added another six. The same forger had also reworked the seven letters known to Eusebius, adding passages to suggest that Ignatius, in the second century, was pushing the same (heretical) theological barrow that the forger was pushing two centuries later.

Despite the confident judgement of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* that the controversy about the authenticity of even the smaller core of seven letters known to Eusebius 'was virtually settled in [their] favour ... by J. Pearson's *Vindiciae Epistolarum S. Ignatii* (1672)', the question has continued to be hotly debated. A good deal of the heat, now as in the seventeenth century, has been generated by the curious supposition that, if genuine, the Ignatian letters would in some way authenticate a tiered hierarchy of ministry and order. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§ 1593), for example, mis-translates Ignatius to the Trallians 3.1 to the effect that 'without the bishop, presbyters, and deacons, one cannot speak of the Church'. As Allen Brent points out, what this text means is that, without these three orders 'a Church cannot be summoned' (*Second Sophistic*, pp. 25–6, 196), which is not at all the same thing. Those coming to the study of these letters for the first time will have cause to be grateful to Brent for the excellent introduction he provides in the first and fifth chapters of *Martyr Bishop* to the controversies these letters have engendered.

Brent has his own novel and intriguing explanation of the origin of the seven letters known to Eusebius. He thinks that they were indeed written by an early Christian who was taken as a prisoner from Antioch in Syria to Rome, there to be put to death by exposure to wild beasts. Brent is curiously vague about the date of this journey and martyrdom. The traditional date hovers between 107 and 115, but these are no more than guesses based upon Eusebius' guess that it happened within the reign of Trajan. Brent is confident that he has 'positioned

Ignatius of Antioch in the world of the early second century' (*Second Sophistic* p. 318), though it seems that 'early' might stretch to A.D. 135 (*ibid.*) or 138 (*Martyr Bishop*, p. 118). For Brent, the crucial thing is that Ignatius must be located before the middle of the second century, because the understanding of the roles of bishop, priests, and deacons put forward in the letters was quite unlike the church order that was to emerge from the second half of the second century onwards and then become normative. Indeed, it was unlike anything seen in the Christian Church, before or since. In Ignatius there is 'no trace of an idea of the bishop as teaching successor to the apostles being able to guarantee his validity and authenticity by the elaboration of a *diadoche* or list of teachers in lineal, chronological descent'. The bishop 'is neither the successor of the apostles, nor does he perform an act of ordination upon presbyters, deacons, or one who is to join him as a fellow bishop of another congregation' (*Second Sophistic*, pp. 26, 25, cf *Martyr Bishop*, p. 116). Ignatius is, indeed, concerned with unity in the Christian community, and he does see the bishop at the centre of his submissive clergy as 'the effective sign of unity' (*Martyr Bishop*, p. 155). But he does not describe 'an established church order in an existing historical situation' (*Martyr Bishop*, p. 151). On the contrary, he spins the whole elaborate panoply pretty much out of his own head, his chief models and reference points being not contemporary Christian tradition and practice, but 'the pagan mysteries of the Greek city-states of Asia Minor during the Second Sophistic' (*Martyr Bishop*, p. 151). In 'advocating a new church order of bishop, presbyters, and deacons' Ignatius 'is constructing social reality rather than reflecting it' (*Martyr Bishop*, p. 58); his martyr-procession is 'a visually choreographed argument for unity and episcopal church government' (p. 60), 'a dazzling piece of enacted rhetoric' (p. 158), 'the kind of political rhetoric which claims that what is believed should be is what in fact is' (p. 57).

The novelty of Ignatius' understanding of episcopacy explains both the opposition he met with amongst his fellow Christians at Antioch (*Martyr Bishop*, p. 53) and the caution and reserve of other early Christians, like Polycarp and Irenaeus, in his regard. It was only because Ignatius so dramatically and effectively proclaimed an anti-docetist christology that Polycarp was 'convinced that the strange figure, interpreting his martyr procession as though it was a pagan mystery procession, was nevertheless orthodox' (*Second Sophistic* p. 313–4, cf *Martyr Bishop*, p. 158).

Although J. B. Lightfoot had given short shrift to the 'cheap wisdom which at the study table or over the pulpit desk declaims against the extravagance of the feelings and language of Ignatius, as the vision of martyrdom rose up before him' (*Apostolic Fathers* II. I, 1889, p. 38), Brent is prepared to acknowledge that Ignatius had a 'highly strung and, one might even say, disturbed temperament' (*Martyr Bishop*, p. 19). Despite the strictures of the great bishop of Durham, some readers of the letters might judge this to be altogether too charitable, and that a more forthright assessment would be that Ignatius was quite simply mad. Certainly, anyone inclined to take that view will find abundant diagnostic corroboration in the picture of Ignatius that emerges from these two books.

Brent's argument for the pagan cultic background to Ignatius' language and imagery is copious and persuasive. He recognises how odd this must have seemed to Ignatius' more sober-minded Christian contemporaries, grounded in their own scriptures and traditions, but he argues that, solely for the sake of a spectacularly choreographed display of anti-docetist christology, they were prepared to buy the whole package, even if this meant that the weird bits had to be reinterpreted in the light of their own, emerging, ecclesiology. The case Brent makes for this, if not convincing, is at least plausible. However, this thesis might also encourage the speculation, not entertained by Brent himself, that Ignatius' journey did not end with martyrdom in Rome but that, after bamboozling first his own community at

Antioch and then Polycarp and associated communities in Asia Minor, he cast off the Christian yoke and returned to the paganism in which he was so much more at home, to re-emerge at Olympia as Lucian's Peregrinus Proteus, and to accomplish near there, by his own doing, the death he claimed to have so long desired, and that he had so long postponed.

Brent casts a capacious methodological dragnet, and lands a remarkably catholic catch. In addition to his impressive learning in Ignatian scholarship, and in the literature, epigraphy, and iconography associated with mystery religions, the Imperial cult, and the 'Second Sophistic', we are invited to take on board the epistemological contributions of Wittgenstein, Katz, and Chomsky and speculations about the behaviour of bishops at Buckingham Palace garden parties, about the deliberations of the Master and Fellows of a Cambridge college, and about the trials and tribulations of Lindy Chamberlain after her infant daughter had been taken by dingoes at Ayers Rock.

Both these books would have profited from the more attentive care of copy-editors. In *Martyr Bishop* it is twice asserted that Peregrinus leapt into his pyre at Athens (pp. 54, 73), though in *Second Sophistic* (p. 13) the suicide is said to have taken place at Olympia. It seems to be suggested that the relationship between a bishop and his presbyters had found expression in the furnishings of apse or chancel even before, by Brent's own thesis, that relationship (to say nothing of apse or chancel) had come into existence (*Martyr Bishop*, pp. 38, 85–6, 108). Nevertheless, Brent has rendered a very worthwhile service to those beginning the study of Ignatius, and has secured a place for himself in any future discussion of the Ignatian problem. If his contribution to that discussion will be a hotly contested one it will be none the odder for that.

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SACRIFICE UNVEILED: THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE by Robert J. Daly, *T&T Clark International*, London 2009, pp. xv + 260, £24.99 pbk

Robert J. Daly's latest volume, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, is an apt culmination to the Jesuit theologian's career-long pursuit in revealing what he believes to be a more Christian construction of sacrifice. According to Daly, Christian sacrifice is, above all, the eminently interpersonal, Trinitarian act of '[humanity's] participation, through the Spirit, in the transcendently free and self-giving love of the Father and the Son' (p. 1), all of which is initiated by the Father's giving of the Son. *Sacrifice Unveiled* explores the theological and liturgical implications of Daly's assertion, and the evidence for its Biblical and historical legitimacy.

The book is a chronological account of sacrifice's evolution, and is structured in three parts, connected by two bridges. In Part I, Daly begins to demarcate his Trinitarian redefinition of sacrifice by first rejecting traditional notions of transactional satisfaction. He suggests that these notions, at their essence, 'disastrously... look to the religions of the world, and to the characteristics of sacrifice derived from them' in defining Christian sacrifice, projecting onto Christianity categorically non-Christian notions of violent propitiation. Instead, Daly proposes, Christians must 'look first to the Christ event, and *primarily from the perspective of that Trinitarian event*... to understand sacrifice' (p. 10). From a Trinitarian perspective, sacrifice becomes foremost an act of 'self-giving' in which the Father, Son, and Christians, through the Spirit, intimately interrelate. In light of Trinitarian sacrifice, the 'Sacrifice of the Mass' should also be reinterpreted, now as the transformational, eschatological event through which the assembly becomes 'more fully members of the Body of Christ' (p. 19).