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Christocentric Letters: Christology in the Greetings of Ignatius's *Romans*

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Abstract: This article examines the role of Jesus in the greetings of Ignatius of Antioch's *Letter to the Romans* and the ways in which the Christology of the greeting foreshadows the presentation of Jesus in the letter body. After observing a trend in New Testament scholarship that sees lengthy greetings as precursors for what follows and a call in Ignatian scholarship to read Ignatius's letters as individual compositions, the essay highlights the extraordinary length of Ignatius's prescript. It argues that Jesus is depicted as Son, God, and law-giver. In each case, these terms prepare the way for how Jesus is portrayed in the body of the letter where he is described in relation to the Father, as the God who models faith and love, and as the one who speaks and teaches truly. These observations about Ignatius's greeting to the Roman church suggest that the promising avenues of research noted in New Testament and Ignatian studies deserve further research in Ignatius's letters and in relation to broader early Christian epistolary practice.

Key Words: Ignatius of Antioch, *Romans*, Christology, letter greetings, epistolary studies

Starting Points

This essay begins at the intersection of two observations about early Christian letters. First, I follow recent scholarship which argues that at least some early Christian letters expand the greeting formula in order to introduce significant themes that are discussed in more detail in the letter body. Such observations have been noted with particular care in New Testament letters.¹ For example, the Elder in 2 John expands the typical epistolary greeting, *χαίρειν* (*chairein*; greetings), to "Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the

1. Franz Schnider and Werner Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*; New Testament Tools and Studies 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 3–41; John L. White, "Ancient Greek Letters," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*, ed. David E. Aune, Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study 21 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 85–105, at 98; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 20; Philip L. Tite, "How to Begin and Why? Diverse Functions of the Pauline Prescript within a Greco-Roman Context," in *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, Pauline Studies 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 57–99, at 98.

Father, in truth and love” (2 John 3).² Truth is later described as the source of the author’s joy when the recipients are found to have remained in truth (2 John 4), while love provides the central reason for the letter (2 John 5–6).³ Likewise, the reference to God’s foreknowledge in 1 Peter 1:2 foreshadows the revelation in Christ that has come at the end of time in 1 Peter 1:20. In Philippians 1:1, Paul refers to Timothy as a co-sender and notes that they are both slaves. Timothy is then mentioned in Philippians 2:19–24, and Paul specifically recalls Timothy’s enslavement to the gospel in Philippians 2:22. This tendency among certain early Christian letter-writers to expand introductory formulas can indicate what will come later in the letter.

The second observation that serves as a starting point comes from Ignatian studies. I follow a line of thinking which argues that each of the letters by Ignatius of Antioch was composed as an individual text to be sent to distinct Christian communities.⁴ This statement entails a decision on two further matters regarding Ignatius’s letters. First, the letters must be authentically Ignatian and not, as some have argued, forgeries from the second half of the second century.⁵ For the purposes of this article, a date any time in the first half of the second century is suitable. This broad range of dates is widely, although not universally, regarded as acceptable.⁶ Second, the letters should be understood as separate compositions

2. ἔσται μεθ’ ἡμῶν χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη παρὰ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ παρὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἀγάπῃ; *estai meth’ hēmōn charis eleos eirēnē para theou patros kai para Iēsou Christou tou huiou tou patros en alētheia kai agapē.*

3. See the helpful analysis of epistolary features found in 2–3 John in Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament*, 27–40.

4. See especially the attempt to come to “a differentiated understanding” of Ignatius’s letters in Mikael Isacson, *To Each Their Own Letter: Structure, Themes, and Rhetorical Strategies in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series 42 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2004), 18–20, 180–218.

5. Recent examples of arguments for an inauthentic Ignatian corpus can be found in Robert Joly, *Le Dossier d’Ignace d’Antioche*, Université libre de Bruxelles: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres 69 (Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1979); Reinhard M. Hübner, “Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochien,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 1 (1997): 44–72; Hübner, *Der paradox Eine: Antignostischer Monarchianismus im zweiten Jahrhundert*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 50 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Thomas Lechner, *Ignatius adversus Valentinianos? Chronologische und theologiegeschichtliche Studien zu den Briefen des Ignatius von Antiochien*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Walter Schmithals, “Zu Ignatius von Antiochien,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 13 (2009): 181–203; Otto Zwierlein, *Petrus in Rom*, 2nd ed., Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 96 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 183–237. For a helpful discussion of the particularly unusual preservation of Ignatius’s *Romans*, see Candida R. Moss, “Riddle Wrapped in an Enigma: Pauline Reception in the Antiochene Acts of Ignatius,” in *Intertextuality in the Second Century*, ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Clayton N. Jefford, BAC 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 87–97, at 87–90.

6. Christine Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria and Asia*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 29 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 3–9; Mark J. Edwards, “Ignatius and the Second Century: A Response to R. Hübner,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 2 (1998): 214–226; Hermann Josef Vogt, “Bemerkungen zur Echtheit der Ignatiusbriefe,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 3 (1999): 50–63; Étienne Decret, “La persécution oubliée des chrétiens d’Antioche sous Trajan et la martyre d’Ignace d’Antioche,” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 52 (2006): 1–29; Paul Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Paul Foster

written for communities that are distinct from one another, even if composed over a short period of time.⁷ Although reading Ignatian letters together can be beneficial in reconstructing Ignatius's thought, the letters can be profitably read individually since that is how they were first sent. However, despite increased attention to reading Ignatius's letters as individual compositions, little attention has been given to how his lengthy greetings relate to the contents of the letter bodies.

Taking these observations from New Testament and Ignatian studies as points of departure, this article begins to fill a lacuna by exploring the greeting of one of Ignatius's letters, *Romans*, and its relation to the letter body. I pay particular attention to the role of Jesus to see how the salutation previews christological themes that recur elsewhere. Although Ignatius devotes much of his attention to describing the Roman Christians, this article will focus on the place ascribed to Jesus in the greeting and will examine the way in which these reports interact with Ignatius's characterization of Jesus in the body of the letter. Jesus is the Father's Son and the God whom Ignatius and the Romans serve. Accordingly, he models faith and love for the Romans and instructs them as a law-giver. This presentation of Jesus is expanded in the body and enhances Ignatius's request that the Romans not act to stop his death, since he is Jesus's emissary who seeks to follow Jesus's model as the Romans are doing. Ignatius tailors his depiction of Jesus to the request that he is making of the Romans.

The Prescript of Ignatius's *Letter to the Romans*

Since much of the article takes up Ign. *Rom.* inscr., it will be useful to have the text and a translation in mind before continuing further.

Ἰγνάτιος, ὁ καὶ Θεοφόρος, τῇ ἡλεημένη ἐν μεγαλειότητι πατρὸς ὑψίστου καὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ μόνου υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, ἐκκλησίᾳ ἡγαπημένη καὶ πεφωτισμένη ἐν θελήματι τοῦ θελήσαντος τὰ πάντα ἃ ἔστιν, κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀγάπην Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, ἥτις καὶ προκάθεται ἐν τόπῳ χωρίου Ῥωμαίων, ἀξιόθεος, ἀξιοπρεπής, ἀξιομακάριστος, ἀξιέπαινος, ἀξιοεπίτευκτος, ἀξίαγνος, καὶ προκαθημένη τῆς ἀγάπης, χριστόνομος, πατρώνυμος, ἣν καὶ ἀσπάζομαι ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, υἱοῦ πατρὸς, κατὰ σάρκα καὶ πνεῦμα ἠνωμένοις πάσῃ ἐντολῇ αὐτοῦ, πεπληρωμένοις

(London: T&T Clark, 2007), 81–107, at 89. Timothy D. Barnes, “The Date of Ignatius,” *Expository Times* 120 (2008): 119–130; Alistair C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 238–240. For sustained critique of cases for the inauthenticity of Ignatius's letters, see Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Episcopacy* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 95–143.

7. See further the studies of Ignatius's letters in epistolary terms in Hermann Josef Sieben, “Die Ignatianen als Briefe: Einige formkritische Bemerkungen,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 32 (1978): 1–18; Pablo Cavallero, “La retórica en la Epístola a los romanos de San Ignacio de Antioquia,” *Helmantica* 48 (1997): 269–321; Isacson, *To Each Their Own Letter*, 18–20, 31–179; Isacson, “Follow Your Bishop! Rhetorical Strategies in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch,” in *The Formation of the Early Church*, ed. Josein Ádna, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 183 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 317–340.

χάριτος θεοῦ ἀδιακρίτως καὶ ἀποδιυλισμένοις ἀπὸ παντὸς ἀλλοτρίου χρώματος, πλεῖστα ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν ἀμώμως χαίρειν.

Ignatius, who is also Theophorus. To the church that has been shown mercy by the greatness of the Father Most High and Jesus Christ his only Son, loved and enlightened by the will of the One who willed all things that are in accordance with the faith and love of Jesus Christ our God, which also presides in the place of the district of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and presiding over love, observing Christ's law, bearing the Father's name, whom I also greet in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. To those who are unified in flesh and spirit in every commandment of his, having been filled without wavering by the grace of God and filtered clear of every foreign color, warmest greetings blamelessly in Jesus Christ our God.

At 93 words, Ignatius's greeting in *Romans* is the longest found in any of his seven letters and equals the length of Paul's salutation when he wrote to the Romans (Rom 1:1–7).⁸ The expansion from the simple opening formula, "X to Y, Greetings," is clear merely by noting the length of Ignatius's prescript.⁹ His self-identification is consistent with the other letters that he composed: he is also known as Theophorus.¹⁰ The majority of the length comes in Ignatius's description of the addressee. This may be because Ignatius has not previously met the Romans and sends an elevated address to curry favor in preparation for his request. The Roman church has been shown mercy, loved, enlightened, united with Jesus's commandments, filled with God's grace, and filtered from every foreign stain. Ignatius's formal greeting surrounds these three final descriptions of the Romans. It begins with a first-person greeting in the name of Jesus Christ and is completed with the third-person wish of "warmest greetings" (πλεῖστα...χαίρειν; *pleista...chairein*) in Jesus Christ. Adverbs such as πλεῖστα (*pleista*; most) and πολλά (*polla*; many) are used in correspondence

8. David E. Aune claims that Paul's prescript is the longest in extant Greco-Roman letters ("Romans, Paul's Letter to the," in *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, ed. David E. Aune [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003], 429). Whether or not it is the longest extant prescript, the significant point is that both Paul and Ignatius write equally, extraordinarily long prescripts to the church in Rome.

9. On the typical Greco-Roman prescript, see Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament*, 17–21. On Ignatius's greetings, see Sieben, "Die Ignatianen als Briefe," 3–5.

10. William R. Schoedel concisely summarizes a long-standing debate about whether an active or passive nuance should be preferred for "Theophorus" (*Ignatius of Antioch*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 36). Should "the God-bearer" be understood as "the one who bears God" or "the one who is borne by God?" Schoedel follows J. B. Lightfoot in pointing to the rise of the passive nuance of the adverb in the ninth century. However, this did not make the passive nuance the exclusive interpretation in the medieval period. Lightfoot notes that Bernard of Clairvaux says with regard to Ignatius, "to carry him [i.e. Jesus] is not onerous but honorable" (*gestare hunc, non onerari est, sed honorari*; text in Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp. Revised Texts with Introductions, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. [London: Macmillan, 1889–1891], 2.1.236 n.1).

between family members as well as close friends,¹¹ and Ignatius's use of the adverb may represent an attempt to mark out a more intimate relationship with the Romans. In any case, Ignatius's extended introduction gives way to a letter body in which he asks the Romans not to interfere with his impending death and expounds the reasons for his request while emphasizing his imitation of Jesus's passion.

The Sonship of Jesus

With this overview of Ign. *Rom.* inscr. in place, the remainder of the article can explore Ignatius's understanding of Jesus in the greeting and the letter body. Within the prescript, Ignatius twice identifies Jesus as υἱός (*huios*; Son).¹² In both instances, he is referred to as the Son of the Father and not with other early Christian filial attributions, such as Son of God or Son of Man. In the first instance, the description of the Father as "Most High" (ὕψιστος; *hupsistos*) appears to indicate the Father's superiority and the Son's corresponding subordination,¹³ but their cooperation in giving mercy mitigates against such a reading.¹⁴ Ignatius describes Jesus the Son working collaboratively with his Father to give mercy to the Romans.

When Ignatius begins to turn from his description of the Romans to the formal greeting, he again refers to Jesus as Son by greeting the church "in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father." The first-person greeting is likely employed to heighten the level of friendship between Ignatius and the Romans.¹⁵ First-person greetings are also found in Ign. *Trall.* inscr. and *Phld.* inscr., but Jesus's name and relationship to the Father are only highlighted in *Rom.* inscr. Ignatius does not write to Rome for his own sake but because he has been led to write in his attempt to follow the Son. He can greet the Romans in Jesus's name on account of this leading.

By referring to Jesus as Son, Ignatius identifies him with respect to the Father. Jesus is likewise identified in relation to his Father in Ign. *Rom.* 3.3. As Ignatius outlines his desire to prove that he is a genuine Christian through martyrdom, he claims that he will best be able to do this when he is no longer visible to the world (Ign. *Rom.* 3.2). He then declares that nothing which is visible is good. Ignatius paradoxically points to Jesus to solidify his argument, because Jesus has become more visible "since he

11. Sean A. Adams, "Paul's Letter Opening and Greek Epistolography: A Matter of Relationship," in *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, *Pauline Studies* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 33–55, at 45n.40.

12. Ignatius does not often emphasize Jesus's sonship by using filial language. Jesus is described as "Son" only four times in the six other letters (Ign. *Eph.* 4.2; 20.2; *Magn.* 8.2; 13.1).

13. For example, Alonzo Rosecrans Stark writes about Ignatius's letters, "However little subordination of Christ to God is emphasized, it is not altogether absent" ("The Christology in the Apostolic Fathers," [PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 1912], 29).

14. Gregory Vall, *Learning Christ: Ignatius of Antioch and the Mystery of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 98.

15. Terrence Y. Mullins, "Greeting as a New Testament Form," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968): 418–426, at 419–420.

is with the Father” (ἐν πατρὶ ὄν; *en patri ōn*; Ign. *Rom.* 3.3). In light of the double insistence on Jesus’s sonship in the prescript, Ignatius’s depiction of Jesus’s close relation to the Father may be understood with filial overtones. Moreover, Jesus’s identity as Son is seen most clearly in his return to the Father after his death and resurrection. It is from this point that Jesus becomes more visible and offers mercy to the Romans. The cryptic play between Jesus’s visibility and invisibility indicates that the Romans are better able to perceive Jesus’s relation to the Father since he has been exalted.¹⁶ By twice appealing to Jesus as Son in the prescript, Ignatius prepares the way for Jesus’s relation to the Father to carry kinship overtones.

Jesus as God

Ignatius’s understanding of Jesus’s position as Son is not incompatible with designating Jesus as God. Indeed, there are similarities between the terms as applied to Jesus. Alongside the two references to Jesus as Son, there are two corresponding mentions of Jesus as God in Ign. *Rom.* inscr. The second of these comes as Ignatius completes his formal greetings, just as the second reference to Jesus as Son was placed at the beginning of the salutation proper. Drawing the prescript to a conclusion, Ignatius bids the Romans “warmest greetings in Jesus Christ our God.” This mirrors the greeting “in the name of” the Son and sets Jesus’s role as God and Son parallel to one another.

In the prescript’s first reference to Jesus as God, Ignatius declares that all things “are in accordance with the faith and love of Jesus Christ our God.”¹⁷ If the genitives in this phrase are taken as objective, then Ignatius speaks here of the Romans’ faith and love toward Jesus Christ, who is identified as God.¹⁸ Such a description would be appropriate in a prescript that expands the presentation of the letter recipient. However, faith and love modify a neuter relative pronoun whose antecedent is τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*; all things) and denotes all things that were created by the Father’s will.¹⁹ “All things” includes the Roman church, but it seems unlikely to say that

16. Similarly, Paul Foster “Christ and the Apostles in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch,” in *Early Christian Communities between Ideal and Reality*, ed. Mark Grundeken and Joseph Verheyden, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 342 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 109–126, at 118.

17. Although Theodor Zahn argues for the omission of πίστιν καί (*pistin kai*; faith and; *Ignatius von Antiochien* [Gotah: Perthes, 1873], 557), Schoedel rightly points that the reading of πίστιν καί in T, A, Am, C, g, and Arabic manuscripts is stronger evidence for the inclusion of these words than its absence in G, H, K, L, and Sm (*Ignatius*, 167). Interior evidence may be found in that the omission of these words focuses the prescript on love: the beloved church, the love of Jesus Christ, and the Roman precedence in love. If the prescript is focused on love when the words are omitted, the inclusion of faith is marginally the more difficult reading in Ign. *Rom.* inscr.

18. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2.2.189–190; Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 167.

19. The same word is used to describe the cosmos in Jos. Asen. 8.2; Philo, *Spec.* 1.208; *Somn.* 1.241; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; 15:28; Eph 1:10; 3:9; Col 1:16, 17, 20; Heb 1:3; Rev 4:11; 1 Clem. 34.2; Justin, *1 Apol.* 67.2.

everything that was made was willed in accordance with the faith and love that the Romans showed toward Jesus. The genitives are therefore better understood as subjective so that all things were made according to the faith and love displayed by Jesus himself.²⁰ As God, Jesus is faithful and loving toward all creation, and his faith and love in the greeting are part of a phrase that designates how the Roman church has been loved and enlightened.

Ignatius develops his description of Jesus as God and the themes of faith and love along imitative lines in the body at Ign. *Rom.* 3 and 6–7. Ignatius wants not only to be called a Christian but also to be found one. He will “then be faithful” (τότε πιστός εἶναι; *tote pistos einai*; Ign. *Rom.* 3.2). Ignatius next describes Jesus’s faithfulness in terms of his ability to be seen when he is present with the Father.²¹ This close relationship with the Father identifies Jesus as “our God Jesus Christ” (ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός; *ho theos hēmōn Iēsous Christos*; Ign. *Rom.* 3.3). Two things follow from reading Ign. *Rom.* 3.2–3 in light of what Ignatius says about Jesus in the prescript. First, Jesus’s faith, having already been mentioned in the greeting, is exhibited in his suffering and death that Ignatius now desires to imitate.²² It is for this reason that he asks the Romans not to intervene to stop the proceedings. Second, Jesus’s unique relationship to the Father identifies him both as the Father’s Son and as God. As Son, Jesus is obedient to the Father. As God, he is distinct from the Father, but he cannot be separated from the Father. In the prescript, Ignatius introduces a tension into the Father-Son relationship that must be kept throughout the letter.

Ignatius’s desire to imitate Jesus’s suffering comes through even more clearly in the next reference to Jesus as God. He paradoxically asks the Romans to allow his affairs to proceed unhindered so that he may thus become a human being (Ign. *Rom.* 6.2). At its most basic, this request is for the Romans to allow him to be an imitator of the passion of his God (Ign. *Rom.* 6.3).²³ For Ignatius, Jesus’s suffering as God occurs in Jesus’s incarnation.²⁴ Ignatius desires to mimic this element of what Jesus did as God so that he could enjoy the life that Jesus’s passion achieved.²⁵ A

20. Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 557; Ferdinando Bergamelli, “‘Fede di Gesù Cristo’ nelle lettere di Ignazio di Antiochia,” *Salesianum* 66 (2004): 649–664, at 661–662.

21. While Ign. *Rom.* 3.2–3 depends on a visual analogy, Ign. *Rom.* 2.1 offers a similar line of reasoning with an auditory juxtaposition of word and silence, on which, see Carl B. Smith, “Ministry, Martyrdom, and Other Mysteries: Pauline Influence on Ignatius of Antioch,” in *Paul and the Second Century*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson, Library of New Testament Studies 412 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 37–56, at 54–55.

22. Cavallero, “La retórica,” 290.

23. “Allow me to be an imitator of the passion of my God” (ἐπιτρέψατέ μου μιμητὴν εἶναι τοῦ πάθους τοῦ θεοῦ μου; *epitrepsate mou mimētēn einai tou pathous tou theou mou*; Ign. *Rom.* 6.3).

24. Thomas G. Weinandy, “The Apostolic Christology of Ignatius of Antioch: The Road to Chalcedon,” in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71–84, at 82.

25. On imitation, see Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 43; H. H. Drake Williams, “‘Imitate Me’: Interpreting Imitation in 1 Corinthians in Relation to Ignatius of Antioch,” *Perichoresis* 11

little later, he uses modified eucharistic language to describe his desire for death. The bread that he longs for is Christ's flesh, while the drink is his blood (Ign. *Rom.* 7.3). Ignatius describes Jesus's blood as incorruptible love (ἀγάπη ἀφθαρτος; *agapē aphthartos*) and develops the description of Jesus's love that was mentioned in the greeting. As Jesus's love is made known in his death, so Ignatius's discussion of death should illustrate to the Romans that he follows Jesus in his own suffering and death.²⁶ As Jesus was faithful and showed love to the Romans because he is God, so Ignatius wants to be faithful and to share in Jesus' love by going to his death in Rome. Although the prescript does not elaborate on Ignatius's christological imitation ethic, the brief references to Jesus as God allow Ignatius to unfold in the body of the letter a more developed understanding of Jesus's divinity and a desire that he and the Romans will follow Jesus's example of faith and love. The God-language attributed to Jesus in the greeting forms a preview of what is to come while likewise balancing divine and filial discourse.

Jesus's Laws and Commands

Yet the portrayal of Jesus as Son and God does not exhaust what the greeting has to say about Jesus. Following a series of descriptions in which the Romans are described as "worthy" (ἀξιο-; *axio-*), Ignatius refers to the church as χριστόνομος (*christonomos*; Ign. *Rom.* inscr.).²⁷ In the context of praising the Roman church, this unusual compound word means something like "observing Christ's law."²⁸ Ignatius highlights the Romans' obedience to the regulations set forth by Jesus. The case for

(2013): 75–93, at 81–83.

26. Olavi Tarvainen, *Faith and Love in Ignatius of Antioch*, trans. Jonathon Lookadoo (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 59–60; trans. of *Glaube und Liebe bei Ignatius von Antiochien*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola Gesellschaft 14 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1967), 72.

27. On the textual problems surrounding this word, see the readings listed in Joseph A. Fischer, *Die apostolischen Väter: Griechisch und Deutsch*, Schriften des Urchristentums 1 (Munich: Kösel, 1956), 182; Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library 24–25 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.269n.59; Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 224. Lightfoot is likely correct that the manuscript difficulties arise as a result of attempts to conform χριστόνομος (*christonomos*; observing Christ's law) to πατρόνομος (*patrōnumos*; bearing the Father's name). See Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2.2.193.

28. Translations include "walking in the law of Christ" (Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2.2.558), "Christi Gesetz haltend" (Walter Bauer, *Die Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochia und der Polykarpbrief*, Die apostolischen Väter 2 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1920], 243), "Beobachterin des Gesetzes Christi" (Fischer, *Die apostolischen Väter*, 183), "qui porte la loi du Christ" (Pierre-Thomas Camelot, *Ignace d'Antioche, Polycarpe de Smyrne: Lettres. Martyre de Polycarpe*, 4th ed., Sources Chrétiennes 10 [Paris: Cerf, 1969], 107), "Christi Gesetz haltend" (Henning Paulsen, *Die Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochia und der Polykarpbrief*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 18, Die apostolischen Väter 2, [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985], 68), "a church that keeps the law of Christ" (Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.269), "observing the law of Christ" (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 225), "keeping the law of Christ" (Alistair C. Stewart, *Ignatius of Antioch: The Letters*, Popular Patristics Series 49 [Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2013], 67).

understanding the word in this way is strengthened by the observation that Ignatius commends the Romans for being united in flesh and spirit to every commandment of Jesus later in the prescript. The commandments by which the Romans are united belong to Jesus. Although he is not the subject of a verb depicting him as a lawgiver or teacher in the prescript, these phrases suggest that the Romans have obeyed commandments that Jesus has given. Ignatius's greeting intimates that Jesus gives commands and that the Romans are to be commended for their unity around them.

Later in the letter, Ignatius asks the Romans not to interfere but actually to urge the beasts to devour him. When the world no longer sees his body, then he will be "truly a disciple of Jesus Christ" (μαθητῆς ἀληθῶς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; *mathētēs alēthōs Iēsou Christou*; Ign. Rom. 4.2).²⁹ For Ignatius to be Jesus's disciple, Jesus must implicitly be portrayed as a teacher, even if the teaching in Ign. Rom. 4.2 seems to come from Jesus's action rather than his commandments. This is confirmed in Ign. Rom. 4.3, where following Jesus's example in death will redeem Ignatius from a slave to be Jesus's freedman. For now, he "is learning to desire nothing while bound" (νῦν μανθάνω δεδεμένου μηδὲν ἐπιθυμεῖν; *nun manthanō dedemenos mēden epithumein*).³⁰ By imitating Jesus in death, Ignatius understands himself to follow Jesus's didactic example.

Jesus's speech plays a more obvious role as Ignatius begins to close his letter. After noting the brevity with which he has made his request,³¹ Ignatius claims that Jesus himself will clarify that he is speaking truly (Ign. Rom. 8.2). The description of Jesus continues as Ignatius recalls that he is "the unerring mouth by which the Father has truly spoken" (τὸ ἀψευδὲς στόμα ἐν ᾧ ὁ πατὴρ ἐλάλησεν ἀληθῶς; *to apseudes stoma en hō ho patēr elalēsen alēthōs*; Ign. Rom. 8.2). Jesus's speech is true because the Father speaks through him.³² The laws and commands that Jesus sets out must likewise be true, and the Romans, who are unified around them in the greeting, may be commended for their harmony. The fullest justification for Ignatius's commendation in the prescript thus comes near the end of the letter. In addition, Jesus's true commandments and the Romans' obedience to them strengthen Ignatius's rhetorical position in the letter.³³ His words receive added authority because he writes as someone who wants to imitate Jesus. Although this is stated

29. Walter Rebell, "Das Leidensverständnis bei Paulus und Ignatius von Antiochien," *NTS* 32 (1986): 457–465, at 458.

30. Alexander N. Kirk raises the intriguing possibility of an allusion to Phil 4:11 in Ign. Rom. 4.3 on the grounds that there is a conceptual parallel between the learning of Paul and Ignatius (*The Departure of an Apostle: Paul's Death Anticipated and Remembered*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.406 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015], 82–83).

31. Schoedel notes that this is a regular epistolary formula (*Ignatius*, 188). See Heb 13:22; 1 Pet 5:12.

32. Ferdinando Bergamelli, "Gesù Cristo Porta del Padre (*Filadelfiesi* 9,1): Il Cristo Mediatore e Rivelatore del Padre in Ignazio di Antiochia," in "*In Lui ci ha scelti*" (*Ef. 1,4*): *Studi in onore del Prof. Giorgio Gozzelino*, ed. Sabino Frigato (Rome: LAS 2001), 33–43, at 41–42.

33. Robert M. Grant, *Ignatius, Apostolic Fathers 4* (Camden: Thomas Nelson, 1966), 90.

most clearly as Ignatius makes his request in the body of the letter, the allusion to Jesus's laws in the prescript enables hearers and readers to understand more clearly that the Romans' obedience of Jesus's commands and Ignatius's desire for a death that imitates his exemplary model stem from Jesus's role as a law-giver.

Conclusion

I have explored three ways in which Ignatius's references to Jesus in the prescript of *Romans* foreshadow statements about him found elsewhere in the letter. Ignatius refers to Jesus as the Father's Son in the greeting. This deepens the kinship overtones later in the letter when Ignatius mentions that Jesus is present with the Father. Likewise, his two references in the prescript to Jesus as God not only balance the references to Jesus as Son but prepare readers for Ignatius's discussion of Jesus's suffering and appearance with the Father after he disappeared in death. In all this, Jesus models faith and love for Ignatius and the Romans, who are to follow his example. Finally, Jesus is portrayed as a law-giver whose commands the Romans should follow. Ignatius previews important christological themes in the greeting so that these themes are familiar when they recur in the letter. This epistolary practice allows christological motifs to be known from the beginning and more easily recognized in the letter body.

By paying attention to what Ignatius says about Jesus as he greets the Romans, Jesus's role in relation to both Ignatius's death and the request that he asks of the Romans becomes clearer. Ignatius's understanding of Jesus grounds much of what follows in the remainder of the letter. His reason for desiring death so earnestly in his circumstances is that he is seeking to follow Jesus's example. Although the martyr acts and a homily by John Chrysostom would look back to Ignatius himself as a model who was worthy of emulation,³⁴ Ignatius perceives that he is imitating Jesus in his upcoming death. Indeed, he is constrained by his reflection on Jesus's suffering (Ign. *Rom.* 6.3). In addition to seeking to follow after the passion of his God, Ignatius urges the Romans to learn from Christ's example so that they might do what is right in this situation. The crucial place of Jesus within Ignatius's greeting includes a place for Jesus as law-giver and teacher. This motif reappears when Ignatius writes that Jesus will show the Roman church that he is telling the truth (Ign. *Rom.* 8.2). Accordingly, they should be silent, that is, not to speak or act in such a way as to interfere with Ignatius's execution (Ign. *Rom.* 2.1). In their silence, Ignatius claims that they will show that they are Jesus's disciples, who recognize the work of their teacher, the Son of God.

Two areas may be proposed for future research. First, in light of the christological connections between the prescript and letter body in *Romans*, future scholarship might examine whether connections exist in Ignatius's other letters between the prescripts and the letter bodies. Is there any significance in the cooperation of the Father and

34. See John Chrysostom, *In sanctum Ignatium martyrem*. Texts and translations of Ignatius's martyr acts may be found in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2.2.472–540, 2.2.573–588.

Jesus as Polycarp's bishop other than the simple connection of Polycarp, the Father, and the Son as bishops (Ign. *Pol.* inscr.)? Does the link between Polycarp, the Father, and Jesus influence how one should understand Ignatius's instruction to pay attention to the bishop so that God will pay attention to the Smyrnaeans (Ign. *Pol.* 6.1)? Or what is to be made of Ignatius's greeting to the Philadelphians "in Jesus Christ's blood?" His blood is eternal and abiding joy in the salutation (Ign. *Phld.* inscr.), while it is later mentioned as part of Ignatius's repetition of singular objects that form the basis of Philadelphian unity (Ign. *Phld.* 4). What relations exist between Jesus's blood, joy, and unity in the letter? Moreover, is it possible that there is a connection between Jesus's blood in the prescript and the temple and high priestly metaphors in Ign. *Phld.* 7.2 and 9.1?

Second, future studies could explore how Ignatius's way of connecting the greeting and letter body compares to other early Christian letters. To briefly take up another letter written to Rome, Paul's greeting foreshadows the Christology expanded in the body of the letter with two mentions of Jesus's Sonship and a reference to Jesus's Davidic lineage (Rom 1:3–4). Sonship plays a prominent role as Paul depicts Jesus as the first-born Son among many adopted Roman brothers (Rom 8:29; cf. 8:12–17).³⁵ Likewise, Paul closes a significant portion of his letter with a catena in Romans 15:7–13 which validates that Jesus came to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles could praise God.³⁶ Paul substantiates this by referring to Jesus as a Davidic messiah, namely, as the root of Jesse (Rom 15:12; Isa 11:10).³⁷

This article has brought together trends in New Testament and Ignatian studies in order to show that Ignatius introduces christological themes in Ign. *Rom.* inscr. that recur and are developed in the body of the letter. By setting the prescript of this Ignatian letter in the context of other Ignatian letters and Ignatius's letters in the context of early Christian epistolary practice, this focused epistolary and christological study may be more fully understood within its early Christian literary and theological environment. For now, it must suffice to say that, in Ign. *Rom.* inscr., Jesus is the Father's Son, God, and law-giver and that Ignatius expands the concise references to Jesus in the greetings in order to show in the body of the letter that he imitates Jesus and that the Romans should obey Jesus's command in allowing Ignatius to proceed to his death.

35. On the adoption metaphors in Rom 8:12–25, see Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 135–140; Erin Heim, "Light through a Prism: New Avenues of Inquiry for the Pauline Ὑιοθεσία Metaphors" (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2014), 189–240; Robert Brian Lewis, *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context*, Library of New Testament Studies 545 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 153–196.

36. Stanley E. Porter, *The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary*, New Testament Monographs 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 272–273.

37. Matthew V. Novenson, "The Jewish Messiahs, the Pauline Christ, and the Gentile Question," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 357–373, at 367–372; Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 156–160.