Trinitarian Heresy

Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians

Chapter 6 — Abstain from the Poison of Heretics


I therefore, yet not I, but the love of Jesus Christ, entreat you that ye use Christian nourishment only, and abstain from herbage of a different kind; I mean heresy. For those [that are given to this] mix up Jesus Christ with their own poison, speaking things which are unworthy of credit, like those who administer a deadly drug in sweet wine, which he who is ignorant of does greedily take, with a fatal pleasure, leading to his own death.

I therefore, yet not I, but the love of Jesus Christ, “entreat you that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.” For there are some vain talkers and deceivers, not Christians, but Christ-betrayers, bearing about the name of Christ in deceit, and “corrupting the word” of the Gospel; while they intermix the poison of their deceit with their persuasive talk, as if they mingled aconite with sweet wine, that so he who drinks, being deceived in his taste by the very great sweetness of the draught, may incautiously meet with his death. One of the ancients gives us this advice, “Let no man be called good who mixes good with evil.” For they speak of Christ, not that they may preach Christ, but that they may reject Christ; and they speak of the law, not that they may establish the law, but that they may proclaim things contrary to it. For they alienate Christ from the Father, and the law from Christ. They also calumniate His being born of the Virgin, they are ashamed of His cross; they deny His passion; and they do not believe His resurrection. They introduce God as a Being unknown; they suppose Christ to be unbegotten; and as to the Spirit, they do not admit that He exists. Some of them say that the Son is a mere man, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are but the same person, and that the creation is the work of God, not by Christ, but by some other strange power.


The thought that the Apostles might be searching for God is simply laughable. Yet that was one of the first danger signals to appear in the church—the predicted activity of those intellectuals who would be “ever seeking and never coming to a knowledge of the truth.” Already, at the end of the first century, Ignatius of Antioch writes to the Trallians: “There are some Christ-betrayers, bearing about the name of Christ in deceit, and corrupting the word of the Gospel. . . . They do not believe in his resurrection. They introduce God as being unknown.” And to the Smyrnaens he says: “Do ye, therefore, mark those who preach other doctrines, how they affirm that the Father of Christ cannot be known.” The great crime of the heretics in general, according to the Apostolic Constitutions, is “that they blaspheme God by saying that he is unknowable and not the Father of Christ . . . but is indescribable, unutterable, unnamable, self-begotten. We, the sons of God [it is supposed to be the Apostles speaking] declare that there is one God alone, the Lord of the law and the prophets, the creator of things that are, the Father of Christ, not self-caused and self-begotten, as the Gnostics say, but everlasting and without beginning, dwelling in inaccessible light. He is not two or three or many, but one eternally, not unknown or unnamed but proclaimed through the Law and the Prophets.” Irenaeus’ first charge against the Gnostics is that “they say the Father cannot be known.”