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The Faith Delivered Unto the Saints: The Doctrine of Biblical Sufficiency in the Writings of Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch

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Cover Page Footnote

1. Ron J. Bigalke Jr., "The Latest Postmodern Trend: The Emerging Church," *JDT* 10, no. 31 (December 2006): 20-30; David Cloud, *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement: The History and Error*, 4th ed. (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2011). 2. Suggested reading: James King, "Emerging Issues for the Emerging Church," *JMT* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 24-61. Mal Crouch, "The Power of the Catholic Popes," *CTJ* 6, no. 18 (August 2002): 148-163. Robert E. Hempy Jr., "The Sufficiency of Scripture and Modern Psychology," *CTSJ* 4, no. 1 (January 1998): 10-12. William J. Larkin, "Approaches to and Images of Biblical Authority for the Postmodern Mind," *BBR* 8, no. 1 (1998): 129-138. 3. See, for example, Tertullian, "The Prescription Against Heretics," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 415-416. 4. Davorin Peterlin, "Clement's Answer to the Corinthian Conflict in AD 96," *JETS* 39, no. 1 (March 1996): 57. 5. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2010), 132. 6. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to and quotations of 1 Clement come from the following source. Clement of Rome, "The Epistle of Saint Clement," in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (London: MacMillan, 1889), part 1, vol. 1. 7. D. W. Simon, "Clemens Romanus: An Apologetical Study," *BS* 22, no. 87 (July 1865): 357. 8. Peterlin, "Clement's Answer," 62. 9. W. Harold Mare, "The Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers," *GJ* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 9. 10. Mare, "The Holy Spirit," 9. 11. Justo T. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Harper One, 2010), 51. 12. Howard Clark Kee et. al., *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 85. 13. MacCulloch, *Three Thousand Years*, 133. 14. Gonzales, *Story of Christianity*, 52-53. 15. This charge would not apply to every member of the Emerging Church, but primarily to those members whom Woodbridge classifies as "Revisionists." Noel B. Woodridge, "Understanding the Emerging Church Movement: An Overview of Its Strengths, Areas of Concern and Implications for Today's Evangelicals," *Conspectus* 4, no. 1 (March 2007). 16. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of the Ignatian letters come from the following source: J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, trans. and eds., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989). 17. David Alan Black, "Paul and Christian Unity: A Formal Analysis of Philippians 2:1-4," *JETS* 28, no. 3 (September 1985): 299-308. 18. Black, "Analysis of Philippians," 305. 19. Daniel Hoffman, "The Authority of Scripture and Apostolic Doctrine in Ignatius of Antioch," *JETS* 28, no. 1 (March 1985): 74. 20. J. C. Long, "The Historic Episcopate," *BS* 51, no. 203 (July 1894): 445. 21. Joseph Henry Thayer, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Manhattan, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 243. 22. Norman L. Geisler, "The Historical Development of Roman Catholicism," *CAJ* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 21-22. 23. J. Van Engen, "Papacy," in *EDT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 888. 24. Hoffman, "The Authority of Scripture," 78.

Introduction

The twenty-first century Christian church seems to be in a state of confusion in regard to bibliology. This is due, in part, to the rise of the Emerging Church, the Charismatic movement, and the still-current popularity of the Roman Catholic church.¹ It is outside the scope of this paper to determine what, precisely, each Christian movement believes about Scripture, but perhaps it is not too immodest nor too simplistic to suggest that Christians are increasingly looking outside of the Scriptures to find, or supplement, divine truth. For divine truth, the Emerging church looks to dialogues and conversations with other individuals, the Charismatic church looks to visions or dreams, the Catholic church looks to popes or priests, while other Christians may look to the sciences, the social sciences, their feelings, and the like.² This begs the question of whether Scripture is entirely sufficient for divine truth or if it needs to be supplemented.

Research examining the Bible's claims of its own sufficiency may not be convincing to those Christians who already doubt its sufficiency. For this reason, the method of biblical theology may not be as helpful as historical theology. If the church fathers believed that the Bible was sufficient for all divine truth, then the argument for the Bible's sufficiency will have more support. Also, if those most closely associated with the apostles affirm the Bible's sufficiency, then the doctrine will have an even greater amount of support. Therefore, this paper will examine the writings of two of the apostolic fathers in order to ascertain their views on

¹ Ron J. Bigalke Jr., "The Latest Postmodern Trend: The Emerging Church," *JDT* 10, no. 31 (December 2006): 20-30; David Cloud, *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement: The History and Error*, 4th ed. (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2011).

² Suggested reading: James King, "Emerging Issues for the Emerging Church," *JMT* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 24-61. Mal Crouch, "The Power of the Catholic Popes," *CTJ* 6, no. 18 (August 2002): 148-163. Robert E. Hempy Jr., "The Sufficiency of Scripture and Modern Psychology," *CTSJ* 4, no. 1 (January 1998): 10-12. William J. Larkin, "Approaches to and Images of Biblical Authority for the Postmodern Mind," *BBR* 8, no. 1 (1998): 129-138.

whether the Bible is sufficient for leading someone to salvation and to the knowledge of how to live a holy life. Additionally, whether the apostolic fathers believed the Bible's truth should be supplemented with councils, popes, prophecies, or something else, will be examined.

Clement of Rome

Clement's Relationship to the Apostles

The first father whose views of Scripture will be evaluated is Clement of Rome. Little is known about Clement, but there is evidence he may be whom Paul spoke of in Philippians 4:3.³

Eusebius agrees that Clement of Rome is mentioned in this passage, also noting that Clement became the third Bishop of Rome and that he had a close relationship with the apostles (Hist. Eccl. 3.4.10). Likewise, Irenaeus, in his *Adversus Haereses* affirms that Clement had seen the apostles and conversed with them numerous times, and remarks that Clement was such a loyal follower of the apostles' teachings that he "might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes" (3.3.3). Saint Jerome, in *De Viris Illustribus* (15) also agrees with these propositions. As such, it is reasonable to confirm that Clement had a personal relationship with the apostles and was even regarded highly by them.

Clement's Letter to the Corinthians

Clement's letter to the Corinthian church is his most well-known work, and was written between ninety and one hundred A.D.⁴ His letter was written to address a dispute that was occurring in the Corinthian church that involved the Corinthians removing many of their leaders from their

³ See, for example, Tertullian, "The Prescription Against Heretics," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 415-416.

⁴ Davorin Peterlin, "Clement's Answer to the Corinthian Conflict in AD 96," *JETS* 39, no. 1 (March 1996): 57.

ecclesiastical positions.⁵ This was problematic to Clement, because, according to him, the presbyters who were removed were innocent and “living honorably” (1 Clem. 44:3-44:5).⁶ He sent a letter to the church in order to encourage its congregation to return to righteous living and to also place the presbyters back into office. This letter is important because it is essentially a pastoral letter. Clement has identified a problem in a church and is writing to alleviate it. It is in how he addresses the situation, the solutions he proposes, and what he uses for his standard of truth, that his theology and his understanding of bibliological doctrines might be uncovered.

Clement’s Reliance on Scripture

First, what is most significant about 1 Clement is how often it quotes or references Scripture. It is a masterpiece of biblical exposition. The epistle has approximately 392 verses, and of those 392 verses, by this author’s calculations, more than half of them consists of biblical references and quotations of Scripture (e.g. 1 Clem. 4:1-5:6, 7:6-13:4, 14:2-18:14, 22:1-24:2). What is more, many of the verses that do not contain references or quotations are expounding the biblical passages that are being referenced or quoted (such as 1 Clem. 8:6-9:1, 16:1-2, 50:6-51:3). It would appear, then, that Clement thought extraordinarily highly of Scripture. Not only that, but such a consistent utilization of Scripture may suggest that the Bible was Clement’s standard for truth. Clement’s lofty view of Scripture is exemplified by the stance on biblical inerrancy he takes in 1 Clement 45:1-3. In this passage, he urges, “Be ye contentious, brethren, and jealous about the things that pertain unto salvation. Ye have searched the scriptures, which are true,

⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2010), 132.

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all references to and quotations of 1 Clement come from the following source. Clement of Rome, “The Epistle of Saint Clement,” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (London: MacMillan, 1889), part 1, vol. 1.

which were given through the Holy Ghost; and ye know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them.” Thus, it can be demonstrated that Clement possessed a rather strong adoration for the Word of God.

Clement’s Emphasis on Doctrinal Transmission

Secondly, Clement consistently emphasizes the fact that biblical doctrines were transmitted through human agents. In 1 Clement 3-6, the bishop uses Old Testament Christians as examples of how believers ought to live their lives.⁷ Next, in 5:1-5:3, Clement implores, “But, to pass from the examples of ancient days, let us come to those champions who lived nearest to our time. Let us set before us the noble examples which belong to our generation...let us set before our eyes the good apostles.” He subsequently uses the apostles to illustrate how practical sanctification is expressed through those indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Then, he makes a significant statement. “Wherefore, let us forsake idle and vain thoughts; and let us conform to the glorious and venerable rule which hath been handed down to us; and let us see what is good and what is pleasant and what is acceptable in the sight of Him that made us,” (1 Clem. 7:2-7:3). One can hear faint reverberations of Romans 12:2 in this passage. To Clement, like Paul, the act of turning away from idle and vain thoughts includes conforming to the rule that has been handed down to Christians. He uses a similar wording in 1 Clem. 19:2 when he says “Let us hasten to return unto the goal of peace which hath been handed down to us from the beginning...” This is also similar to Jude’s wording in Jude 3:3. Whether or not Clement is borrowing from Jude or had Jude’s passage in mind when he wrote these verses is unknown. However, what is apparent is that Clement places a strong emphasis on the idea of doctrinal transmission.

⁷ D. W. Simon, “Clemens Romanus: An Apologetical Study,” *BS* 22, no. 87 (July 1865): 357.

Over and over again, Clement explores how God has worked in the lives of the biblical writers and how the entire Christian church has benefited from their reception and transmission of divine revelations (e.g. 1 Clem. 3:6, 16:17-18:14, 42:3-43:1). As Peterlin points out, Clement desires to explain to the Corinthians that there is a “divinely appointed succession,” several layers of authority, and Christians stand upon the doctrinal foundations laid by those who have more authority than they.⁸ This is illustrated through Clement’s proclamation in 1 Clement 42:1-42:2 that “The apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order.” He then proceeds to discuss how the apostles spread the message of Christ. In the same way, he announces “The humility therefore and the submissiveness of so many and so great men... hath through obedience made better not only us but also the generations which were before us, even them that received His oracles in fear and truth,” (1 Clem. 19:1). In other words, Clement is stating that apostles have more theological authority than those who are not apostles, since the Holy Spirit worked through them in a way that is different from how He works through those who are not part of the original apostolate.⁹

Clement’s View of the Bible’s Sufficiency

It is evident that Clement believes the Christian faith has been passed on to his generation from the prophets and apostles. The former received their revelations from God the Father and the latter received theirs from God the Father through Christ Jesus. Similarly, in 1 Clement 31:1 Clement asserts, “Let us therefore cleave unto His blessing, and let us see what are the ways of

⁸ Peterlin, “Clement’s Answer,” 62.

⁹ W. Harold Mare, “The Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers,” *GJ* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 9.

blessing. Let us study the records of the things that have happened from the beginning,” and then proceeds to discuss the salvation of the patriarchs. In this passage, Clement is professing that the doctrine of salvation can be found in the Old Testament books that the prophets wrote and transmitted. He is basing Christian theology off of what the prophets wrote. This implies that Clement believes the Christian faith is defined by the doctrines that have been passed down from the prophets and apostles (also see 1 Clem. 5:2-3, 7:2). In 1 Clement 19:1-3 he even equates looking unto God’s will (19:3) with observing the doctrines of the apostles (19:2). If the Christian faith has been transmitted to this generation by the Old and New Testament saints (1 Clem 42:1-43:6, 63:1), and the Christian faith is characterized by the doctrines found in Scripture, then it follows that the doctrines of Scripture have been transmitted by the Old and New Testaments saints.

Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the “rule which hath been handed down to us” Clement mentions in 1 Clement 7:2 is a reference to the doctrines found in Scripture. If this is the case, his next phrase, “...and let us see what is good and what is pleasant and what is acceptable in the sight of Him that made us,” (1 Clem. 7:3) could be indicative of what he perceives the consequences are of conforming to that rule. In other words, Clement may be affirming that by reading the Scriptures (including the New Testament books that had yet to be canonized) people are able to know what is acceptable in God’s eyes. This certainly is consistent with 1 Clement 45:1-3 in which he makes a connection between being “jealous about the things that pertain unto salvation” and searching the Scriptures. Moreover, in 1 Clement 2:1-2, he writes, “Giving heed unto His words, ye laid them up diligently in your hearts, and His sufferings were before your eyes. Thus...an abundant outpouring also of the Holy Spirit fell upon all.” He continues through 2:3-8 describing the immense behavioral changes that occurred

among the Corinthians after they “heeded” God’s words. Here Clement proposes a cause and effect relationship between the Corinthians heeding God’s words and their conversion. This conveys that Clement believes the Scriptures have within them all knowledge required for salvation and holy living.

However, it would be a non-sequitur to admit this also conveys that Clement believes that divine truth cannot be obtained outside of Scripture. While in the entirety of his letter he makes no reference to any vision, prophecy, church council, priest, pope, or anything else as a way of supporting his theological propositions, and does not appear to supplement the truth of Scripture with such things, the fact that he does not reference them does not necessarily mean he is against them. As a matter of fact, Mare posits that in 1 Clement 63:2, Clement “suggests that there were others than the Apostles and their close acquaintances in subsequent times, who through the Spirit were authors of Scripture.”¹⁰ If anything, it would simply mean that he affirms Scripture is primary in determining divine truth, and everything else is secondary. Therefore, two possible conclusions that could be drawn from 1 Clement are that Clement believes Scripture is sufficient for both leading someone to salvation and guiding them through practical sanctification, and that Scripture has ultimate authority when it comes to the prescribing of theological doctrines and moral laws (cf. 1 Clem. 1:2-2:8, 7:2, 13:3, 42:3, 47:1-2, 53:1, 50:4, 57:3-58:2, 59:1, 62:3).

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius’ Relationship to the Apostles

The second apostolic father who will be examined, Ignatius, was born around 30-35 A.D.¹¹

¹⁰ Mare, “The Holy Spirit,” 9.

¹¹ Justo T. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity, vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Harper One, 2010), 51.

According to *The Martyrdom of Ignatius* (1), he was a disciple of John the Apostle. Eusebius mentions that Evodius, the first bishop of Antioch, was succeeded by Ignatius, and that Ignatius was held in high regard by the Christian community (Hist. Eccl. 3.22, 3.36.2). On his way to be martyred in Rome under emperor Trajan, he wrote various epistles to churches in Asia Minor and even to the Christians in Rome itself.¹² These letters primarily combatted Gnosticism and the Christological heresy of Docetism, but they also urged their readers to submit to the authority of their bishops.¹³

Thematic Elements of the Ignatian Epistles

Each of Ignatius' letters, for the most part, expresses three general themes. First, in his letters, Ignatius expresses a concern for Christian unity (cf. Smyrn. 8:1; Phil. 2:1, 3:3; Pol. 6:1; Magn. 7:1; Trall. 8:2, 11:1; Eph. 2:2, 20:2). Second, the letters call for church congregants to submit to their bishops (cf. Smyrn. 8:1; Phil. 8:1; Magn. 3:1-2; Trall. 2:1-3; Pol. 5:2, 6:1; Eph. 4:1). Lastly, the letters emphasize the authority of the apostles' doctrines (cf. Smyrn. 8:1; Phil. 5:1, 9:1; Magn. 6:1, 13:1; Rom. 4:3; Trall. 2:2, 7:1; Eph. 11:2). Ignatius' letter to Rome would be something of an exception since its telos is different from the others. In that letter, Ignatius' primary concern is to persuade the Christians in Rome to cease their attempts to save him from his upcoming death.¹⁴ Each of these themes will now be discussed.

Ignatius' View of Christian Unity

Ignatius' desire that Christians be unified over truth, at first glance, may not be so different from

¹² Howard Clark Kee et. al., *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 85.

¹³ MacCulloch, *Three Thousand Years*, 133.

¹⁴ Gonzales, *Story of Christianity*, 52-53.

the Emerging Church's tendency to value relationships and unity over confessional Christianity and doctrine.¹⁵ However, throughout his letters, it is evident that Ignatius prioritizes Christian doctrine and truth. For example, he urges Polycarp, "Let not those that seem to be plausible and yet teach strange doctrine dismay thee. Stand thou firm, as an anvil when it is smitten" (Pol. 3:1).¹⁶ In this verse, Ignatius does not tell Polycarp to agree and be of one mind with those who teach strange doctrine, but rather to stay true to the Christian faith, implying that it is better to believe truth than to maintain unity with people. Additionally, Ignatius commands the congregation in Philadelphia that if someone preaches Judaism, they should "hear him not," going on to say that he views those who do not believe in Christ's Messiahship as "tombstones and graves of the dead" (Phil. 6:1). To Ignatius, truth is more important than forming and keeping relationships.

It is curious, then, to ponder what he means by commands such as, "Attempt not to think anything right for yourselves apart from others: but let there be one prayer in common, one supplication, one mind, one hope, in love and in joy unblameable, which is Jesus Christ, than whom there is nothing better [sic]" (Magn. 7:1). Paul uses a hymn to promote a similar idea in Philippians 2:2, in which he asks the Philippians to "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose," (ESV).¹⁷ Black comments that the Philippian church was experiencing "internal dissension," and Paul's purpose

¹⁵ This charge would not apply to every member of the Emerging Church, but primarily to those members whom Woodbridge classifies as "Revisionists." See, Noel B. Woodridge, "Understanding the Emerging Church Movement: An Overview of Its Strengths, Areas of Concern and Implications for Today's Evangelicals," *Conspectus* 4, no. 1 (March 2007).

¹⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of the Ignatian letters come from the following source: J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, trans. and eds., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989).

¹⁷ David Alan Black, "Paul and Christian Unity: A Formal Analysis of Philippians 2:1-4," *JETS* 28, no. 3 (September 1985): 299-308.

in penning Philippians 2:2 was to encourage them to put such dissensions away.¹⁸ Elsewhere in the Pauline corpus one finds the apostle ordering the punishment of excommunication for church members who are living unrepentant lifestyles (e.g. Philippians 2:1-2). As such, it may be reasonable to say that Paul's idea of church unity is one in which church members are united on the truth of Scriptures and are one in obeying the biblical text. There is no need nor justification for disunity and dissensions among church members when they all believe the truth of Scripture, because they are all spiritual family members.

On the other hand, while it is true that Ignatius did have access to New Testament epistolary literature, it is impossible to know whether he is making a direct reference to Philippians here.¹⁹ The point, however, is that the idea of having "one mind" with fellow believers does not necessarily imply that agreement and peace are to be valued above truth. As a matter of fact, it is almost impossible that Ignatius' call to unity could mean that he affirms heresy is acceptable so long as everyone believes in it, considering the fact that he regularly tells his congregation to resist heretical doctrines (e.g. Trall. 6:1-6:2, 9:1; Magn. 8:1; Phil. 6:1ff; Smyrn. 5:1-7:2; Eph. 8:1-10:3). Perhaps the most feasible interpretation would be that he is urging church members to be unified in their affirmation and espousal of sound doctrine and to be especially careful to maintain peaceful and altruistic relationships with their fellow congregants.

The Origin of Truth

Ignatius' view of episcopal authority

If there is veracity to the proposition that Ignatius values truth above unity, then from where does

¹⁸ Black, "Analysis of Philippians," 305.

¹⁹ Daniel Hoffman, "The Authority of Scripture and Apostolic Doctrine in Ignatius of Antioch," *JETS* 28, no. 1 (March 1985): 74.

he think this truth can be obtained? As was previously mentioned, Ignatius commanded church congregations to be in submission to their bishops in terms of doctrine and holy living. His instruction to the Smyrnaeans, for instance, was to “Let no man do aught of things pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop,” (Smyrn. 8:1). From passages like these it might be presumed that Ignatius subscribes to the idea that truth is derived, albeit indirectly, from bishops. Yet, in his letter to the Magnesians (3:1), he tells the Magnesian church to “render unto [the bishop] all reverence...give place to him as to one prudent in God; yet, not to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ, even the Bishop of all.” Subsequently he indicates that to obey bishops is to bring honor to God (Magn. 3:2).

Here it may be tempting to argue that Ignatius ascribes to the bishopric some kind of divine power and authority in prescribing doctrines that a common Christian does not have, such as the power and authority Roman Catholicism ascribes to the position. However, one must remember that the monarchical episcopate of Roman Catholicism as it is known today took several centuries to develop, and that in the early apostolic church, “bishop” was, essentially, synonymous with “elder.”²⁰ Indeed, in 1 Timothy 3:2, the Greek word translated by the KJV translation as “bishop” is ἐπίσκοπον, transliterated as episkopon. Episkopon merely refers to the idea of oversight and guidance; it has no connotations of absolute, unquestionable authority.²¹ Even though it is true that ecclesiastical doctrines began to deviate from New Testament teaching early in the second century A.D., the immense power and authority that the Roman Catholic

²⁰ J. C. Long, “The Historic Episcopate,” *BS* 51, no. 203 (July 1894): 445.

²¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Manhattan, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 243.

episcopacy possesses today was still relatively unknown.²² It would be somewhat anachronistic, to say that Ignatius held to the idea of Papal Infallibility or even Papal Primacy, especially considering that the earliest official decrees of these doctrines cannot be found until at least the fifth century.²³ Another crucial point is that Ignatius seems to imply the reason the Magnesians church should be in submission to their bishops is because the bishop is “prudent in God” (Magn. 3:1). He does not appeal to the bishopric itself, but rather to the knowledge and Godliness of the person who holds the position. Therefore, it is not evident that Ignatius believes that divine truth can find its origination (through God providing them knowledge of such truth) in bishops. Rather, it would seem that he acknowledges bishops obtain their knowledge from prophets and apostles, and it is because they are well learned in the Scriptures that they should be followed.

Ignatius’ view of apostolic authority

Even though he is himself a bishop, not once in his letters does Ignatius appeal to the authority of the bishopric. As Hoffman insightfully points out, in Ignatius’ letter to the Ephesians he even “makes a distinction between his own teaching and that given by the apostles.”²⁴ The passage in focus reads, “Seeing that I love you I thus spare you, though I might write more sharply on [your bishop’s] behalf: but I did not think myself competent for this, that being a convict I should order you as though I were an Apostle,” (Trall. 3:3). He tells the church in Rome “I do not enjoin you, as Peter and Paul did. They were Apostles, I am a convict; they were free, but I am a slave to this very hour,” (Rom. 4:3). It is clear that Ignatius believes the apostles are more authoritative than

²² Norman L. Geisler, “The Historical Development of Roman Catholicism,” *CAJ* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 21-22.

²³ J. Van Engen, “Papacy,” in *EDT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 888.

²⁴ Hoffman, “The Authority of Scripture,” 78.

himself. This does not definitively prove that Ignatius believes the Bible itself is authoritative, but rather that he thought those humans who authored the Bible are authoritative. What is more, that he constantly yields to the instructions of the apostles and to the revelation of the Old Testament indicates he affirms that divine truth finds its human origins in the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles who directly received God's special revelation (cf. Smyrn. 7:2; Phil. 5:1, 9:1; Magn. 8:2; Acts 10:43; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:2).

The Content of Truth

What Ignatius believes to be the content of this divine truth can be found in Trall. 9:1, in which he commands the Trallians, "Be ye deaf therefore, when any man speaketh to you apart from Jesus Christ...apart from whom we have not true life." He also equates those who disbelieve in the literal death and suffering of Christ with those who are unregenerate (Trall. 10:1). From these passages it can be gleaned that Ignatius taught that salvation is not possible for those who do not believe in the Gospel, and for Ignatius, the entire Gospel centers on Christ (Phil. 9:2). As such, according to Ignatius, what is necessary for salvation and practical sanctification is knowledge of, and belief on, Jesus Christ. The content of divine truth is Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

That said, it may be fair to claim that Ignatius' views on the Bible's sufficiency can be understood from Smyrn. 5:1, in which he says the people who have been denied by Christ are "advocates of death rather than of the truth; and they have not been persuaded by the prophecies nor by the law of Moses, nay nor even to this very hour by the Gospel, nor by the sufferings of each of us severally..." If in order to receive salvation (be accepted by Christ), one must believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and if someone disbelieving in such things means they have not been persuaded by the Old Testament nor the Gospel, then it can be concluded that the knowledge of Christ's life, death, and resurrection is found in the Bible. Thus, Ignatius may

hold the position that the Bible is sufficient for salvation, in that the Bible contains all of the truths Ignatius believes are necessary for salvation. Further, Ignatius' letters do not demonstrate an insistence that those truths need to be supplemented.

Conclusion

In summary, both Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch seem to agree that the knowledge found in Scripture is sufficient for leading someone to salvation. Yet, it needs to be said that the New Testament was not canonized by the time these two men walked the earth. Thus, precision must be used in describing how they would view the Bible's sufficiency. It can be stated that Clement and Ignatius believe that the Bible is sufficient for salvation in so far that the truths they both claim are sufficient for salvation can be found in the Bible.

Additionally, from their letters alone it is not demonstrable that they thought it necessary to supplement with councils, popes, prophecies, visions, their feelings, or anything else, the truths taught by the prophets and apostles. This is, of course, an argument from silence, and does not conclusively mean that Clement and Ignatius were against such supplements. It does mean, however, that one cannot appeal to the letters of Clement nor Ignatius to support the idea that the Scriptures should be supplemented. It is possible that Clement and Ignatius believed Scripture should be supplemented, but, by reading only their letters, it is not provable that they did. For this reason, those who seek to give evidence that these two men taught that the Bible should be supplemented must use sources that are written about Clement and Ignatius instead of sources that are actually written by them. This lowers the overall persuasiveness of an affirmative position.

Nonetheless, because Clement and Ignatius personally knew the apostles and were highly esteemed by them, their beliefs carry much weight in doctrinal matters. They are, in a sense,

ambassadors and representatives of what the apostles taught, and exemplify how non-apostles are to live and function in the context of New Testament Christianity. From following their examples, it would appear that Christians are to have a steadfast, unwavering reliance on the Bible and are to be entirely dependent on its teachings. Indeed, according to these apostolic fathers, the Scriptures are sufficient for salvation because therein can be found the words of the prophets and apostles who speak the words of God and testify of the Messiah. To reject the sufficiency of Scripture, then, is to reject the sufficiency of God Himself and the sufficiency of His Christ for salvation.

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