

**Church History and Evidences**  
**Notes: Church "Fathers": Ignatius**

**I. Church "fathers" and their writings: Ignatius**

**A. Ignatius of Antioch**

1. Ignatius of Antioch (also known as Theophorus) (c. 35-50 – c. 110) was the third bishop or Patriarch of Antioch and a student of the Apostle John. En route to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius wrote a series of letters which have been preserved. Important topics addressed in these letters include ecclesiology, the sacraments, the role of bishops, and the Incarnation of Christ. He is the second after Clement to mention Paul's epistles.

2. Nothing is known of Ignatius' life apart from what may be inferred internally from his letters, except from later (sometimes spurious) traditions. It is said Ignatius converted to Christianity at a young age. Tradition identifies Ignatius, along with his friend Polycarp, as disciples of John the Apostle. Later in his life, Ignatius was chosen to serve as Bishop of Antioch.

3. A tradition arose that he was one of the children whom Jesus Christ took in his arms and blessed, although if he was born around 50 AD, as supposed, then Christ had ascended approximately 20 years prior.

4. Ignatius' own writings mention his arrest by the authorities and travel to Rome to face trial:

1. *"From Syria even to Rome I fight with wild beasts, by land and sea, by night and by day, being bound amidst ten leopards, even a company of soldiers, who only grow worse when they are kindly treated."* — Ignatius to the Romans, 5.

5. Ignatius' transfer to Rome is regarded by scholars as unusual since those persecuted as Christians would be expected to be punished locally. If he were a Roman citizen, he could have appealed to the emperor, but then would usually have been beheaded rather than tortured.

6. During the journey to Rome, Ignatius and his entourage of soldiers made a number of stops in Asia Minor. Along the route, Ignatius wrote six letters to the churches in the region and one to a fellow bishop, Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. In his Chronicle, Eusebius gives the date of Ignatius's death as AA 2124 (2124 years after Abraham), i.e. the 11th year of Trajan's reign, AD 108. Ignatius himself wrote that he would be thrown to the beasts, and in the fourth century Eusebius reports tradition that this came to pass, which is then repeated by Jerome, who is the first to explicitly mention "Lions".

7. After Ignatius' martyrdom in the Circus Maximus, his remains were carried back to Antioch by his companions

**B. Writings**

1. Seven supposed authentic letters:

1. The Letter to the Ephesians,
2. The Letter to the Magnesians,
3. The Letter to the Trallians,
4. The Letter to the Romans,
5. The Letter to the Philadelphians,

6. The Letter to the Smyrnaeans,
  2. Writing in 1886, Presbyterian minister and church historian William Dool Killen asserted none of the Ignatian epistles were authentic. Instead, he argued that Callixtus, bishop of Rome, pseudepigraphically wrote the letters around AD 220 to garner support for a monarchical episcopate, modeling the renowned Saint Ignatius after his own life to give precedent for his own authority. Killen contrasted this episcopal polity with the presbyterian polity in the writings of Polycarp.
  3. Most scholars, however, accept at least the two Ignatian epistles which were referenced by Origen and believe that by the 5th century, this collection had been enlarged by spurious letters. Ignatius's letters proved to be important testimony to the development of Christian theology since the number of extant writings from this period of Church history is very small. They bear signs of being written in great haste and without a proper plan, such as run-on sentences and an unsystematic succession of thought.
  4. Ignatius is known to have taught the deity of Christ:
    1. *"There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first passible and then impassible, even Jesus Christ our Lord."* — Letter to the Ephesians, ch. 7, shorter version, Roberts-Donaldson translation
  5. Also, in the interpolated text of the 4th Century Long Recension:
    1. *"But our Physician is the Only true God, the unbegotten and unapproachable, the Lord of all, the Father and Begetter of the only-begotten Son. We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For "the Word was made flesh." Being incorporeal, He was in the body, being impassible, He was in a passible body, being immortal, He was in a mortal body, being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption, and heal them, and might restore them to health, when they were diseased with ungodliness and wicked lusts."* — Letter to the Ephesians, ch. 7, longer version
  6. He stressed the value of the Eucharist, calling it a "medicine of immortality" (Ignatius to the Ephesians 20:2). The very strong desire for bloody martyrdom in the arena, which Ignatius expresses rather graphically in places, may seem quite odd to the modern reader. An examination of his theology of soteriology shows that he regarded salvation as one being free from the powerful fear of death and thus to bravely face martyrdom.
  7. Ignatius is claimed to be the first known Christian writer to argue in favor of Christianity's replacement of the Sabbath with the Lord's Day:
    1. *"Be not seduced by strange doctrines nor by antiquated fables, which are profitless. For if even unto this day we live after the manner of Judaism, we avow that we have not received grace ... If then those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto newness of hope, no longer observing Sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord's day, on*

*which our life also arose through Him ... how shall we be able to live apart from Him?"* — Ignatius to the Magnesians 8:1, 9:1-2, Lightfoot translation.

2. *"Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness, ... But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body ... and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space ... And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, "To the end, for the eighth day," on which our life both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ"* — Letter to the Magnesians 9, Roberts and Donaldson translation, p. 189

8. Ignatius is the earliest known Christian writer to emphasize loyalty to a single bishop in each city (or diocese) who is assisted by both presbyters (elders) and deacons. Earlier writings only mention either bishops or presbyters. For instance, his writings on bishops, presbyters and deacons:

1. *"Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest"* — Letter to the Magnesians 2, 6:1

9. He is also responsible for the first known use of the Greek word *katholikos* (καθολικός), meaning "universal", "complete" and "whole" to describe the church, writing:

1. *"Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful to baptize or give communion without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid."* — Letter to the Smyrnaeans 8, J.R. Willis translation.

10. It is from the word *katholikos* ("according to the whole") that the word *catholic* comes. When Ignatius wrote the Letter to the Smyrnaeans in about the year 107 and used the word *catholic*, he used it as if it were a word already in use to describe the Church. This has led many scholars to conclude that the appellation *Catholic Church* with its ecclesial connotation may have been in use as early as the last quarter of the First century.

11. On the Eucharist, he wrote in his letter to the Smyrnaeans:

1. *"Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God ... They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes."* — Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2–7:1