CHAPTER 2

# The Concept of Death in the Apostolic Fathers



This chapter examines the concept of death in the Apostolic Fathers. The term "Apostolic Fathers" has traditionally been used to designate what we know as the earliest Christian writings that stand outside the New Testament.[1] These writings are believed to cover the time period between AD 70 and 150, otherwise known as the "post-apostolic" period.[2] Many of the writers of these documents remain anonymous. But they are quite engaging in their thought. Jefford remarks that although these texts never made it to the New Testament canon, "the collection of the Apostolic Fathers are considered to be consistent with the general principles and theologies of an apostolic tradition," a tradition that "circulated among the churches from the end of the first century into the middle of the second century."[3] That is, although the writings of these Fathers are not part of the New Testament, their teachings are consistent with those of the New Testament itself. They are, in other words, "small yet precious gems that glitter with the features of Christianity immediately after the

1. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 3.

2. Some of the key texts and translations of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers include Bihlmeyer, *Die apostolischen Väter*; Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*; Lightfoot, *S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp Part 2*; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*; Kirsopp, *The Apostolic Fathers*; Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers*; Glimm et al., *The Apostolic Fathers* and Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

3. Jefford, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 8–9.

New Testament from the close of the first century to the latter part of the second."[4] While some scholars, like Schoedel, do not see any significant theological concerns emerging in these writings, many see these documents as pivotal towards our understanding of the theological concerns of the earliest Christians.[5] Holmes, for example, observes that these writers are "real people struggling to deal with various opportunities, problems, and crises as best as they can."[6] Because a number of them face death through martyrdom, a key crisis becomes the question of the definition and understanding of death.

Recognizing the fact that these Christians wrote in response to differing occasions, it seems necessary to come up with some kind of organizational structure that can help us synthesize their views on death. In the first part of the chapter, we will examine the non-martyriological Apostolic Fathers' concept of death. With such writings as *1 Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the term "sleep" is mostly used to explain the concept of death. In the second part of the chapter, we examine the concept of death as far as the second-century martyrs are concerned. With such fathers as Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, as well as the writings known as *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, such terms as discipleship, sacrifice, imitation, and witness are used to define and describe death.

## DEATH IN EARLY APOSTOLIC FATHERS

In this section, we will argue that the writings of the early Apostolic Fathers on the subject of death reveal a consistent definition of death geared towards exhorting the living towards virtuous living. For them, the subject of death is part of broader exhortations towards other aspects of Christian life such as church unity and holiness. The restful state of those who are dead (mostly described as "sleep") is presented as the incentive for these exhortations in these writings.

4. Bingham, *Pocket History of the Church*, 20.

5. Schoedel, *Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp*, v.

6. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers,* 4. These documents include the writings of Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna. In addition, this list has been expanded to include *The Epistle to Diognetus*, the fragments of Papias, and Quadratus as well as *The Didache*.

## *1 Clement: Death As Sleep*

*1 Clement* is understood to have been written in Rome, most probably in late nineties A.D. The writer is identified in Christian tradition as "Clement," perhaps a key leader of the church in Corinth.[7] It seems to have been occasioned by divisions in the Corinthian church. In it, the writer addresses the same factions that Paul had addressed in his Corinthian letters. It "appears that some of the younger men in the congregation had provoked a revolt . . . and succeeded in deposing the established leadership of the church (3.3; 44.6; 47.6)."[8] Therefore, since this was the occasion for the writing, treatment of the concept of death, as noted above, is within the aspect of church unity.

Clement treats the concept of death specifically in 24.1–5. In these verses, he ties the death of Christians to that of Christ. After exhorting his readers to consider (κατανοήσωμεν) how the Master continually points out the resurrection of which he made the Lord Jesus Christ to be the first fruit when he raised him from the dead, the writer proceeds to compare death with falling asleep as night does, awaiting the arising of the day when the resurrection takes place.[9] He then compares death with the planting of seeds. "Let us take as an example the crops: how and in what manner does the sowing take place?" He then quotes from the parable of the sower as told in Mark 4:3 to argue that the seeds which are sown to the earth "dry and bare," decay. However, out of their decay, the majesty of the Master's providence then raises them up.[10] They then go on to bear more fruit.

Finally, the author connects his understanding of death with the exhortation to holiness. In chapter 26.1–2, the writer tells the factitious Corinthians that the Lord will resurrect those who "have served him

7. Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 4.23.11. I am using Eusebius, Cruse, *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*.

8. Holmes, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers*, 34. Unless otherwise stated, all the quotations of First Clement are from this text. Based on the classic work of Joseph Barber Lightfoot (1828–89), the translation of the Apostolic Fathers by Homes has only minor changes of Lightfoot's work that are geared towards readability and corrections of misprints as well as a revision of the introductions to the *Letters of Ignatius*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle to Diognetus* to accommodate for text critical apparatus. See Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers: Revised Greek Texts*; Lightfoot, *S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp*.

9. *1 Clem.* 24. 2.

10. *1 Clem.* 24.4–5.

in holiness."[11] Then, he quotes Job 26:3 to the effect that when we die, we lay down and sleep, waiting to be raised again in the same flesh that has endured all these things, namely, the atrocities of physical death. He concludes his understanding of death by suggesting that those who are perfected in love have already entered their glorious places in Christ's kingdom. He writes:

> All these generations from Adam to this day have passed away, but those who by God's grace were perfected in love have a place among the godly, who will be revealed when the kingdom of Christ visits us. For it is written: "Enter into the innermost rooms for a very little while, until my anger and wrath shall pass away, and I will remember a good day and will raise you from your graves."[12]

In other words, not only does the writer of *1 Clement* understand death in terms of sleep, but he also, within the tradition of the Old Testament, affirms the survival of the soul beyond the physical death. As Dewart observes, "it is interesting to note that the letter contains one of the passages in the Apostolic Fathers which seems to affirm the survival of the soul independently of the body" after death.[13]



## *The Shepherd of Hermas: Death As Sleep*

Hailed as one of the most enigmatic documents to have survived from the postapostolic period, the *Shepherd of Hermas* was written to deal with a varied number of questions and issues including "postbaptismal sin and repentance, and the behavior of the rich and their relationship to the poor within the church."[14] The style of *The Shepherd* is a narration of the revelations of visions (as well as explanations of the meanings of these visions) purported to have been given to Hermas by the Shepherd, an angelic figure from whom the book derives its name.[15]

11. *1 Clem*. 26.1.

12. *1 Clem*. 50.3–4.

13. Dewart, *Death and Resurrection*, 42.

14. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 442.

15. Ibid. The authorship and dating of *The Shepherd of Hermas* has been the subject of much discussion. An early suggestion was that the book was written by Paul on the basis of Acts 14:12 where Paul Hermes is mentioned as a name that was given to Paul for raising a man from the dead in Lystra, therefore equating him with one of the gods of Lystra. Certainly, this is not true. Also, according to Origen, the book was written by

The first cursory treatment of the subject of death in *The Shepherd* occurs in *Vis. 3. 5.2*. In the entirety of this vision, *The Shepherd* presents the Lady's explanation to Hermas of the vision that he had seen of the Tower.[16] The Tower is understood to be a reference to the church, a metaphor reminiscent of the mountain in *Sim.* 9. Particularly, in *Vis.* 3.5–7, the Lady explains the different groupings of the stones that Hermas saw either building the Tower or being rejected by the builder of the Tower.[17] Of interest here are those stones that the Lady says fit easily into the Tower. These stones the Lady identifies as the apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons who have walked in holiness and of whom some *have fallen asleep* (ἀπόστολοι καὶ ἐπίσκοποι καὶ διδάσκαλοι καὶ διάκονοι οἱ πορευθέντες κατὰ τὴν σεμνότητα τοῦ θεοῦ . . . οἱ μὲν κεκοιμημένοιμέν). The phrase οἱ μὲν κεκοιμηνμένοι ("have fallen asleep"), which will be repeated in *Sim.* 9, is used in the New Testament and early Christianity as a figure of speech meaning to "be dead, sleep." In the substantive, it means one who has fallen asleep. It appeared in Hebrew graves as inscription for the state of sleeping or lying down to sleep.[18] The emphasis, therefore, is on the fact that these dead Christians are now in a peaceful rest, compared to merely falling asleep.

*The Shepherd* comes back to the subject of death in *Sim.* 9. In a vision similar to the one in *Vis.* 3, Hermas is shown twelve mountains (9.1), a revisitation of the vision of the Tower (9.2–9), the young women/virtues (9.10–11), the explanation of the tower and the young women (9.12–16), and, an explanation of the twelve mountains (9.17–29).[19] Specifically, while explaining the meaning of the twelve mountains to Hermas, the Shepherd turns his attention to those who have fallen asleep in 9.15–16. A key difference, however, occurs between the ones who are identified as asleep here and the ones who are identified as such in *Vis* 3.5.1–5.

the Hermes mentioned in Rom 16:14, one of the members of the church of Rome that Paul sends his greetings. According to some, most probably, it seems more likely that the suggestion by the Muratorian Canon (ca. AD 180–200?) that this is the work of the brother of Pius, the bishop of Rome (ca. 140–154) was the author. But this is at best uncertain. For further discussion on this subject, see Snyder, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 1–3; Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas.*

16. *Herm. Vis.* 3.3–7

17. For a full structural analysis of the groupings of these stones, see Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 70.

18. Bauer et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. κοίμησις.

19. For a discussion of the place of this Similitude in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, see Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 211.

Whereas in the Vision the ones who are asleep were identified as apostles, overseers, teachers, ministers, and those who have suffered for the name of the Lord, here, it seems like the phrase "ones asleep" goes deeper than the Christian times. As Osiek notes, "verse 16.5 will make it clear that the intended people except for the forty are pre-Christian."[20]

In a very complicated argument that involves the meaning of baptism as well as the symbolic meaning of death and the activity of the dead, the author, perhaps appealing to some local folk traditions, lays bare his views of the existence and some activities associated with the dead.[21] First of all, according to the Shepherd, it is necessary for everybody to "come out through water" in order to be made alive so that they can enter the kingdom of God.[22] Without doubt, the reference here is to baptism, without which everybody is considered to be "in their deadness." Thus, death here is understood metaphorically, as a reference to the pre-baptismal state, with baptism being the only way out of this kind of death.[23] However, the situation becomes even more interesting when the Shepherd tells Hermas that as far as the pre-Christians are concerned, the apostles and the prophets preached to them in their dead state and even "gave them the seal of the preaching."[24] Since the "seal" is understood here as a reference to baptism, the argument expressed here is that the apostles and the prophets baptized these pre-Christian dead in their place of the dead.

The belief that indeed Christ also preached to the dead sometime between His death and resurrection is well-attested in the early church.[25] Most probably, the concept here is based on that belief. However, it seems like *The Shepherd* sees more than preaching taking place here: the

20. Ibid., 237.

21. Ibid. See also Dibelius, *Der Hirt des Hermas*, 624–25.

22. *Herm. Sim.* 9.16.2.

23. According to Osiek, "the association of passing through water with entering the kingdom of God (v. 2) and receiving the seal (σφαγίς) is unmistakably a reference to baptism, more explicit than the original allusion in Vis. 3.3.5. The language of death and life is similar to Pauline language [see Rom 6:1–11] but not exactly the same: here, death is the pre-baptismal state, not the dying process that is symbolically enacted in the course of baptism (Osiek, *Hermas*, 238).

24. *Herm. Sim.* 9. 16.5.

25. See especially 1 Pet 3:19–20; 4:6; *Ep. Apost.* 27; *Apoc. Pet.* 14; *Odes Sol.* 42:11–20; Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.27.3 ; Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 4.24 ; Hippolytus *Antichr.* 45. For further discussion, see Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 86. For a current discussion, see Bass, "The Battle for the Keys."

baptism of the dead by the apostles and prophets who have themselves also fallen asleep.

In conclusion, therefore, the concept of death in these earlier sub-apostolic writings is subsumed under such other concerns as the unity of the church and the holiness of believers. The views are held as an encouragement for the unity of believers as well as for virtuous living.[26]

## *The Meaning of* κοιμᾶσθαι

In Judaism and Christianity, the metaphor of the "sleep of death" has been largely employed to describe and perhaps define death.[27] Because of the centrality of this metaphor in understanding the concept of death since antiquity, there has not been a small scholarly controversy as far as its meaning is concerned. On the one side, there have been scholars like Oscar Cullmann who, because of what has been expressed as "more than a little distaste for Greek notion of disembodied soul" on their part, understand the term quite literally.[28] According to Cullmann, since death is both the last enemy and the wages of sin, it results in the possible annihilation of both the body and the soul. Cullmann starts by proposing an anthropology which states that man was created originally good both in body and soul. However, according to him, after the fall of Adam, the "flesh," the "power of sin or the power of death," entered man, the inner



26. In its teaching on the belief of the resurrection, the Christian homily known as *2 Clement*, written perhaps at the same time as *1 Clement*, also emphasizes reward after death as an encouragement for a holy life of a believer (see *2 Clem*. 5.5). Similar teaching is also found in the *Didache*. Talking about the second coming of the Lord, the document stresses the expected behavior appropriate for those who are waiting for his coming and the accompanying rewards in *Did*. 16.6–8. Thus since these are not lengthy treatments of the concept of death, I don't feel that they need much treatment. Furthermore, their themes are quite similar to those of *1 Clement* and *The Shepherd of Hermas* when it comes to the concept of death.

27. For some examples where the "sleeping" and "awaking" metaphor occurs, see 1 Kgs 1:21; 2 Kgs 4:32; 1 Chr 17:11; 2 Chr 16:13; Ezk 31:18; 32:20–32; Dan 12:2; Job 3:11–14; 14:12; Pss 3:6; 4:9; 87:6; Jer 2:33; Isa 57:2; 59:3–4; Sir 46:20; 2 Macc 12:43–45; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; Matt 28:52; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor 7:39; 15:6, 51; 1 Thess 4:13–15; Eph 5:14; Justin *Dial*. 72.4; 97; 1 *Apol*. 38.3; *1 Clem* 24–26; Irenaeus *adv. haer* 5.13.4, etc. For an excellent study of the use of the metaphor of the sleep of death in antiquity, see Ogle, "The Sleep of Death," 81–117. See also Miguel, "Zur Lehre vom Todesschlaf," 285–90.

28. Peters, "Resurrection," 69.

man and the outer man.[29] The existence of this power, argues Cullmann, necessitates that death be understood as the annihilation of both the inner man and the outer man in order to eradicate this power permanently. Thus, according to him, the metaphor of the "sleep of death" means something akin to "repose." Rejecting Karl Barth's assertion that this term implies "a peaceful going to sleep which those surviving have," Cullman notes that "the expression [sleeping] in the New Testament signifies more, and like the repose in Apocalypse 14:13 refers to the *condition* of the dead before the Parousia."[30]

Cullmann seems to move back and forth between what has come to be known as "soul sleep" and what he calls being "with Christ" to describe the interim state of the dead believers. By the expression "with Christ," he means the continued existence of the inner man (soul) through the power of the Holy Spirit that has renewed him.[31] This oscillation has earned him the support of some proponents of soul sleep, such as Reichenbach. Arguing that Cullmann is inconsistent, he observes that "yet in arguing that an essential part of man can continue to exist subsequent to death he [Cullmann] is adopting a Greek Dualistic position."[32] Thus, Reichenbach sees Cullmann as an inadvertent proponent of the very thing that he (Cullmann) has vehemently rejected: that is, the concept of Greek philosophical influence in early Christianity's idea of death.

Even before Cullmann came in the picture, the idea that both the body and the soul go to "sleep" at death, was prevalent. Scholars point out that this concept started in the second century as believers struggled with the concept of rewards and judgment especially at the wake of persecution and martyrdom. According to Gavin, the idea of "soul sleep"

29. Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 34. For a critique of this anthropology, see Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body*, 12 n. 5.

30. Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 51 n. 6. To be fair to Cullmann, he understands those who are in Christ to have already started being "resurrected" through the presence of the Holy Spirit. But he does not know how to deal with the statement of Jesus to the thief on the cross that, "today, you will be with me in Paradise." After a lengthy discussion of this passage, he concludes: "The thief asks Jesus to remember him when he 'comes into His kingdom,' which according to Jewish view of the Messiah can only refer to the time when the Messiah *will come* and erect the kingdom. Jesus does not grant the request, but instead gives more than he asked for: he will be united *with Jesus* even before the coming of the kingdom" (ibid., 50 n. 5). What kind of form this union takes place, Cullmann does not define.

31. Ibid., 52.

32 Reichenbach, "Resurrection of the Body," 39. See also Bailey, "Is Sleep the Proper Biblical Term," 161–67.

started with Tatian and has been common in the Syrian church theology ever since.[33] Since such apologists as Tatian emphasized what has come to be known as the "unitary anthropology" (that is, the body and the soul are so united that neither could experience either judgment or rewards without the other), it was believed that during the time between death and resurrection, nothing happens in terms of the soul's consciousness.[34] And, as noted above, in contrast to the Greek and Latin fathers, the Syrian church has continued to hold on to this position concerning the state of the dead during the intermediate period. A key proponent of this view today is A. C. Rush, who, according to Gousmett, argues that the belief in "soul-sleep" on the part of the early Christians was in stark contrast to the existing pessimistic pagan view of death as an eternal sleep from which there was no awakening.[35]

However, a majority of scholars understand the expression κοιμᾶσθαι ("fallen asleep") as a metaphor for the infinitive "to die." Indeed, this metaphorical understanding is consistent with the usage of the term in Greek since the time of Homer. The expression appears for the first time in *Il.* 11.241 and 14.482–3. It occurs again in the Homeric poetry in *Odyss*. 13.79–80. In these occurrences, the expression is used as a simple comparison between natural sleep and death.[36] As time progressed, the expression was softened to a simile, being used to refer to the "peaceful end of men in the Golden Age."[37] As Ogle explains, the tradition of comparing death with sleep continued throughout the Platonic Age. During this time, the expression was used as an argument to combat the fear of death.[38] While the usage of this metaphor somehow diminished in the Poetic period, it is widely used in the Hellenistic period.

In regard to the use of this expression to refer to death in the second century, it seems like the immediate context is the Old Testament and Hellenism (especially after Alexander the Great) and the New Testament. Ogle summarizes:

33. Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul," 107–8.

34. Gousmett, "Shall the Body Strive and Not be Crowned?" 42.

35. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 8–9, 12–13. See also Gousmett, "Shall the Body Strive and Not be Crowned?"; Rush, "Death as a Spiritual Marriage," 81–101.

36. Ogle, "The Sleep of Death," 81. The expression also occurs in Sophocles *Electra* 509.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

> That it was the influence of the Hebrew conception of death as sleep, whether working through the Bible or through later Jewish documents of an apocalyptic character, which led to the same metaphorical use of words for sleep by the early Fathers, both Greek and Latin, is proved, if proof is needed, by the fact that the Fathers, in their discussion of death and resurrection of the dead, invariably quote in support of their arguments the passages from the Old Testament, the Apocrypha and the New Testament.[39]

In other words, the Fathers' usage and interpretation of the metaphor of the sleep of death is in continuity with the earlier occurrences of this metaphor in the literature mentioned above. For example, when the writer of *1 Clement* talks about death as night that falls asleep and day arises (κοιμᾶται ἡ . . . ἀνίσταται ἡ ἡμέρα), he clearly has in his mind such Old Testament passages as Psalm 3:6.[40] And, as we noted above, with his concern being focused on Christian interaction with Judaism, the author of *The Shepherd of Hermas* applies the term metaphorically as well. But instead of the verb, the author uses the noun (κοίμησιν αὐτῶν) "their falling asleep."[41] Although there are questions as to whether the author is taking the expression from *Sirach* or some other passage(s) in the Old Testament, what is clear is that he is taking the expression metaphorically.[42]

When we come to the New Testament, we find multiple references to death as "sleep." Key examples include Matthew 27:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 15:20, 22; 11:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14; 2 Peter 3:4. In most of these occurrences, the passive κοιμᾶσθαι is used. Again, in continuity with the usage of the expression in the Old Testament, the term is used metaphorically to refer to death. However, the term is used mostly to refer to the death of believers.[43] Indeed, in some cases, it seems to refer to the manner of death (thus, Stephen was stoned, but "fell asleep"). He, in other words, dies peacefully as though going to a sleep, albeit being killed violently.

In conclusion, with this background, one is hard pressed to reach the conclusion of Cullmann and others that, according to early Christians, death means literal sleep. While Cullmann and others are correct in

39. Ibid., 95.
40. 1 *Clem*. 24.3.
41. *Vis*. 3.11.3.
42. Ogle, "The Sleep of Death," 99.
43. Bailey, "Is 'Sleep' the Proper Biblical Term," 164.

noting that this is the term used for death in the New Testament, what the term means needs careful qualification. Bailey is correct in noting that the emphasis of the term is theological and eschatological and not anthropological.[44] In other words, this term is used as an euphemism for death and not a reference to "soul-sleep." I agree with Bailey's conclusion that:

> The state of the dead . . . is not a sort of "soul-sleep." Rather, the term is an euphemism for death—a euphemism which indicates the manner of dying to some extent (as in e.g., Acts 7:60) and also the meaning of the death for the Christian. The Christian stands under the promise of the resurrection and death has for him lost its power, its sting. Those who die in Christ (I Thess 4:16) have the terror of death behind them—they are at rest (Rev 14:13). Because the dead are in Christ they may be said to be "asleep", though outwardly death retains its character as the enemy. Because Christ is risen, the dead in Christ do not perish in death (I Cor 15:17ff.). The eschatological factor is Christ.[45]

I contend that this aspect of being at rest in death is what these Fathers have in mind when they speak of death as sleep. This is consistent with the majority of thought in Hellenism, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. But, as noted above, with the onset of martyrdom and a growing need for an apologetic response to the critics of the Christian faith, the view of death as an unconscious sleep of the soul gained momentum especially with the Syrian church.[46] However, this exploration is beyond the scope of this study.

## MARTYRS' CONCEPT OF DEATH

It is impossible to overemphasize the value of the writings of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, on his way to martyrdom on the concept of death in second-century Christianity. Studies on Ignatius' view of death in view of his very own impending martyrdom as expressed in his seven letters considered authentic are multiple.[47] His views on death, I believe, give us

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 165.

46. Examples here include Aphrahat, Ephrem of Edessa, and Isaac of Syria.

47. These studies include but are not limited to McNamara, "Ignatius of Antioch on his Death"; Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*; and Bommes, *Weizen Gottes*. Mellink's analysis of these studies is helpful. He notes that first, there were the representatives of the so-called religion-historical school who argued that "Ignatius envisaged his road

insight to the concept of death from the perspective of those who literally stared death on its face in the second century. Four words (and their related derivatives and variations) come up in the discussion of the concept of death in the lives and works of Christian martyrs in the second century: discipleship, sacrifice, imitation, and resurrection. This is particularly the case with the Letters of Ignatius and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

## Ignatian Letters

A number of terms (or their variations) have been used to describe Ignatius' concept of death in lieu of his own impending martyrdom. These include μαθητὴς ("discipleship"), ἀνίσταμαι ("to rise"), θυσία/περίψημα ("sacrifice/dedication"), and μιμητήν ("imitator/imitation"). We will deal with these terms in the same order here. We will conclude by offering a summary of Ignatius' concept of death.

### *Death As True Discipleship*

The term μαθητής or its equivalents in Ignatian usage occurs in these passages in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch: *Mag*. 9.1; *Rm*. 3.2; 4.2; *Eph*. 1.2; 3.1–2 and *Pol*. 7.1. In *Mag*. 9.1, Ignatius is interested in showing that if his readers patiently endure in Christ, then they will be found to be disciples of Jesus Christ (ἵνα εὑρεθῶμεν μαθεταὶ).[48] Similarly, in *Rm*. 3.2, talking about his attitude towards his martyrdom, Ignatius tells the Christian believers that he prays to have strength to not only talk about being a Christian, but to prove to be one. Once he proves to be a Christian, then he will have become "faithful when he is no longer visible to the world." It seems that the term μαθητής has been substituted with one of its Ignatian

unto death as a celestial journey like that of a Gnostic, or as a reenactment of the death of his Lord like that experienced by the initiate of certain mystery cults," (Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 52). Secondly, he notes that there were those who noticed that Ignatius rarely mentioned Christ. According to these, "Ignatius understood himself rather as an *alter Christus* than as a follower or imitator of Christ, and that he perceived his death rather as a second passion than an imitation of the passion of Christ" (ibid). In short, therefore, the emphasis of Ignatius' understanding of death has been either sociological or psychological. In some case, the focus is to situate "Ignatius' reflection of his violent death within the context of certain cultural and ideological trends at the time of the early Roman empire, such as the widespread fascination with death, and the rise of an imperial cult" (ibid).

48. Ign. *Mag*. 9.1.

equivalents, πιστός, here.[49] In a similar manner, Ignatius declares in *Rm.* 4.2 that after the beasts have completely consumed his body, leaving him not a burden to anyone, after he has fallen asleep, then he will "truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ" (τότε ἔσομαι μαθητὴς ἀληθῶς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).[50]

In *Eph.* 1.2, Ignatius is thanking the Ephesian church that had hurried to visit him when they heard that he was in chains on his way from Syria to Rome. He thanks them for their prayers, by which he hoped to succeed in fighting with the wild beats and, succeeding, he "might be able to be a disciple" (ἵνα διὰ τοῦ ἐπιτυχεῖν δυνηθῶ μαθητὴς εἶναι).[51] While "succeeding" here might mean overcoming the beasts, other contexts suggest that Ignatius is thinking about succeeding in dying at the hands of the beasts. In *Eph.* 3.1–2, Ignatius informs the Ephesian believers that he is not qualified to command them because he is yet to be perfected in Christ. In other words, he sees himself as "only beginning to be a disciple" (γὰρ ἀρχὴν ἔχω τοῦ μαθητεύεσθαι).[52] He, therefore, only succeeds in encouraging them to be in harmony with the mind of Christ. In these verses, therefore, it has been proposed that "Ignatius understood suffering to be the beginning, and martyrdom the completion, of discipleship."[53] I will come back to this as I evaluate Ignatius' understanding of death as it relates to his discipleship. Finally, the term appears in *Pol.* 7.1. While reporting his encouragement because of the peace that the church at Antioch in Syria had finally achieved, thanks to Polycarp's prayers, Ignatius tells Polycarp that he has himself also received freedom from anxiety from God. However, he adds the remark that this freedom is only possible if he, through suffering, reaches God and proves to be a disciple (εὑρεθῆναί με ἐν τῇ αἰτήσει μαθητήν).[54]

The question that scholars have struggled with is what exactly Ignatius means by the term μαθητής as it relates to his view of death. In

49. Ign. *Rom.* 3.2. It was Lightfoot who first observed correctly that the terms μαθητής and πιστός are actually equivalents, (*S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp*, 204). He noted that "his martyrdom alone will make him πιστός a believer, as it alone will make him truly a μαθητής." However, as McNamara perceptively notes, "what is unclear is the cause and effect relationship between martyrdom and being a μαθητής" (McNamara, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 24).

50. Ign. *Rm.* 4.2.

51. Ign. *Eph.* 1.2.

52. Ign. *Eph.* 3.1.

53. McNamara, "Ignatius of Antioch," 31.

54. Ign. *Pol.* 7.1.

other words, is there a causal relationship between discipleship and martyrdom? As McNamara observed, for over a good number of years, two theses proposed by Lightfoot and Bauer have dominated the discussion as far as the meaning of μαθητής in relation to Ignatius' view of death is concerned. First, "it is proposed that martyrdom would actually make him a disciple. Second, it is proposed that Ignatius understood suffering to be the beginning of discipleship, and martyrdom its completion."[55] Thus, based on these two theses, scholarly analyses of Ignatius' view of death "have concluded that Ignatius saw martyrdom to be an important and necessary part of the life of all true followers of Christ."[56] William Schoedel makes the same equation without qualification when he writes "Ignatius' discipleship has only begun and depends on a successfully completed martyrdom for its perfection."[57] Schoedel, however, does not see this attitude as a reflection of all the martyrs in the second century. Rather, he sees this conditional discipleship as expressed by Ignatius here as reflective of his own personal "self-doubt and self-effacement . . . ."[58]

However, there has been serious questioning of these theses. For example, in his lengthy study on the subject, McNamara concluded that the Lightfoot-Bauer theses misunderstood the meaning of the term μαθητής as it pertains to Ignatius' view of death. On the contrary, according to him, these texts really bear on "how he [Ignatius] will face his death."[59] Thus, the discipleship texts really are referring to the *manner* in which Ignatius desires to face his death; that is, as a disciple, and not the *cause* or *result*. This makes sense if we recall the continued concern by believers from the earliest times for the possibility of failing in their Christianity. In this case, therefore, Ignatius sees martyrdom as the chronological

55. McNamara, "Ignatius of Antioch," 22. See Bauer, *Die Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochia*, 198.

56 Ibid. Bauer went to the extent of equating martyrdom with discipleship, writing "gleichwertig mit mätyrer" (equivalent to martyr). (Bauer, *Die Briefe*, 198).

57. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 28–29.

58. Ibid., 29. Schoedel is among scholars who interpret Ignatius' attitude towards his impending death as a response to his failure as the bishop of Antioch. He, therefore, interprets the letters of Ignatius within this theory. Setting his thesis, he writes: "We shall argue that the bishop's reactions to his situation reveal a person whose self-understanding had been threatened and who was seeking to reaffirm the value of his ministry by what he did and said as he was taken to Rome" (ibid, 10). For similar views, see also Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity* and Trevett, "Ignatius and His Opponents."

59. McNamara, "Ignatius of Antioch," 24.

limit of his discipleship and not a proof of it. In other words, before his martyrdom, there is still the possibility of failure and falling back, a concern that colors his writings.

Likewise, in his careful study of the discipleship passages of Ignatius as they pertain to his concept of death, Osger Mellink concluded that Ignatius does not see his death as what *causes* him to be a true disciple. Death, rather, according to Ignatius, is the final point of the completion of his discipleship, beyond which there is no questioning of his position in Christ. "Ignatius will have completed his task," he writes commenting on *Rm*. 4.2 that "beyond any doubt when the beasts have not left even the tiniest bit of his body. When the earthly Ignatius has ceased to exist . . . his life is fulfilled and his discipleship is perfected."[60] Most importantly, as he concludes, it is also important to note that "the use of the adverb ἀληθῶς, which suggests that Ignatius did see himself as a disciple, but only thought to become a *true* disciple in death."[61] Clearly, this conclusion challenges the Lightfoot-Bauer theses.

Indeed, the twin phrase that Ignatius uses in reference to his death sheds more light here. In a number of places, he equates his impending death with "attaining God" (θεοῦ τυγχάνειν).[62] Ignatius sees his death as the method through which he attains God, begging the Roman Christians not to do anything to impede this process from taking place in *Rom*. 2.1.[63] Appearing twenty times in Ignatian letters, the verb ἐπιτυγάχνω is certainly an important one for Ignatius. While some like Swartley and Schoedel hold to the position that this phrase means that Ignatius sees the "achievement of unity in his own church and its realization in the churches of Asia as a certification of his ministry and a sign that there is no further question about his worthiness to attain God and become a disciple," this interpretation seems like a bit of a stretch.[64] In all the

60. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 187.

61. Ibid.

62. See, for example, Ign. *Eph*. 10.1; Ign. *Mag*. 1.2; Ign. *Sm*. 9.2; cf. Ign. *Pol*. 4.3. An alternative phrase occurs in Ign. *Rom*. 1.2: "to reach God" (θεοῦ ἐπιτυχεῖν). See also Ign. *Pol*. 2.3. For a complete study of the meaning of the term τυγχάνειν in Ignatian corpus, see Bower, "The Meaning of ΕΠΙΤΥΓΧΑΝΩ," 1–14. In total, the verb ἐπιτυγχάνω occurs twenty times in the letters of Ignatius, certainly not a small count by any standard.

63. Apparently, Ignatius saw the Roman church as being in a position to influence the political leaders at Rome, and, perhaps, block his impending execution. This, in his opinion, would rob him of his only opportunity to attain God.

64. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 29. See also Swartley, "The Imitatio Christi,"

eighteen times that Ignatius uses the phrase θεοῦ ἐπιτυχεῖν to refer to his journey towards his martyrdom, it seems clear that he is using it as a reference to his trajectory which he sees as ending with his death, and, thus, attainment of God. Thus,

> In sum, no less than twelve times Ignatius speaks about his imminent death as a possibility to attain God or Christ. We do not get much information about what Ignatius understood by this notion in itself. Yet the framework seems clear. On the road to attainment Ignatius is supported by some and opposed by others. The grace of God and the prayer of the local communities stand over against the envy of things visible and invisible. His death is the last stage on the road to the final goal: the attainment of God and Christ.[65]

Again, it seems that Ignatius' concern with both the terms μαθητής and τυγχάνειν is the chronological outcome of being a disciple of Christ and not a cause and effect relationship. Therefore, it will be an unnecessary stretch for anyone to "infer that Ignatius understood that death itself would transform him to a μαθητής."[66] In other words, the argument that death, according to Ignatius means discipleship needs to be carefully defined.



### *Death As Resurrection*

The other contentious phrase that Ignatius uses to describe his own death is the infinitive ἀνίσταμαι ("to rise"). Ignatius either uses this term or its conceptual synonyms in at least three key passages. These are *Eph* 11:2, *Mag* 9.2 and *Rm* 4.3. In his letter to the *Eph* 11.2, Ignatius writes: χωρὶς τούτου μηδὲν ὑμῖν πρεπέτω, ἐν ᾧ τὰ δεσμὰ περιφέρω, τοὺς πνευματικοὺς μαργαρίτας, ἐν οἷς γένοιτό μοι ἀνατῆναι τῇ προσευχῇ ὑμῶν, ἧς γένοιτό μοι ἀεὶ μέταχον εἶναι, ἵνα ἐν κλήρῳ Ἐφεσίων εὑρεθῶ τῶν Χριστιανῶν, οἱ καὶ τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πάντοτε συνήνεσαν ἐν δυνάμει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("Let nothing appeal to you apart from him, in whom I carry around these chains (my spiritual pearls!), by which I hope, through your prayers, to rise again. May I always share in them, in order that I may be found in the

81–103.

65. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 214.

66. McNamara, "Ignatius of Antioch," 26. It helps to remember that Ignatius' concern in these letters was pastoral. Rather, he was concerned that believers in Asia would not turn back on Christ when faced with persecution which many times resulted in martyrdom.

company of the Christians of Ephesus, who have always been in agreement with the apostles by the power of Jesus Christ)."[67]

Scholars have wrestled with the question of the meaning of Ignatius' difficult phrase here: "to rise again." In his monograph on the concept of the resurrection of the dead in the Apostolic Fathers, van Eijik argues that for Ignatius, martyrdom is resurrection in the sense that both are two aspects of the same event.[68] Likewise, Schoedel, agreeing with Eijik that Ignatius sees his death as resurrection, commenting on this verse, writes:

> Especially in light of *Mag.* 9.2 and *Rom.* 2.2 (4.3) Ignatius probably thinks of resurrection as a state immediately after death. In any event, his talk of rising in his bonds is not intended to clarify the state of human beings in the other world but to express his hope of seeing his martyrdom through. Hence also his reference to the prayer of the Ephesians on his behalf.[69]

Thus, according to Schoedel, Ignatius sees his resurrection as taking place immediately after death. However, he does not deal specifically with the question of the nature of this resurrection.[70] The question, hence, is this; does Ignatius see his resurrection taking place immediately after death or at the Parousia, according to this verse? It would help to, before making any conclusion, look at the other key passage (*Rm* 4.3).

In his letter to the church in Rome, Ignatius famously wrote in 4.3: οὐχ ὡς Πέτρος καὶ Παῦλος διατάσσομαι ὑμῖν. ἐκεῖνοι ἀπόστολοι, ἐγὼ κατάκριτος· ἐκεῖνοι ἐλεύθεροι, ἐγὼ δὲ μέχρι νῦν δοῦλος. ἀλλ' ἐὰν πάθω, ἀπελεύθερος γενήσομαι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀναστήσομαι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐλεύθερος. νῦν μανθάνω δεδεμένος μηδὲν ἐπιθυμεῖν ("I do not command you as Peter and Paul. They were apostles, I am a condemned man; they are free, I am still a slave. But if I suffer, I shall be a freedman of Jesus Christ, and I shall arise free in him").[71] My concern is the last part of the passage.

Scholars are divided on what exactly Ignatius means by the phrase ἀναστήσομαι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐλεύθερος ("I shall rise in him free.") Taking the preposition ἐν spatially, Eijik argues that Ignatius is here thinking

67. Ign. *Eph* 11.2.

68. Van Eijik, *La résurrection des morts*, 119–20. However, Eijik also understands Ignatius as seeing his own resurrection as ascension unto God in heaven (ibid., 121–24).

69. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 72 n. 2. See also Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 171–72.

70. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 253.

71 Ign. *Rom* 4.3.

resurrection as another aspect of his suffering (πάθος).[72] Mellink, on the other hand, insists that there is no proper justification to take this preposition as spatial. Rather, according to him, "it appears more probable that the preposition ἐν should be taken in an instrumental sense, just as in Eph 11:2."[73] Taken this way, therefore, Ignatius is understood to be saying that he will rise in Christ after his suffering. This understanding seems consistent with his understanding of the role of Christ in the ultimate resurrection of all believers at the Parousia.[74] Indeed, Ignatius' language here is reminiscent of Paul's in reference to the union of believers with Christ both in his death and resurrection.[75]

Most probably, Ignatius here is thinking of the hope that he has of resurrection after having suffered persecution (hence the conditional ἐὰν πάθω). He is thinking of the chronology and not necessarily the nature and time of the resurrection here. Bearing in mind how Ignatius sees believers' resurrection as taking place in the future, I concur with Mellink, that "Ignatius perceived his violent death as a condition to participate in the resurrection at the end of time and not as a gateway to a heavenly existence with God."[76]

To be fair, however, it is also significant to note that there is a significant amount of literature that talks about the immediate resurrection of the martyr. This literature includes both Jewish and Hellenistic corpus. These texts use the specific verbs ἀνίστημι/ἐγείρω or the noun ἀνάστασις to refer to the martyrs' death.[77] Specifically, in the Intertestamental document known as 2 Maccabees, resurrection is mentioned in a number of places as in connection with violent death. In many of these passages, it seems like death is understood as resurrection. One key passage serves to illustrate this.

72. Eijik, *La résurrection des morts*, 120.

73. Ibid.

74. See, for example, Ign. *Sm* 1–2 and Ign. *Tral* 9.1–2.

75. See Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:12–5; 2 Cor 4:14; 1 Thess 4:14; Rom 6:5. Notice the similarity of the language especially in Rom 6:5: "Εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα" ("For if we have been united in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.")

76. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 257.

77. According to BDAG, the term ἀνάστασις means "a change for the better in status, rising up, rise," as well as "resurrection from the dead" (BDAG, s.v. ἀνάστασις).

Chapter 7 of this document records the execution of the seven brothers and their mother during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes.[78] In 2 Maccabees 7, we see the record of the final moments of one of the seven brothers who are the subjects of the document. All are put to death on account of the Torah:

> Each brother is brought forward, refuses to obey the king's command, is tortured, and makes a speech before he dies. The mother makes two speeches, which are placed between the speeches of the sixth and the seventh brothers. The subject matter of the speeches is twofold: a) the mother and the second, third, and fourth brothers speak of dying for the Torah and the hope of the resurrection; b) the fifth, sixth, and seventh brothers discuss the suffering of the nation and the punishment that awaits Antiochus.[79]

Particularly, when the second brother addresses the king, he declares in 7.9: σὺ μὲν ἀλάστωρ ἐκ τοῦ παρόντος ἡμᾶς ζῆν ἀπολύεις, ὁ δὲ τοῦ κόσμου βασιλεὺς ἀποθανόντας ἡμᾶς ὑπὲρ τῶν αὐτοῦ νόμων εἰς αἰώνιον ἀναβίωσιν ζωῆς ἡμᾶς ἀναστήσει ("Thou like a fury takest us out of this present life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, unto everlasting life").[80] Although there is agreement that this and similar texts speak of the ultimate vindication of the Jewish nation, what has concerned many interpreters here is the timing of the resurrection of these brothers. According to Kellermann, 2 Maccabees is really a text about the immediate resurrection of the martyr in heaven after death, which is in contrast to the eschatological resurrection at the end of time.[81] Further, with other passages like 2 Maccabees 7:36 whereby a comparison between the brother's brevity of suffering and the reception of the rewards ("διαθήκην Θεοῦ—the covenant of God") is made, the conclusion has been made by some that "the termination of the suffering" is the beginning of eternal life. In other words, the brothers are raised immediately after death.[82] Death, accordingly, is seen as resurrection. And, consequently, these and similar passages in Hellenism and Judaism are

78. For some key studies of 2 Maccabees, see Kellermann, *Auferstanden in den Himmel*. For a helpful discussion of the authorship of 2 Maccabees, see Cavalin, *Life After Death*, 111.

79. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life*, 119.

80. 2 Macc 7.9. See also 2 Macc 12:43–44.

81. Kellermann, *Auferstanden in den Himmel*, 64–65.

82. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 271.

seen as the precursors of passages like the ones we have come across in Ignatius of Antioch.[83]

However, a careful reading of the passage shows that it is neither concerned with the time nor the place where the martyrs will be raised. In other words, the view that they have been raised immediately in heaven after death cannot be textually substantiated. Rather, "the main point seems to be the opposition between the reward of the faithful Jewish martyrs (οἱ μέν) and the punishment of the lawless Antiochus (σὺ δέ)."[84] But, "when and where this settlement—may it be vindication or damnation—will take place is left unsaid."[85] Nickelsburg's observation seems in order, that this story preserved that hope that God would avenge the unjust deaths of these sons and their mother "by means of an apocalyptic catastrophe" in the eschaton.[86]

In summary, therefore, although Ignatius uses language that suggests that he understands his death as resurrection, there is no clear indication in the relevant texts that he sees this resurrection taking place immediately after death. Also, neither is this clear in the literature that Ignatius may be alluding to, that is, 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 and 2 Maccabees 7 as discussed above. Rather, what seems clear is the continued hope of resurrection, reward and vindication in spite of the impending suffering and death.



### *Death As Sacrifice*

The other key expression that Ignatius uses to describe his death is περίψημα ("sacrifice") and its related terms.[87] Although the idea of sacrifice as the guiding theme of Ignatius' view of death was hinted at by Zahn, Lightfoot, and Walter Bauer, it was Hans von Campenhausen who explored it to the fullest.[88] Since the term "sacrifice" implies giving one's

83. Kellermann, *Auferstanden in den Himmel*, 131. For the possible utility of this Maccabean passage in the New Testament book of Hebrews, see Lane, "Living a Life of Faith," 247–69.

84. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 271.

85. Ibid.

86. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life*, 137.

87. Ign. *Rom.* 2.2; 4.2b; Ign. *Eph.* 8.1; 18.1; 21.1; Ign. *Tral* 13.3; Ign. *Smyr.* 10.2; Pol. 2.3; 6.1. The other key substitute term is θυσία.

88. Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 420; Bauer, *Die Briefe*; Campenhausen, *Ignace d'Antioche*, 51.

life for someone or something else, the focus of the discussion has been on these key questions: Did Ignatius himself understand his death as a sacrifice in a technical manner? Did Ignatius believe that there would be some people who would benefit from his death? If so, who are these people and what kind of "benefit" did he believe his death would bring?[89] As we look into these questions, it is important to look more keenly at the key passages where Ignatius uses the term περίψημα or its equivalents.

One of the key passages in understanding Ignatius' conception of death as sacrifice is *Rom*. 2.2. In this passage, Ignatius appeals to the Roman Christians to grant him nothing short of being "poured as an offering to God" (σπονδισθῆναι θεῷ, ὡς ἔτι θυσιαστήριον).[90] As noted above, in his plea to the Roman church, Ignatius asks them not to use their presumed political power in order to influence the outcome of his anticipated martyrdom there since he is on his way to be poured as an offering/sacrifice to God. Since Ignatius mentions this "offering" as taking place in the altar at Rome (ἕτοιμόν), the meaning of the term has been associated with the Lord's Supper. For example, Gilles P. Wetter saw Ignatius as understanding his death as participation in a cultic event.[91] In this case, "Ignatius pictures the Roman Christians as gathered around him in the arena, just as they normally are gathered around the eucharistic altar in the church."[92] Wetter saw Ignatius as understanding his death as a representation of Christ and his passion, "but then in a more realistic way," going as far as speaking of Ignatius' death as *ein blutiges Abendmahl* (a bloody Lord's Supper).[93]

The other set of passages are those whereby the term περίψημα occurs. In the passages where the term "sacrifice" occurs, Ignatius uses the combination of the terms περίψημα ὑμῶν ("I am dedicated to you.")[94] On his part, Frend, commenting on *Rom*. 4, notes that "primarily, therefore, Ignatius regarded martyrdom as a sacrifice."[95] But he locates the benefits of Ignatius' sacrifice in something else: the defeat of Satan. He concludes: "Ignatius takes up the theme of innocent, expiatory suffering as the means

89. McNamara, "Ignatius of Antioch," 43.

90. Ign. *Rom.* 2.2.

91. Wetter, *Altchristlische Liturgion I*, 134–38.

92. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 84.

93. Ibid.

94. See especially Ign. *Eph.* 8.1; 18.1; 21.1; Ign. *Trall.* 13.3; Ign. *Smyr.* 10.2; *Pol.* 2.3; 6.1.

95. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 199.

of overthrowing Satan in the Last Times," adding that the "imitation of the Passion thus becomes the imitation of Jesus' own sacrifice on the model of that performed for Israel by the Maccabean martyrs."[96] Thus, although Frend sees Ignatius as understanding his death as sacrificial, the benefit of that sacrifice is that of the final defeat of Satan. However, Frend does not explain how this defeat of Satan is related to Ignatius' sacrifice.

The question is whether these two sets of passages are enough to support the conclusion that Ignatius saw his death as a sacrifice with salvific benefits, or even with an atonement value similar to that of Christ. As noted above, this has been the conclusion of some scholars like Wetter who based his conclusions on the mention of Ignatius in the subsequent *Acts of the Martyrs*.[97] This definitely creates a theological concern of seismic proportions. Winslow correctly elucidates the nature of the problem:

> The apparent contradiction, then, is this. On the one hand, it is Christ that ταῦτα πάντα ἔπαθεν δι' ἡμᾶς, ἵνα σωθῶμεν ["suffered all things for our sakes, in order that we might be saved"] (Smyr. 2.1); yet, on the other hand, Ignatius claims that it is only through his *own* [Ignatius'] suffering and death that he can receive the ἀμοιβὴ ["reward"] of God (Smyr. 9.2). Ignatius proclaims salvation through Christ, yet, in these Epistles, it is only his own death which he describes in "sacrificial" terms (Rom. 2.2., 4; Smyr. 10.2), even referring to himself as an ἀντίψυχον ὑμῶν ["my spirit be a ransom on your behalf"] (Eph. 21.2; Smyr. 10.2).[98]

For many, therefore, in contrast to the finished work of Christ of salvation, Ignatius sees his work as that which ensures his (and possibly others') salvation. T. F. Torrance drew the same conclusion in his Basel dissertation.[99] Indeed, according to McNamara, this has been the consensus since the time of Theodore Zahn. "The merit of that death [of Ignatius]," he writes, "moreover, is almost universally acknowledged to be either an atonement or even salvific sacrifice similar to that attributed to Christ."[100]

Although I will explore this idea further as I evaluate Ignatius' use of the term περίψημα below, a couple remarks are in order. It seems like there are enough reasons to cast doubt on the conclusion that Ignatius understood his death to be similar to that of Christ as far as securing

96. Ibid.

97. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 84.

98. Winslow, "The Idea of Redemption," 125.

99. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace*.

100. McNamara, "Ignatius of Antioch," 44.

salvific benefits is concerned. Although these interpretations sound attractive, the main problem is that it is quite doubtful that the terminology of *Rom*. 2.2 really points to a Eucharistic service. First, although the term σπονδίζω and other comparable terms were used in the pagan cultic practices, it was never used either in the New Testament or the Apostolic Fathers in a Eucharistic context. Indeed, the verb σπονδίζω is a *hapax* within the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers.[101] Second, in another context, Ignatius clearly differentiates his looking forward to celebrate the Eucharistic elements but not becoming the elements himself.[102] It seems, therefore, that Ignatius is not merely expressing his longing for a regular earthly Eucharistic service. But he "envisages his death as the beginning of a new, incorruptible, life."[103] Thus, since elsewhere Ignatius sees the Eucharistic elements as "symbols of immortality" (see Ign. *Eph*. 20.2), he sees participation in them as participation in the eternal life, a life in Christ that is "adumbrated in the eucharist," and a life that "will be realized in the future."[104]

In sum, therefore, there is no support for the conclusion that Ignatius saw his death as a sacrifice in the same way as that of Christ was. Although Ignatius uses the terms θυσία (sacrifice) and τοῦ απονδισθῆναι (a libation) to refer to his death, it is hardly possible to demonstrate that, by the mere use of these terms, Ignatius saw his death as meritorious. In other words, Ignatius seems to be using the Eucharistic language in these passages to refer his death as "an image selected from the realm of baking to express the transformation that . . . [he] looked for as the result of his martyrdom."[105] The transformation is from the body characterized by sin and disobedience of God to an incorruptible state, a transformation he cannot wait for.

101. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 85.

102. In Ign. *Rom*. 7.3, he writes: "I take the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink I want his blood, which is incorruptible love."

103. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton*, 86.

104. Ibid.

105. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 176.