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**The crucified *eros* of Ignatius of Antioch.**

**Interpretation in the perspective of reception history**

(doctoral dissertation - summary)

Christianity and Greek *eros* is a full of drama relationship. The first encounter of this pair in the early Christian literature gave rise to a long-lasting interpretative dispute that has been going on for 400 years now. Ignatius of Antioch, unprecedentedly introducing *eros* into his epistolary speech written in the early second century on his way to martyrdom, referred to it as „my” and coupled it with the Christological category „crucified”. He stated this in the most ardent of his seven letters, the one addressed to the Church at Rome, in the most elevated part of that letter and immediately after the most straightforward expression of the desire for death to be found in all his writings. Owing to the history of reading this fragment, it has become the most famous passage of Ignatius’ entire oration. Referred to in each century of the patristic period, it was understood by the Greek Fathers as a unique externalization of Ignatius’ fiery spirit, which clearly contains a Christological sense. Namely, that Ignatius’ *eros* is Christ and, at the same time, the martyr’s passionate love to the Crucified One. In this line of thought the famous excerpt from Ignatius’ letter was also interpreted in the Middle Ages both in the East and in the West. A turn was brought by the sixteenth century that opened early modern period. An alternative interpretation of the passage formulated at that time, according to which Ignatius’ *eros* is neither Christ nor the love for him, but earthly sinful desires, faced the hitherto prevailing Christological explanation. Thus began the dispute, which coincided with the beginning of controversy over authenticity of the letters authored by the Bishop of Antioch.

The new, negative interpretation of Ignatius’ famous words due to some demonstrated signs of harmony with the rest of the speech in this fragment of the letter, as well as some footing in arguments and usefulness on the grounds of other polemics, soon gained advocates. Moreover, following the nineteenth century, when those of the researchers, who significantly contributed to the resolution of the letters’ authenticity problem, taken the side of the negative interpretation, it even became dominant. Propagators of the interpretation sidelined the Greek Fathers, accusing them of ignorance regarding Greek or deliberate manipulation of meanings of words taken from the Ignatius’ text. However, the positive interpretation did not allow itself to be buried. It marked

strong presence in a trend of distinctive spirituality and devotion that was based on Ignatius' words and their Christological sense and that was dynamically developing in parallel to the ongoing scientific discussion, from the Middle Ages to the late modern period, being abundantly manifested in various forms of expression. But also in the scientific arena the positive interpretation, having been pushed back for some time, started re-emerging in the discussions, gradually regaining its position. At the turn of the twenty-first century the voices of doubt and even opposition to the reproduced negative interpretation that undermines the voice of the Greek fathers have strengthened. This was accompanied by statements that this problem required an in-depth examination with due regard for a broad context. An important question that has been returning over the past centuries and in the twenty-first century, while accompanying the doubts and appeals raised, has resounded with new intensity, was the one about the actual ability of ancient writers to correctly read the words from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*: how the Greek Fathers, who lived in a cultural and chronological proximity to Ignatius, could have misinterpreted his words?

The aim of the presented dissertation – in view of this considerable matter of Ignatius' evocation from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*, which includes not only its reception and influence in history as an example of a phenomenon but also the problem of its interpretation – is first to reconstruct and trace the history of both reading and interpretation of the said Ignatius' passus as well as, in a broader perspective, that of reading of entire letters authored by the Bishop of Antioch, and, even more broadly, also the echoes of this reading in the history of Christianity, in order, as a top objective, to subsequently make on the background of so circled history a separate attempt to interpret the evocation from the *Letter to the Church at Rome* based on extensive external and internal analysis. So devised task is reflected in the title of the dissertation.

Consequently, Chapter One reconstructs the history of Ignatius' letters from the moment they were written to the present day, that is – in the full extent of one thousand nine hundred years that have elapsed since the martyrdom of the Bishop of Antioch – traces the research interest and attention these letters have received. The elaboration covers the importance of the letters originated in the days of martyrdom and further increased over time, as well as the letters progressive spread. In the long march across the centuries, as part of the presented history also the references and quotations made by writers of Christian antiquity and Middle Ages are indicated as well as complemented with context, background and meaning. This walk-through also involves versions, recensions and translations of the letters that were arising simultaneously. Following that, the

history of research on these letters, which began at the dawn of the modern era and continues to the present day, is presented along with accompanying circumstances with a special attention focused on the controversy over authenticity. The report also covers significant manuscript discoveries and subsequent major critical editions.

Chapter Two extends the historical journey by further tracing the history, this time however only the history of the reception of the evocation from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*. Thus, returning to the beginnings in the history of Ignatius' writings, it makes a repeated walk-through the same range of ages but on a different route to show on the background of the previously presented history of the entire collection of Ignatius' letters not only the popularity enjoyed by this significant confession of the Bishop of Antioch but, above all, the actual understanding of it throughout the ages, as well as the course of this reception over the following centuries, when and how it was changing, and, lastly, the origin and course of the controversy that has arisen around this matter along with the arguments made in the polemical discussion. The separate and thus second walk-through the history in this chapter is dictated by, among others, the fact that the history of reading of Ignatius' evocation, while having episodes that coincide with the history of reading of the entire collection of his letters, largely followed its own course. Also its journey between readers' circles progressed differently, as well as the spread and popularization. Moreover, it played a special role in polemics around other early Christian writings and, today, despite the general consensus that has emerged on the authenticity of Ignatius' letters, the discord over the evocation continues, still driving a wedge between commentators.

The final Chapter Three constitutes an attempt to interpret the Ignatius' famous words from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*. With due regard for the perspective of past discussions on this issue and arguments articulated as part of the said dispute, a thorough research is presented that considers the broad context and that results in gathering of multilateral evidence. This research endeavor was carried out in a classic way on two levels: external and internal analysis. On the first level, in the field of ancient Greek literature the similarities in phraseology were tracked down and, for the identified instances, comparison of the context and meaning was made. This task was carried out first for the non-Christian ancient Greek literature and then for early Christian writings. In turn, on the second level, Ignatius' evocation was subjected to linguistic and grammatical analysis both within a narrow text unit in which it is located and in the light of the entire text of

the letters. This was followed by a theological analysis. The collected evidence and inferences made on its basis constitute the conclusive interpretation.

As it turns out, the propagated negative interpretation of Ignatius' evocation from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*, visible today in many commentaries to and translations, in which *eros* is elucidated as earthly or sinful desires, proves to have many shortcomings. They occur on all basic levels. Namely, on those delineated by the field of external analysis (that is, on the level of ancient non-Christian Greek literature and on the level of early Christian literature) as well as on those delineated by the field of internal analysis, i.e., on the linguistic-grammatical level (including syntactical and semantical) and on the theological level. Simultaneously, the positive interpretation removes most, if not all, of these shortcomings and shows high compliance on all the levels.

Does this so devised research in its results aspire to definitively solve the problem of the interpretation of Ignatius' evocation? An affirmative answer would be a sign of underestimating the significant words of the Antiochene martyr. After many centuries of discussion around their proper reading and numerous attempts to resolve this interpretative issue – although not as extensive as the one presented here – it is difficult to expect that this problem would be solved in one stroke. While this is probable, the history of the dispute alone does not allow to triumphantly put a period on it and announce victory, but rather prompts to humbly submit the verdict to a critical reader who, having considered the presented arguments, will form an answer to this new act of exploration. However, what this work brings in the collected research material alone is certainly an opening of new, broadened perspective. Not only for the perception of the famous words of Ignatius from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*, but also for the presence of the entire collection of letters attributed to the Bishop of Antioch in history. Until now, neither the history and traditions evolved around Ignatius and his letters, nor the history of the reception of the evocation from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*, nor the history of the discussion that has been going on for over 400 years around this evocation had an attempt for comprehensive elaboration. Similarly, the issue of interpretation of Ignatius' famous words had not received an in-depth study with due regard for the broad context, even though the discussion has been going on since the sixteenth century. Thus, the dissertation provides a perspective that is different enough from what the hitherto published professional literature offers, to at least induce another serious reflection on the interpretation of *eros* in the characteristic passage from the *Letter to the Church at Rome*, and maybe even on its relationship with Christianity in general.