

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, THEOLOGY OF

THEOLOGICAL VIEW: ONENESS MODALISM



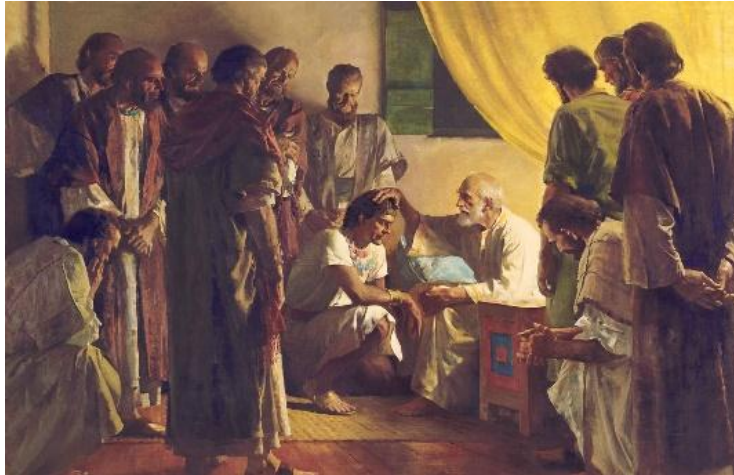
STEVEN RITCHIE



IGNATIUS TAUGHT THE SAME THEOLOGY OF THE APOSTLES

Ignatius is called an “Apostolic Father” because he was taught by the original apostles within the first century. Although the historical information about Ignatius’ background is somewhat vague, we can be sure that Ignatius had been taught by some of the original apostles within the first century, as scripture informs us that Peter and Paul had ministered in Antioch (*Galatians 2:11-14*). Historical sources within early Christian literature also inform us that both Ignatius and Polycarp had been students of the apostle John (*O’Connor, John Bonaventure. "St. Ignatius of Antioch." The Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 7. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. 15 Feb. 2016*). This is likely the case, as we know that the apostle John had ministered throughout Asia Minor.





In about 190 AD, Clement of Alexandria wrote that the apostle John had travelled “from church to church, appointing bishops.”

“When John the apostle returned to Ephesus from his exile on the island of Patmos, he was invited to numerous churches. He went from church to church, appointing bishops, strengthening the people, and ordaining others who were *marked out by the Spirit*.” (Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* ch. 42, c. A.D. 190).



Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch in Norther Syria which borders Asia Minor where the apostle John ministered “from church to church.” Although we cannot be certain if Ignatius had been ordained as the bishop of Antioch by Peter, Paul, or John - as there are conflicting accounts in later church history (*Theodoret, Dial. 1. p. 33* says “Peter” / *The Apostolic Constitution* states that “Euodius” was “ordained by Peter” and “Ignatius by Paul” / *The "Synaxarium: The Martyrdom of St. Ignatius, and Patriarch of Antioch", Coptic Orthodox Church* says “John”), no respectable scholar would argue against Ignatius being ordained by one of the first century apostles and that he had heard their teachings firsthand. It is therefore highly unlikely that Ignatius did not fully understand the theology of the



first century apostles, as he sat under their teachings. Ignatius' close association with the apostles would certainly explain why Ignatius was so highly venerated among the churches of Asia Minor and why his seven letters were copied and spread throughout the world.

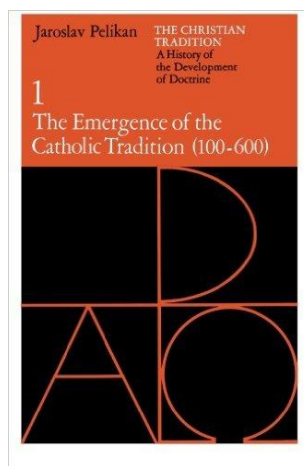
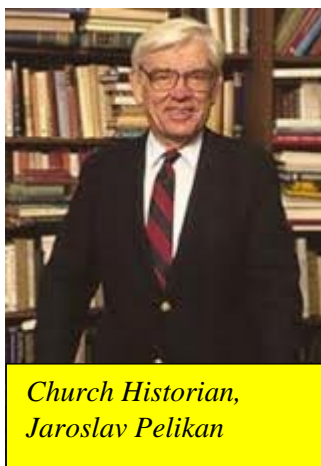
Since most historians and scholars agree that Ignatius was martyred under Emperor Trajan within the time frame of 107-113 AD, it is very unlikely that Peter or Paul could have ordained Ignatius the third bishop of Antioch, as Ignatius would have been more than eighty years old by time of his death. If Peter or Paul ordained Ignatius, he would have had to be ordained in the late 50's or early 60's before their martyrdom's (Peter died 64-68 / Paul died 67-68). Therefore I am prone to believe the historical sources pointing to Ignatius being mentored and ordained by the apostle John.

The "Synaxarium: The Martyrdom of St. Ignatius, and Patriarch of Antioch" says,

"On this day, the honorable St. **Ignatius, Patriarch of Antioch**, was martyred. **He was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist and travelled with him to many cities. St. John ordained him Patriarch of Antioch** where he preached the life giving Gospel, converted many to the knowledge of God, baptized them, illumined them, and showed them the error of worshipping idols." (*"Synaxarium: The Martyrdom of St. Ignatius, and Patriarch of Antioch", Coptic Orthodox Church Network*)

If Ignatius had been a disciple of the apostle John, and had travelled with him, he would have been very familiar with John's theological beliefs. Ignatius would have known the precise meaning of John 1:1 where the apostle John wrote about "the logos" ["expressed thought"] of God in John chapter one being "with God" along with the precise meaning of John 14:24 when Jesus said that "the logos" was not his, but the Father's. "The logos (word) which you hear IS NOT MINE, but THE FATHER'S."

TRINITARIAN SCHOLARS AND HISTORIANS HAVE IDENTIFIED IGNATIUS' THEOLOGY AS MODALISTIC MONARCHIAN

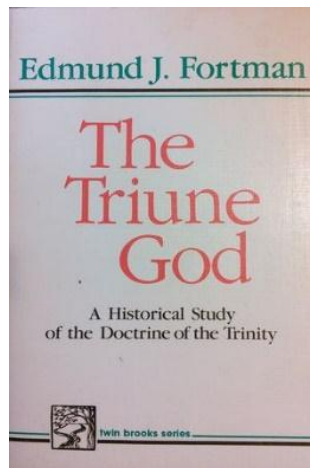


The famed Eastern Orthodox church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, wrote that "Many of the passages in ancient Christian writers sound like Modalistic Monarchianism" (*The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, Vol. 1, Pg. 177*). Then in the same paragraph (page 177) Pelikan cited Ignatius of Antioch (40-113 AD) and Melito of Sardis (130-180 AD) to show that their writings sounded "like Modalistic Monarchianism."



After citing Ignatius of Antioch and Melito of Sardis, Pelikan admitted that **“Modalistic Monarchianism ... turns out to have been a systematization of popular Christian belief in ancient Christian theology.”** (*The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition Vol. I. – Page 179*)

If Trinitarian thought had been a “popular Christian belief in ancient Christian theology,” we can be certain that Mr. Pelikan would have pointed it out to us. To the contrary, Pelikan wrote that “Modalistic Monarchianism” was the “popular Christian belief” as the most “ancient Christian theology.”



The late Edmund J. Fortman, R.C. Jesuit Scholar

Trinitarian historians such as J.N.D. Kelly and Edmund Fortman have correctly pointed out Ignatius’ tendency to think of the Oneness of God in that “the Son and the Spirit” are “modes of the Father’s self-revelation” (*JND Kelly Early Christian Doctrines, p.93*). On the other hand, Kelly and Fortman pointed out Ignatius’ use of the titles, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit listed together in two occurrences within his seven authentic epistles. The use of the titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit listed together is not problematic for Oneness Pentecostals, as this does not necessitate a belief in a three person deity. Matthew 28:19 lists Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit together without proving a Trinity of three divine persons. Oneness adherents believe that God the Father has manifested Himself through His own Spirit (God in action – Gen. 1:2-3) and that He was later “manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16) as “the man Christ Jesus” in order to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:18-23). Therefore, rather than believing in three coequally distinct divine persons, Oneness adherents can affirm that Ignatius believed that the Son and the Holy Spirit are manifestations of the Father’s own self-revelation.

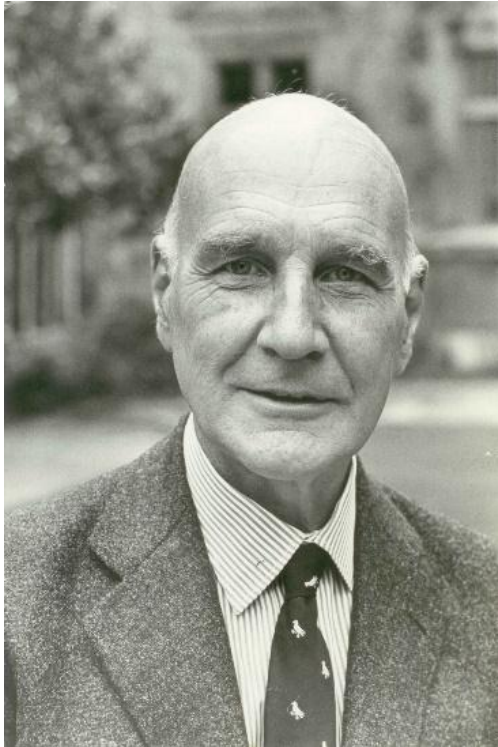
Catholic scholar Edmund J. Fortman wrote in his book, **The Triune God,**

“He (Ignatius) urges the Magnesians to ‘be eager ... to be confirmed in the commandments of our Lord and His apostles, so that whatever you do may prosper ... in the Son and Father and Spirit’ (Magn. 13.2). And in one of his most famous passages he declares: ‘Like the stones of a temple, cut for a building of God the Father, you have been lifted up to the top by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the Cross, and the rope of the Holy Spirit’(Eph. 9.1). Thus although **there is nothing remotely resembling a doctrine of the Trinity in Ignatius, the triadic pattern of thought is there ...**” (*The Triune God, Edmund J. Fortman, p. 39-40*)

Notice that while acknowledging the three-ness “pattern of thought” in Ignatius, Mr. Fortman still acknowledged that “there is nothing remotely resembling a doctrine of the Trinity in Ignatius.” This speaks volumes! To Fortman, Ignatius’ use of the titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does not even “remotely” resemble “a doctrine of the Trinity.” If Ignatius was a true Trinitarian, why is there “nothing remotely resembling a doctrine of the Trinity” in his writings?



According to historians Kelly and Loofs, the only alternative view describing Ignatius' theology is that ***“the Son and the Spirit” are “merely forms or modes of the Father’s self-revelation*** (JND Kelly *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.93),” which was clearly the Modalistic Monarchian view held by the majority of the earliest Christians within the first three hundred years of Christian history (Tertullian, *Against Praxeus* 3 affirms that the Modalists were “always the majority of the faithful” in the West, while Origen’s *Commentary of the Gospel of John Book 1., chapter 23*, affirms that the Modalists were “the general run of Christians” in the East).



The late J. N. D. Kelly was the Principal of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, England. He was acknowledged internationally as an authority on early patristic Christian history.

Trinitarian Church historian, J. N. D. Kelly, accurately described the theology of Ignatius when he wrote,

“... he speaks of God the Father and Jesus Christ, declaring that 'there is one God, Who has revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ, Who is His Word emerging from silence (Magnesians 8:2)'. Christ is the Father's 'thought' (gnome – Ephesians 3:2), 'the un-lying mouth by which the Father spoke truly'(Ephesians 3:2; Romans 8:2).” (JND Kelly *Early Christian Doctrines*, Pg. 92)

Mr. Kelly succinctly described the theology of Ignatius from the following passages written by Ignatius:

“... there is one God who manifested Himself through Jesus Christ His Son, who is His Word that proceeded from silence,...” (Magnesians 8:2, J.B. Lightfoot).

The context proves that One God the Father “MANIFESTED HIMSELF through Jesus Christ HIS SON, who is HIS WORD.” According to Ignatius, the Son is the Father’s Word rather than a coequal Word Person. The text does not state that a God the Son manifested Himself as an alleged distinct God the Word Person called the Son, but rather, One “God” the Father “was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16) through

“His Word that proceeded from silence.”

“... run in harmony with the mind of God: for Jesus Christ also, our inseparable life, is the mind of the Father ...” (Ephesians 3:2, J.B. Lightfoot)

How could Jesus be “the mind of the Father” while being a coequal God Person? Could an alleged God the Son have been mindless, not having His own divine mind? If the Son is “the mind of the Father,” then that makes Him the Father’s Logos (the Father’s “expressed thought”) as an extension of the Father Himself revealed (“the arm of Yahweh” - Isaiah 53:1).

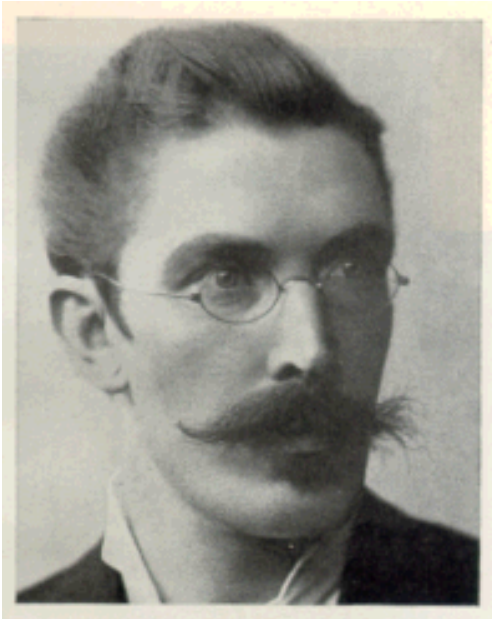
The original word order of John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the word (logos) and the word (logos) was with God, and God was the word (logos).” The Greek word “logos” simply means the “expressed thought” of someone. According to the apostle John, the “logos” is the “expressed thought” of God which would naturally be the expressed mind or thought of God the Father



Himself. Since there are early Christian sources affirming that Ignatius was taught and mentored by the apostle John himself, it is easy to see how Ignatius knew the correct meaning of the logos in John 1:1 as “Jesus Christ” being “the mind of the Father” and the word of the Father Himself (John 14:24 “the logos (word) which you hear IS NOT MINE, BUT THE FATHER’S”).

“... Jesus Christ, the unerring mouth in whom the Father hath spoken [truly].” (Romans 8:2, J.B. Lightfoot)

Jesus said in John 14:24, “The word (logos) which you hear is **not mine, but the Fathers** who sent me.”



Friedrich Loofs (19 June 1858, Hildesheim – 13 January 1928, Halle an der Saale) was a German theologian, church historian and a student of church historian Adolf Harnack. Author of “The History of Dogma.”

Kelly goes on to mirror German historian Friedrich Loofs assessment of Ignatius as a Modalist (Friedrich Loofs, Professor of Church History at the University of Halle-Wittenberg in Germany, 1858-1928), by writing,

“Ignatius regarded God ‘as **an undifferentiated monad** in His essential being, **the Son and the Spirit being merely forms or modes of the Father’s self-revelation, only distinguishable from Him in the process of revelation.**.’” (JND Kelly Early Christian Doctrines, p.93)

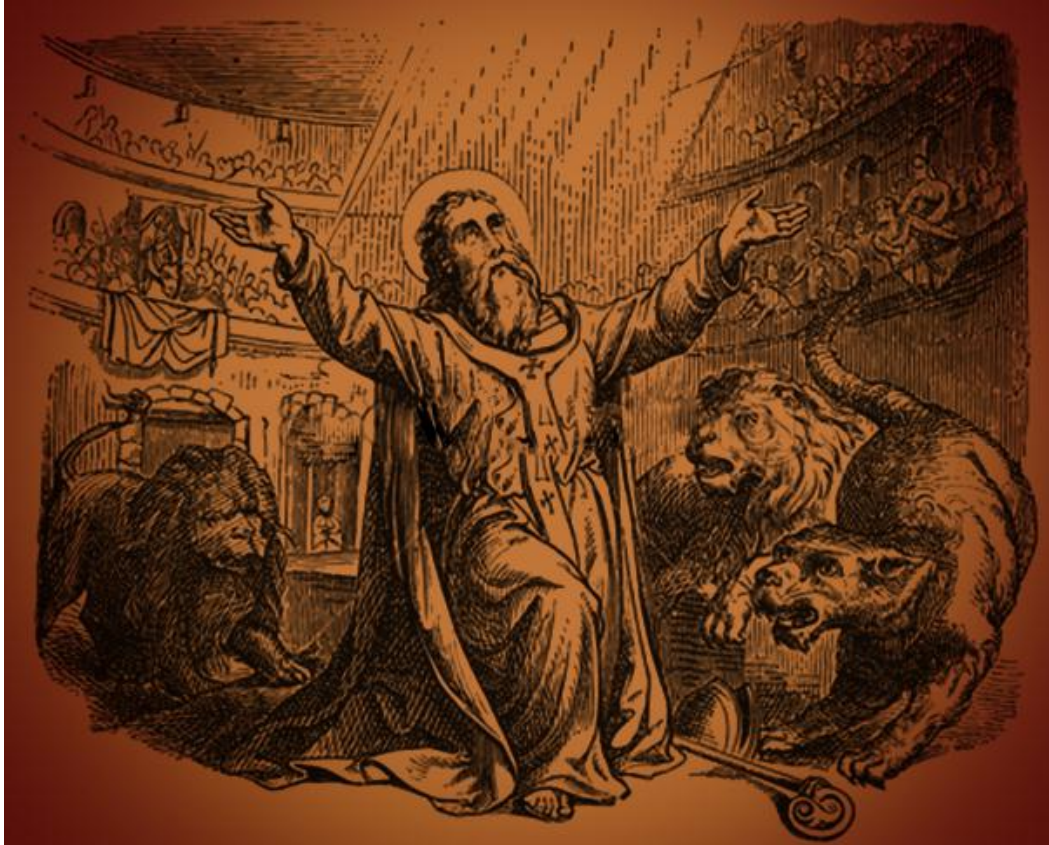
Myriam Webster succinctly Defines Modalism as, “Three **modes** or forms of activity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) under which God manifests himself.” Monarchianism simply means a belief in “One Ruler.” Monarch comes from “mono”, meaning “One” and “arch”, meaning “Ruler.” Hence, Modalistic Monarchianism is the belief in God as One Monarch [Ruler] who has manifested Himself in three modes of activity.

If Loofs and Kelly’s description of Ignatius’ theology does not sound like Modalism, I don’t know what else does! Loofs and Kelly admitted that Ignatius and the

early Christians of Asia Minor (who were taught by the original apostles) believed in God as “an undifferentiated monad (monad = “a single unit or entity”) in His Being” as “the Son and the Spirit” were to them, “merely” “modes of the Father’s self-revelation.” Therefore, even Trinitarian historians describe the theology of Ignatius with vocabulary that fits perfectly with the definition of Modalistic Monarchianism.

Why would Trinitarian scholars state that Ignatius believed that “the Son and the Spirit” were merely “modes of the Father’s self-revelation” if Ignatius was a true Trinitarian? As honest historians Kelly and Loofs had to admit, Ignatius taught that the Son and the Spirit are manifestations of the self-revealing Father.





“For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary according to a dispensation, of the seed of David but also of the Holy Ghost.” (*Ephesians 18:2, J.B. Lightfoot*)

Ephesians 18:2 in a modern translation is much easier to understand,

“For our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God’s plan, both from the seed of David and from the Holy Spirit. ...” (*Ephesians 18:2, Modern Translation*)

Ignatius clearly believed that the humanity of Jesus Christ was “of the seed of David” from “Mary”, while the divinity of Jesus Christ was “of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20).” Therefore, Ignatius believed that the Holy Spirit is the divine nature of the Son from which he claimed divinity (John 8:58; John 14:9), whilst the same omnipresent Holy Spirit is the divinity who Fathered the Son (Luke 1:35).

Ignatius further claimed that the Holy Spirit is the same divine person “who is Jesus Christ.”

“Fare ye well in the harmony of God, ye who have obtained the inseparable Spirit, who is Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:17; Romans 8:9; John 14:16-18).” (*Magnesians 15:1, Roberts-Donaldson Translation*)

According to Ignatius, “the inseparable Spirit” “is Jesus Christ.” Just as Paul contextually wrote in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, “Christ Jesus the Lord (2 Cor. 4:5)” and “the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17),” so Ignatius faithfully followed the theology of the Apostles by writing, “the inseparable Spirit, who is Jesus Christ.” Early first and second century Christian writers often

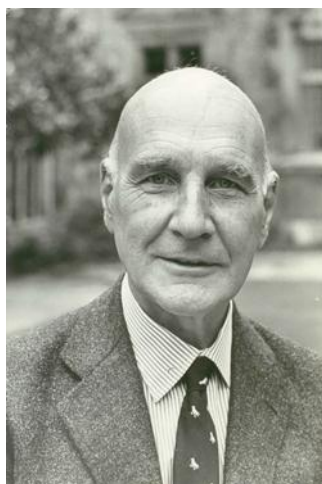


spoke of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit who became the Son through the virgin (Hermas, Clement, Mathetes, Aristides, Irenaeus, Melito) because this is precisely what the first century apostles had taught in all the churches.



Church Historian Jaroslav Pelikan

Pelikan observed that the earliest Christian witness believed that the Lord Jesus Christ is the indwelling Holy Spirit, “... **the use of Lord for the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:17, continued to require explanation even after the Trinitarian issues appeared settled.**” Then in the very next paragraph (Pg. 185) Pelikan wrote, “**Christ is constantly described as Spirit by the fathers, in virtue of His divine nature ... The use of Spirit for the divine in Christ was prominent in those early Christian writings which still show the marks of the Jewish origins of Christianity.**” (*The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, Pg. 185, Jaroslav Pelikan)



J. N. D. Kelly

Church historian J. N. D. Kelly further wrote,

“Ignatius even declares that He is 'our God' (Ephesians 8:2; Trallians 7:1), describing Him as 'God incarnate' (Ephesians 7:2; 19:3 – ‘*en sari genomenos theos*’) and 'God made manifest as man (*theou anthrōpinōs phaneroumenou*).’ He was 'in spirit united with the Father' (*Smyrna 3:3*). **In His pre-existent being 'ingenerate':** (the technical term reserved to distinguish the increate God from creatures), **He was the timeless, invisible, impalpable, impassible one Who for our sakes entered time and became visible, palpable and passible** (Ephesians 7:2; Polycarp 3:2). **His divine Sonship dates from the incarnation.**” (*JND Kelly Early Christian Doctrines*, p.92).

Kelly accurately described Ignatius’ belief that the “timeless” and “increate” “invisible” Spirit of God “entered time” to become subject to sufferings through “His “Sonship” which “dates from the



incarnation.” In other words, although Ignatius believed that the Sonship was dated to the incarnation through the virgin (having a beginning in time), he believed that the timeless, eternal Spirit of God became the “divine Son” only in “the incarnation.” Hence, Ignatius did not believe in a timeless God the Son of a three person deity. Ignatius’ theology was clearly Modalistic, as the One Spirit of the One God became incarnate as the Son in “the incarnation.”

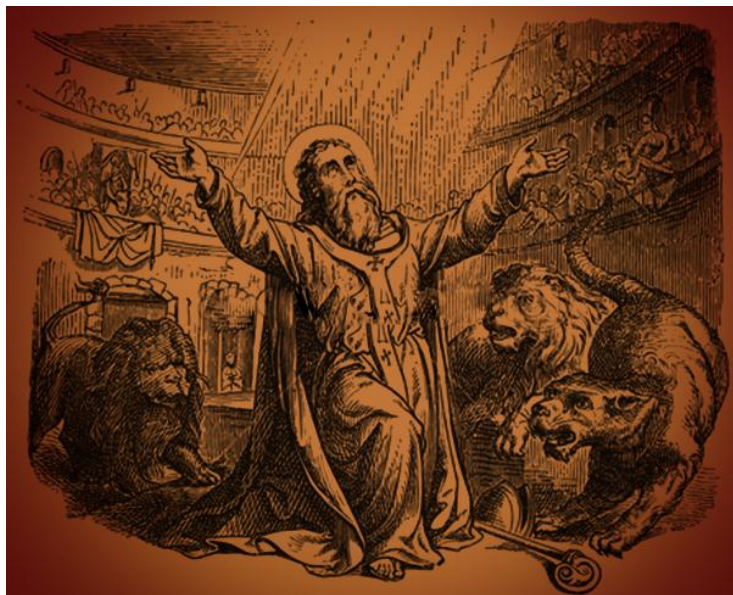
Kelly clearly described Ignatius’ theology as Modalistic rather than Trinitarian when he wrote,

“... the Father was not limited to His earthly sojourn, such as the formulae of greeting and farewell affixed to the letters, and Ignatius' requests to his correspondents to address their prayers to Jesus Christ. But **the only hint he gives of the nature of this distinction within the unity of the divine spirit is that Christ is the Father's 'thought'.**” (*JND Kelly Early Christian Doctrines*, p.93)

How could a coequal God the Son be “the Father’s thought” while still being coequal? There can be no doubt that Ignatius held a Oneness Modalistic Monarchian conception of God which even some Trinitarian historians and theologians have pointed out.

Trinitarian theologian Virginia Corwin (Ph.D.) stated that Ignatius of Antioch was a “Monarchian” rather than a Trinitarian,

“If one term must be chosen to indicate the tendency of his thought, Ignatius must be said to be Monarchian” (*“St Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch”* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960, page 126.).



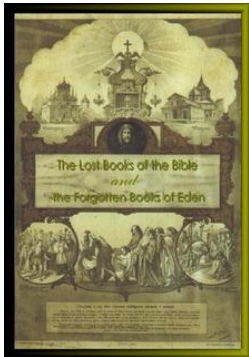
Church historians Kelly and Loofs concur in their description of the simple theology of Ignatius, and of the early second century Christians of Asia Minor (about 107-110 AD) who esteemed Ignatius as one of their greatest leaders. The apostle John had died only about a decade before Ignatius wrote his seven epistles. Therefore, it is most probable that Ignatius was repeating the simple theological teachings that he had received from the first century apostles themselves. Hence, the earliest Christian witness indicates that the first century Christians believed that God



exists “as an undifferentiated monad” in that “the Son and the Spirit” are merely “modes of the Father’s self-revelation (*JND Kelly Early Christian Doctrines*, p.93).”

THE WRITINGS OF IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH PROVE HE WAS A MONARCHIAN MODALIST

Trinitarians often cite Ignatius to the Magnesians 6 to show that Jesus “was with the Father before all ages.” However, Ignatius had taught that Jesus was with the Father as the word (logos = “expressed thought”) of the Father (Magnesians 8:2; Ephesians 3:2), so Jesus could have been with the Father before all ages in God’s “expressed thought” (in His mind and plan which is the meaning of the Greek word “logos”).



Archbishop Wake translated Vossius' 1646 Greek text of Magnesians 6 identifying Jesus “the Father before all ages” who “appeared in the end for us.”

"Jesus Christ, who was the Father before all ages, and appeared in the end to us." (*The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden*, 173)

If "with the Father before all ages" is correct, Jesus can be said to be with the Father within the eternal Logos or Mind of the Father. In John 17:5 "with" translated from Greek is "PARA" in the dative case. Thayer says that this "indicates that something is or is done either in the immediate vicinity of someone, or (metaph) in his mind." (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 477)



Joseph Henry Thayer, author of the Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament



Ignatius wrote to the Ephesians 1:3 "Jesus Christ our inseparable life, is the mind of the Father." How could a person’s MIND be ANOTHER PERSON beside Him? If Jesus is the Mind of the Father, He must be that Father. For how could the Father exist without His own mind? Ignatius personally knew the apostle John and heard his teachings which confirms that the logos in John 1:1 is not spoken of as a literal pre-incarnate Son, but as a Son who was already conceived in the mind (logos) of the Father before the ages of human history began.



The testimony of the earliest Christian witness was clearly Modalistic Monarchian (Oneness). Ignatius repeatedly called Jesus “God” without once mentioning him as an alleged God the Son (*Ephesians 1.1, 7.2, 15.3, 17.2, 18.2, 19.3; Trallians 7.1; Romans 3.3, 6.3; Smyrneans 1.1; Polycarp 8.3*). In fact, no early Christian writers used the words “Eternal Son” or “Eternally begotten Son” during the first two hundred years of Christian history.



Ignatius of Antioch wrote in Polycarp 3:2,

"Look for Him who is above time - the Timeless, **the Invisible, who for our sake became visible**, the Impassible, who became subject to suffering on our account and for our sake endured everything."

Ignatius who was taught by the original apostles, wrote that the God who became “visible” was first “invisible” before his birth. Trinitarians often affirm that the Son was visible as one of the angels of Yahweh (Christophanies) in the Hebrew Scriptures, while the Father was invisible. But to Ignatius and the earliest Christian witness, the only invisible God later became the visible Son who was “subject to suffering on our account.”

Ignatius wrote to the Ephesians, “**God appeared in the likeness of man** unto the newness of everlasting life; and **that which had been perfected in the counsels of God began to take effect.**” (*Ignatius to the Ephesians 19:3, J.B. Lightfoot Translation*)

The Roberts-Donaldson translation of Ignatius to the Ephesians 19:3 expands on the nuances of meaning from the Greek text,

God Himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life. And now **that took a beginning which had been prepared by God.**” (*Ephesians 19:3, Roberts-Donaldson Translation*)

Ignatius wrote, "GOD appeared (“manifested” Roberts-Donaldson Translation) in the likeness of man (“in human form” – Roberts-Donaldson Translation), and that which had been perfected in the councils of God (“had been prepared by God” Roberts-Donaldson Translation) began to take effect (“took a beginning” Roberts-Donaldson Translation).”



Ignatius first identified Jesus as God who appeared as A MAN ('in human form') before he identified the human aspect of his existence as "that which had been perfected in the councils of God" which later "began to take effect." The Greek text indicates that Jesus as a human child born and Son given was a "that which took a beginning" (1 John 1:1) who was "made" "in the councils of God (Ephesians 1:11; Proverbs 8:22-26)," while the God who had "manifested" Himself "in human form" has always existed as the One who is "not made."

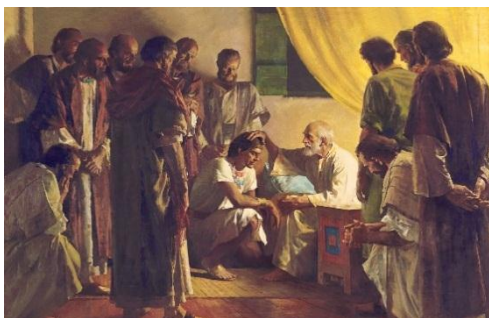
Ignatius wrote to the Ephesians, "There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; BOTH MADE [created] and NOT MADE (not created); GOD EXISTING IN FLESH; true life in death; BOTH OF MARY (human) AND OF GOD (divine); first passible and then impassible, even Jesus Christ our Lord." (*Ephesians 7:2, Roberts-Donaldson Translation*)

Ignatius clearly believed that the Son of God was "made" [created] as man" but was "not made" [not created] as God. For God as God is "not made," nor does God as God have "a beginning." For Ignatius taught that the Son was a "**that which had been perfected in the councils of God**" before taking on "**a beginning**" by his begetting (*Ignatius to the Ephesians 19:3*).

Lightfoot's Translation sheds more light on the nuances of the Greek text in Ephesians 7:2,

"There is one only Physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate [created] and ingenerate [uncreated], GOD IN MAN, true life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible [capable of feeling or suffering] and then impassible [incapable of suffering pain], Jesus Christ our Lord." (*Ignatius to the Ephesians 7:2, J.B. Lightfoot Translation*)

Ignatius was no Trinitarian, he believed that the Son of God (Messiah) was an impersonal "THAT" which "took a beginning." He described the Word (logos) as an impersonal "THAT" which had been perfected in the councils of God" before it receiving "a beginning" as the child born and son given. The apostle John did the same in 1 John 1:1 when he opened his first epistle by saying, "THAT" which was from the beginning" rather than "He who was from the beginning." Therefore the Son is the man who is new, while the "God" who "was manifested in the flesh" as a man" has always existed as the great I AM (John 8:58) before being manifested in the flesh as a human son.



Ignatius personally knew Peter, Paul, and John, and was an eyewitness to their teachings. Therefore the testimony of the earliest Christian witness proves that the logos in John 1:1 is not spoken of as a literal pre-incarnate distinct God the Son. For the child born and Son given who was conceived in the mind and thought (logos) of the Father before the foundation of the world, could not have literally existed as a Son before being "foreknown ... before creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20). Ignatius and the earliest Christians clearly taught that the God who became the child born and Son given is the same "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father" of eternity past (Isaiah 9:6)!



