Judaism without Circumcision and "Judaism" without "Circumcision" in Ignatius*

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The seven letters written by Ignatius in the early decades of the second century C.E. offer a fascinating if enigmatic glimpse at the internal life of the churches of western Asia Minor.[1] Ignatius condemns various errors and heresies, and pleads with his fellow Christians to maintain unity by accepting the leadership of their bishops. Remarkably brief, florid, and allusive, the letters are frequently obscure;

*This essay was first written for presentation at a conference on Judaism and Christianity at the University of Tel Aviv in January 1997. Since there is no sign that the conference proceedings will ever be published, I am publishing the essay here in much revised form. In 1996 Prof. William Schoedel, dean of Ignatian studies in the United States, gave the first version of this essay a close and careful reading. In revising the essay I received support from my friends Professors David Frankfurter and Lawrence M. Wills, and helpful criticism from an anonymous reader for this journal. I am grateful to all of them.

[1]Helpful introductions to Ignatius are P. Nautin, "Ignatius of Antioch," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (ed. Angelo Di Berardino; trans. A. Walford; 2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 1.404–5, and Christine Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria and Asia* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1992). For surveys of Ignatian scholarship, see William R. Schoedel, "Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch," *ANRW* II.27.1 (1993) 272–358 (hereafter "Schoedel, *ANRW*"), and Charles Munier, "Où en est la question d'Ignace d'Antioche?" *ANRW* II.27.1 (1993) 359–484. On the date of the letters, see Schoedel, *ANRW*, 347–49 ("anywhere between A.D. 105 and A.D. 135") and Munier, "Ignace," 380 ("entre les années 110–135"). Throughout this essay the translations of Ignatius are drawn from William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) (hereafter "Schoedel, *Ignatius*"). I have used the Greek text edited by Joseph B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Part II, Ignatius and Polycarp* (London: Macmillan, 1889–1890; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989; 3 vols.) (hereafter "Lightfoot, *Ignatius*") which I have verified against F. X. Funk, K. Bihlmeyer, and W. Schneemelcher, *Die apostolischen*

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as a result the nature and identification of Ignatius's opponents are much debated in contemporary scholarship.[2] Among the much-discussed opponents are the targets of the polemic in *To the Philadelphians* (6.1–2), in which Ignatius exhorts his flock not to listen to anyone who expounds "Judaism." Here is the text:

> (6.1) But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from a man having circumcision than Judaism from a foreskinned man;[3] both of them, if they do not speak of Jesus Christ, are to me tombstones and graves of the dead on which nothing but the names of men is written. (6.2) Flee, then, the evil arts and plots of the ruler of this age, lest, wearied by his scheming, you grow weak in love; but all of you, come together with undivided hearts.

How are we to understand the striking utterance, "it is better to hear Christianity from a man having circumcision than Judaism from a foreskinned man"? Who is the circumcised man who preaches Christianity, and who is the foreskinned man who preaches Judaism? And what kind of "Judaism" is this that is preached by a man who is not circumcised?[4]

In this essay I am interested particularly in one question that follows naturally upon these prior questions. Is *Phld*. 6.1 evidence for the existence of foreskinned

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Väter (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1970). I have also consulted J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (ed. and rev. Michael Holmes; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992). Note the typographical distinction between the Pauline epistles to the Romans (Romans, Rom) and to the Ephesians (Ephesians, Eph) and the Ignatian epistles *To the Romans* (*Romans*, *Rom.*) and *To the Ephesians* (*Ephesians*, *Eph.*). I assume that in his letters, five of which are addressed to churches in Asia Minor, Ignatius is referring to phenomena that he observed, or heard about, while in Asia Minor.

[2]Recent discussion includes Schoedel, *ANRW*, 301–30; Munier, "Ignace," 404–7 (on the "judaizers") and 407–13 (on the "Docetists"); Jerry Sumney, "Those Who 'Ignorantly Deny Him': The Opponents of Ignatius of Antioch," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993) 345–65; Mark Edwards, "Ignatius, Judaism, and Judaizing," *Eranos* 93 (1995) 69–77; Judith Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 23–56; Michael Goulder, "Ignatius's 'Docetists,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 53 (1999) 16–30; Wolfram Uebele, *'Viele Verführer sind in die Welt ausgegangen': Die Gegner in den Briefen des Ignatius von Antiochien und in den Johannesbriefen* (BWANT 151; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001).

[3]The Greek is ἄμεινον γάρ ἐστιν παρὰ ἀνδρὸς περιτομὴν ἔχοντος χριστιανισμὸν ἀκούειν ἢ παρὰ ἀκροβύστου ἰουδαϊσμόν. I have slightly modified Schoedel's translation ("it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from a man uncircumcised") in order to make it more literal. I shall discuss below the phrase ἔχων περιτομήν, "having circumcision." "Uncircumcised" is a fine translation for ἀπερίτμητος, a word that appears in the Septuagint, Philo, Josephus, Acts 7:51, and many ancient Christian authors, but is euphemistic and inaccurate as a translation for ἀκρόβυστος, which means "having a foreskin," or in my parlance "foreskinned." The term "uncircumcision" has a long pedigree in English—according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed., 1989), it first appears in English in Tindale's Bible of 1526—but it has no ancient equivalent. The abstract noun for "the state of having a foreskin" is ἀκροβυστία; see note 37 below.

[4]Clearly I am privileging the male in this essay; I discuss the non-circumcision of women in my *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?* (forthcoming).

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men within the Jewish communities of western Asia Minor in the early second century C.E.? Elsewhere I have argued that there is no evidence that any non-Christian Jewish community in antiquity received into membership male converts who had not been circumcised, or dispensed with the requirement that native born males be circumcised on the eighth day.[5] We may safely assume that the vast majority of Jewish men in antiquity were circumcised, in accordance with the requirements of Gen 17:9–14 and Lev 12:3, but we cannot assume that all Jewish men everywhere and always will have been circumcised, because in certain times and places in antiquity Jewish fathers left their sons uncircumcised and Jewish men attempted to hide their circumcision.[6] Is *Phld*. 6.1 evidence for the existence of such Jews? And, if so, is it evidence that the local Jewish community admitted to membership non-circumcised men?

Some scholars have answered these questions in the affirmative, arguing that the foreskinned preacher of Judaism was a member of the local Jewish community.[7] I shall argue here that the answer is no, that *Phld*. 6.1 cannot serve as evidence for the presence of foreskinned men within the Jewish community, and this for four reasons. First, the "Judaism" that is being preached by Ignatius's opponent is not what we would call "Judaism"; it is what we would call "Christianity." Second, in all likelihood the foreskinned preacher of "Judaism" was a gentile Christian, and his "Judaism" was the ascription of too much authority to the "Jewish" scriptures. This "Judaism" has nothing to do with the Jewish community of the city. Third, "having circumcision" and "foreskinned" may well be metaphorical expressions that do not necessarily attest to physical circumcision and physical foreskin. Fourth and last, the "man having circumcision" and "the foreskinned man" are not (necessarily) figures whom Ignatius met or heard about (i.e., they are not necessarily "real"), but are rhetorical devices invented by Ignatius in order to highlight the contrast between "Judaism" and "Christianity." Any one of these arguments is sufficient to rebut the claim that *Phld*. 6.1 attests to the presence of foreskinned men in the Judaism of Asia Minor.

"Judaism" and "Christianity" in Ignatius

What does Ignatius mean by "Christianity" (Χριστιανισμός) and "Judaism" (Ἰουδαϊσμός)? We cannot be certain. The meaning of these terms is not transparent, either for Ignatius's time or for our own, and Ignatius nowhere provides definitions. Χριστιανισμός is a neologism, first attested in Ignatius.[8] Perhaps he coined the term, or perhaps he learned it in his native city Antioch, the same city in which

[5]Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) 219–21.

[6]Robert G Hall, "Epispasm and the Dating of Ancient Jewish Writings," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 2 (1988) 71–86.

[7]See note 25 below.

[8]*Phld*. 6.1; *Magn*. 10.1, 3; *Rom*. 3.3. Another early attestation is *Mart. Pol*. 10.1.

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the disciples of Jesus were first called "Christians" (Χριστιανοί, Acts 11:26). We cannot assume that what Ignatius means by "Judaism" and "Christianity" coincides with what we mean by these same terms. Hence I shall routinely place these words in quotation marks, in order to make clear that I am speaking of Ignatius's hypostatized "Judaism" and "Christianity," not (necessarily) our own.

To the Magnesians 8–10 provides more information than *Phld.* 6.1 on the contrast between "Judaism" and "Christianity." I excerpt the relevant sentences:

> (8.1) Be not deceived by erroneous opinions nor by old fables, which are useless. For if we continue to live until now according to Judaism, we confess that we have not received grace. (8.2) For the most divine prophets lived according to Jesus Christ. For this reason they were also persecuted. . . . (9.1) If, then, those who lived in old ways came to newness of hope, no longer keeping Sabbath, but living in accordance with the Lord's day . . . (9.2) how shall we be able to live without him of whom the prophets also were disciples in the spirit? . . . (10.1) . . . Therefore let us become his disciples and learn to live according to Christianity. For one who is called by any name other than this, is not of God. (10.2) Set aside, then, the evil leaven, old and sour, and turn to the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. . . . (10.3) It is ridiculous to profess Jesus Christ and to judaize; for Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, into which every tongue that has believed in God has been gathered together.

In both *Philadelphians* and *Magnesians,* Ignatius sees "Christianity" and "Judaism" as antithetical categories. In *Philadelphians* he exhorts his flock to listen to preachers of "Christianity" and not preachers of "Judaism." In *Magnesians* he contrasts life "according to Judaism" with life "according to Christianity," just as he contrasts observance of "the Sabbath" with living "in accordance with the Lord's day." "Judaism" is "the evil leaven, old and sour"; Christianity is "the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ." "To profess Jesus Christ" is the antonym of "to judaize." For Ignatius "Christianity" and "Judaism" are mutually exclusive. "Judaism" for Ignatius is something that "Christianity" is not. "Christianity" ought to exclude "Judaism," but Ignatius is upset because for some Christians it does not.

In both *Philadelphians* and *Magnesians* the "Judaism" that arouses Ignatius's attention and anger is within the church. This "Judaism" is the "Judaism" of Christians within the Christian community, not the "Judaism" of Jews "out there" beyond it. In *Magnesians* Ignatius writes "It is ridiculous to profess Jesus Christ and to judaize," that is, it is ridiculous to be a Christian and yet to act like a Jew. "To judaize" does not mean "to be a Jew" or "to convert to Judaism"; it means "to adopt the beliefs and manners of the Jews even though one is not a Jew oneself." Jews do not judaize, any more than Medes medize or Greeks hellenize; non-Jews judaize, just as non-Medes medize and non-Greeks hellenize. Ignatius is telling the Christians of Magnesia to keep their "Christianity" separate from "Judaism"

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and not to act like Jews when they are not Jews.[9] The statement "For one who is called by any name other than this, is not of God" seems to imply that the Christians of Magnesia were not yet comfortable calling themselves "Christians" and their beliefs "Christianity."[10] What were they calling themselves instead? The context suggests, of course, that they were calling themselves "Jews" and their beliefs "Judaism," and this is further evidence, says Ignatius, of their failure to keep their "Christianity" separate from "Judaism."[11] In *Philadelphians* Ignatius exhorts the community not to pay attention to preachers of "Judaism" unless they also preach Jesus Christ—in which case, we may presume, their message will no longer be "Judaism" but "Christianity." Even if someone preaches "Christianity," that is, a "Christianity" that is not "Judaism," do not listen to him unless he too preaches Jesus Christ, that is, the real Jesus Christ, the proper beliefs about Jesus.[12] The trouble with "Judaism" according to Ignatius is that when mingled with "Christianity" it leads to error and "heresy."[13]

Support for this interpretation comes from the "long recension" of the Ignatian letters. In the second half of the fourth century, some unknown author in Syria rewrote the seven genuine letters of Ignatius, interpolating and altering the text at will, and composed six (in some versions: five) additional letters. This corpus of thirteen letters, comprising seven interpolated letters and six spurious letters, is known as the "long recension" and is an important source for the study of Christianity in Syria in the late fourth century.[14] What is important for our purposes is that the interpolated letters are in effect a running paraphrase of the genuine letters of Ignatius and thus constitute the oldest extant commentary on them.[15] Here is

[9]On the word "judaize" (ἰουδαΐζειν) and associated terms, see Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 175–97, and "Between Judaism and Christianity: The Semicircumcision of Christians according to Bernard Gui, His Sources, and R. Eliezer of Metz," *HTR* 94 (2000) 285–321, at 294–98.

[10]Cf. *Magn*. 4.1, "it is right, then, not only to be called Christians but also to be Christians."

[11]Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 126. The author of the long recension (on which see below) seems to have so understood *Magn*. 10.1 (Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 3.175). Edwards, "Ignatius," 71–72, argues that the "judaizers" of Magnesia wished to "pass" as Jews in order to escape martyrdom; this is possible but not necessary. Centuries later, long after "Judaism" and "Christianity" had achieved currency as competing entities, Augustine had to deal with a Christian who, based on high theological grounds, argued that Christians should call themselves "Jews" (*Epistle* 196).

[12]I assume that it is Ignatius who is characterizing the content of one sermon as "Judaism" and the other as "Christianity," which in the context of *Phld*. 6.1 would seem to mean "Christianity that is not Judaism." The latter preacher would no doubt have agreed with Ignatius that the content of his sermon was "Christianity," but the former might well have disputed the assertion that the content of his sermon was "Judaism."

[13]Ignatius uses "heresy" (in other contexts) in *Eph*. 6.2 and *Trall*. 6.1.

[14]On the long recension see Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 1.233–79; more recent scholarship includes Jack Hannah, "The Setting of the Ignatian Long Recension," *JBL* 79 (1960) 221–38, and James D. Smith III, *The Ignatian Long Recension and Christian Communities in Fourth Century Syrian Antioch* (Th.D. diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1985; University Microfilms International no. 8619016).

[15]None of the quotations and testimonia collected by Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 1.135–232 cites or alludes to *Phld*. 6.1.

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Phld. 6.1 as rewritten by Long-Ignatius, as I shall henceforth call the author of the long recension:[16]

> If anyone expounds the one God of the Law and the Prophets but denies that Christ is the son of God, he is a liar, just like his father the devil; and such a one is a pseudo-Jew of the lower circumcision. If anyone confesses Christ Jesus Lord, but denies the God of the Law and the Prophets, saying that the maker of heaven and earth is not father of the Christ, such a one has not stood in truth, just like his father the devil; and such a one is a disciple of Simon Magus, but not of the holy spirit.

After cataloguing an additional four heresies in this same style, including one whose proponent "has denied the faith no less than the Christ-killing Jews,"[17] Long-Ignatius returns to the text of the genuine Ignatius and concludes that these six heresies and "all such as these are tombstones and graves of the dead on which nothing but the names of men is written."

Long-Ignatius intuited correctly that *Phld*. 6.1 was directed against heresies within the Christian community. The first heresy, the denial of the Sonship of Christ, makes a Christian a "Jew," or, in the memorable language of Long-Ignatius, "a pseudo-Jew of the lower circumcision." A "pseudo-Jew" is what we would call a "Jew." For Long-Ignatius, at least here and in one other passage, "Jew" is an honorable designation that properly belongs only to those who believe in Christ, just as Paul says that the real Jew is not the one outwardly with circumcision in the flesh but the one inwardly with circumcision in the heart and spirit (Rom 2:28–29). This may well be the meaning, too, of Revelation's much debated references to "those who say they are Jews and are not" (Rev 2:9 and 3:8–9).[18] According to Long-Ignatius, if a Christian denies that Christ is the son of God, then he himself becomes a "pseudo-Jew," that is, a Jew, as we would say, "of the lower circumcision," that is, of the carnal or physical circumcision, as opposed to the circumcision of the heart and spirit.[19] As a "Jew," this Christian, who has denied the Sonship of Christ, has become a son of the Devil, a designation that Long-Ignatius derived from Jesus' address to the Ἰουδαίοι in John 8:44. Long-Ignatius assumes that when Ignatius refers to "Judaism" he is speaking not about a social entity outside the communal

[16]Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 3.211–12, my translation.

[17]Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 3.213, χριστοφόνων Ἰουδαίων. This phrase and its equivalents occur five times in Long-Ignatius; see Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 1.248.

[18]Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 26; David Frankfurter, "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the 'Other' in Rev 2:9 and 3:9," *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001) 403–25. Frankfurter argues that "those who say they are Jews and are not" were members of the Christian community. He may be right.

[19]The Greek is καὶ ἔστιν ὁ τοιοῦτος τῆς κάτω περιτομῆς ψευδοϊουδαῖος. I know no other attestation of either the term ψευδοϊουδαῖος (except that it recurs in Long-Ignatius at *Trall*. 10, in Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 3.160) or the phrase ἡ κάτω περιτομή. For κάτω in the sense "in the sphere of the literal or physical," see *PGL* s.v. κάτω, definition B 2.

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limits of Christianity, but about theological error within the church. On this point at least Long-Ignatius read Ignatius correctly.

To summarize the argument thus far: "Judaism" for Ignatius is clearly and unmistakably an incorrect expression of "Christianity." The "Judaism" of Jews was of no concern to Ignatius. Ignatius is no Justin Martyr, and his letters to the churches of Asia Minor are no *Dialogue with Trypho*. Although numerous Jews lived in western Asia Minor in the second century C.E., Ignatius was not interested in them or in their practices and beliefs (what we would call "Judaism"). Ignatius mentions "Jews" only once, in a passage that reveals that he expects the church in the end time to embrace believers among the Jews as well as among the Gentiles.[20] Ignatius never has any dealings with "Jews," and never speaks of interaction between the members of the Christian community and "Jews."[21] His interest in, and ire against, "Judaism" are aroused only when Christians confuse their "Christianity" with "Judaism." The purveyors and promoters of "Judaism," both the "judaizers" of *Magnesians* and the preachers of *Philadelphians*, are within the Christian community. In other words, the people who are observing "Judaism" are Christians, and their "Judaism" is Christianity.

The "Judaism" of the "Foreskinned Man" in *Philadelphians* 6.1

Who is the "foreskinned man" who is preaching an incorrect form of Christianity? What makes this Christianity "Judaism" for Ignatius? Numerous scholars have grappled with these questions, and since the evidence is so sparse there is, naturally enough, great diversity of opinion. There are two fundamental approaches: either Ignatius's opponents resemble those combated by Paul or they do not.

Many scholars have argued that "Judaism" and "judaizing" in Ignatius should be understood in a Pauline manner. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, "Judaism" means the observance of the ritual requirements of (what Christians call) the Old Testament, and "judaizing" means the inappropriate observance of these rituals by gentile Christians. Since there are many linguistic and substantive connections between Paul and Ignatius, some scholars have suggested that Ignatius uses "Judaism" and "judaizing" to mean what Paul meant.[22] According to this reading, the "judaizers" who are castigated in the letter to the Magnesians were a group within the Christian community who were observing "Old Testament" rituals in a manner that aroused

[20]*Smyrn*. 1.2 (". . . that he [Jesus] might raise an ensign to the ages through his resurrection to his saints and believers whether among the Jews or among the gentiles in the one body of his church"). On *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* see the book with that title by Paul Trebilco (SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[21]On the absence of "the Jews" from Ignatius, see, e.g., Lieu, *Image*, 26 and 35.

[22]Schoedel, *ANRW*, 307–9; Munier, "Ignace," 391–93. See especially Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, " 'Judentum' und 'Christentum' bei Paulus und Ignatius von Antiochien," *ZNW* 85 (1994) 218–33. Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 119 astutely observes that what Ignatius calls "Judaism" was called "the Law" or "the works of the Law" by Paul.

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Ignatius's displeasure. Ignatius does not specify which Jewish rituals were being observed by these Christians, but *Magn*. 9.1–2 suggests, as many scholars have argued, that the observance of the Sabbath, instead of or in addition to the Lord's Day (Sunday), may have been an important ingredient in this Christianity that Ignatius labels "Judaism."[23]

A central difference between the "judaizers" combated by Paul in Galatia and the preachers of "Judaism" combated by Ignatius in Philadelphia is the observance of circumcision. The judaizers of Galatia attempted to convince their fellow Christians that without circumcision they could not be "justified"; the preachers of Philadelphia, however, were not circumcised—at least this much seems clear from *Phld*. 6.1. Who are these foreskinned people who preach "Judaism"? At least two different possibilities have been defended: 1) They are Gentiles, perhaps "God-Fearers," who, as is implied in the letter to the Magnesians, combine the veneration of Christ with their observance of "Old Testament" practices. As Gentiles (or God-Fearers), they are not converts to Judaism and are not circumcised, even if they advocate a Christianity that Ignatius can call "Judaism."[24] 2) They are gentile Christians (or Jewish Christians) who had been accepted as Jews by the Jewish community, and apparently had even regarded themselves as Jews. They observed many Jewish practices but not circumcision; not all Jewish communities insisted on circumcision, either for the native born or for converts.[25]

If this last interpretation is correct, then *Phld*. 6.1 is indeed evidence for the presence of either foreskinned converts to Judaism or foreskinned native Jews in the Jewish community of the city. It would be sufficient for my purposes merely to note the availability and viability of other explanations, thus reducing this explanation to at best one possibility among many.[26] But I should like to argue further: this "Pauline interpretation" of *Phld*. 6.1 is implausible. *Philadelphians* is not *Magnesians*; there is no hint anywhere else in this letter that anyone is observing "Jewish" or "Old Testament" practices and we have no way of knowing whether

[23]Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 123. Long-Ignatius clearly understood *Magnesians* 9 as a reference to the specifics of Sabbath observance; see Lightfoot, *Ignatius*, 3.173.

[24]Paul J. Donahue, "Jewish Christianity in the Letters of Ignatius," *VC* 32 (1978) 81–93, at 89; Robert M. Grant, *Ignatius of Antioch* (vol. 4 of *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*; London: Thomas Nelson, 1966) 103; Stephen Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 164–165; Goulder, "Ignatius's 'Docetists,'" 22.

[25]C. K. Barrett, "Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius," in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians . . . Essays in Honor of William David Davies* (ed. R. Hammerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs; Leiden: Brill, 1976) 220–44, at 234–35; Eduard Schweizer, "Christianity of the Circumcised and Judaism of the Uncircumcised," idem, 245–60; Jakob Speigl, "Ignatius in Philadelphia: Ereignisse und Anliegen in den Ignatiusbriefen," *VC* 41 (1987) 360–76, at 370; Hall, "Epispasm," 80; Peder Borgen, *Philo, John, and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity* (BJS 131; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 221; others listed by Wilson, 361 n. 92. Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 202, flirts with this view.

[26]John J. Collins, *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997; repr., 2001) 221 n. 35.

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the error combated in Magnesia is the same as that combated in Philadelphia. And even if they are the same—as is generally assumed—there is nothing in either *Magnesians* or *Philadelphians* to imply that members of the Christian community were consorting with, or being influenced by, members of the Jewish community, or that people were moving back and forth from one community to the other. Further, as I just discussed, Ignatius has no interest in Jews; he says nothing to them or about them. He has no interest in "Judaism" unless it be part of "Christianity." Indeed, Ignatius's ignorance of Jews, of things Jewish, of the "Old Testament," and of the notion of "Israel," is truly striking, especially when we set Ignatius beside Paul.[27] In this regard, Ignatius is decidedly different from Paul.

Hence I much prefer a non-Pauline reading of *Phld.* 6.1., "Judaism" here has nothing to do with "Jews" or the Jewish community or "Old Testament" observances. The foreskinned proponents of "Judaism" are Gentiles whose Christianity contains some serious flaw according to Ignatius, a flaw that can be characterized as "Judaism." Who are these foreskinned proponents of "Judaism" and what is their mistake? Here again at least two different possibilities have been defended:[28] 1) They are gentile Christians whose "Judaism" consists of participating in the Eucharist celebrated by circumcised Jewish Christians. As a result of communal tension, the two groups have been celebrating the Eucharist separately; Ignatius warns the community to use only one Eucharist (*Phld.* 4.1), presumably the one celebrated by the gentile Christians.[29] 2) They are gentile Christians who accord too much authority to the "Jewish" scriptures. In *Phld.* 5.2, the passage that comes just before 6.1, Ignatius insists that "we also love the prophets," as if to deny charges that only his opponents respect the biblical prophets and that he does not. In *Phld.* 8.2 Ignatius reports that he heard some Christians saying, "If I do not find (it) in the archives, I do not believe (it to be) in the gospel." The identity of these "archives" is uncertain, but many scholars have plausibly suggested that the "Old Testament" is meant. For these Christians the only source of authority is the Jewish Bible; if a passage cannot be found in scripture supporting a given belief, they will reject it. For Ignatius this attitude is "Judaism," and these Christians are expounding "Judaism."[30]

[27]Niebuhr, " 'Judentum' und 'Christentum,' " 226; Schoedel, *ANRW*, 305.

[28]Perhaps there is yet a third variation. Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 123 and 203, writes that these are gentile Christians who "may have been more interested in the idea of Judaism than in the practice of it." He also suggests that Ignatius objects that their interest in "Judaism" prevents them from putting Christ first. Frankfurter ("Jews or Not?," 420 n. 73) notes that Schoedel "seems to draw on modern Christian notions of religious identity." I am not quite sure what Schoedel means.

[29]Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM Press, 1993) 188. This suggestion is adumbrated by Grant, *Ignatius*, 22.

[30]See especially Einar Molland, "The Heretics Combatted by Ignatius of Antioch," *JEH* 5 (1954) 1–6; W. R. Schoedel, "Ignatius and the Archives," *HTR* 71 (1978) 97–106; Lloyd Gaston, "Judaism of the Uncircumcised in Ignatius and Related Writers," in *Separation and Polemic* (vol.

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Of these two explanations I prefer the second because it makes good sense of the passage and also accounts for the verb ἑρμηνεύειν, "to expound," which appears in the opening clause ("if anyone expounds Judaism to you") and which may well imply scriptural exegesis. Ignatius thus anticipates the stance of later Christian polemicists who use the terms "judaizer" and "Jew" to denigrate any Christian who accords too much authority to the "Old Testament."[31] The important point for our purposes is that the foreskinned proponent of "Judaism" in Philadelphia is a gentile Christian, whose "Judaism" is a construction of internal Christian polemic, with no (necessary) connection either with the local Jewish community or with our conceptions of "Judaism."

"Circumcision" and "Foreskin" in *Phld.* 6.1

I have argued that the foreskinned preacher of "Judaism" was a gentile member of the Christian community who was preaching "Judaism," that is, a Christianity that Ignatius regarded as incorrect, probably because it was too beholden to the "Old Testament." I have so far accepted the scholarly consensus that the foreskinned preacher of "Judaism" was in fact foreskinned, that the circumcised preacher of "Christianity" was in fact circumcised, and that these facts were important to Ignatius.[32] Unlike so much else in these scholarly explanations, these points, at least, have the advantage of taking Ignatius's own words literally. And yet . . . there is room for doubt. I should like to suggest that Ignatius was not interested in the foreskin (or lack thereof) of either preacher, and that "circumcision" should be understood as a metaphor for "Judaism."

As we have already seen, Ignatius was not interested in the boundary between the "Judaism" outside the Christian community (what we call "Judaism") and the "Judaism" and "Christianity" inside the Christian community (what we call "Christianity"). Not interested in that boundary, he was also not interested in circumcision. *Phld.* 6.1 is the only passage in the Ignatian corpus to mention circumcision and foreskin, and it mentions them only obliquely.[33] If circumcision were an important issue for Ignatius, we would have expected not only much greater attention to the topic but also greater condemnation. "It is better to hear Christianity from a man having circumcision than Judaism from a foreskinned man" is a weak, offhanded,

2 of *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*; ed. Stephen Wilson; Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1986) 33–44, at 37–38; Sumney, "Opponents," 357–58. This suggestion too is adumbrated by Grant, *Ignatius*, 22, and Uebele, *Gegner*, 60–66 and 82.

[31]Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 190.

[32]Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 164: ". . . some (if not all) of the Judaizers were Gentile in origin. That is the plain sense of *Phld.* 6.1—those who expounded Judaism were uncircumcised." See Gaston, "Judaism of the Uncircumcised," 38 n. 30, for excerpts from the writings of older scholarship on this point.

[33]Long-Ignatius introduces "circumcision of the flesh" to its paraphrase of *Magnesians* 8 (Lightfoot, *Ignatius* 3.171).

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and ineffectual slight against circumcision. Surely such a serious topic merits more than cavalier treatment.[34]

If circumcision versus foreskin was not an issue for Ignatius, why does he mention the contrast? The simplest explanation is that "a man having circumcision" is a synonym for "a man favoring 'Judaism,' " and that "a foreskinned man" is a synonym for "a man who favors a Christianity that is not 'Judaism.' "[35] "Circumcision" is a metonym for "the state of being a Jew," and "foreskin" is a metonym for "the state of being not-a-Jew." In various passages Paul uses "the circumcision" as a metonym for "Judaism" or "the collectivity of Jews," in contrast with "the foreskin" which is a metonym for "the beliefs and practices of non-Jews" or "the collectivity of non-Jews."[36] Similarly, Eph 2:11 is addressed to ". . . you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the foreskin' by what is called 'the circumcision.' "[37] Mishnah *Nedarim* 3:11 goes even further:[38]

> If a man said [as an oath], "May any benefit that I derive [even] from the foreskinned of Israel be as forbidden to me as a sacrificial offering," he is permitted to have benefit [even] from the foreskinned of Israel, but is forbidden to have benefit [even] from the circumcised of the nations [of the world].
>
> If a man said [as an oath], "May any benefit that I derive from the circumcised be as forbidden to me as a sacrificial offering," he is forbidden to have benefit [even] from the foreskinned of Israel, but he is permitted to have benefit [even] from the circumcised of the nations [of the world], since "foreskin" is but another name for "gentiles."

In this Mishnah, "foreskin" and "circumcision" have become purely metaphysical categories, with no necessary connection with the physical state of the people included in either group. True, most gentile men are foreskinned and most Jewish

[34]Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 203, concludes that "no one was actually recommending circumcision, and the issue had probably been injected into the debate by Ignatius under the influence of Pauline models." I agree with the first half of this sentence, but I see no necessity for the second, because Ignatius has not actually injected circumcision into the debate. Similarly Uebele, *Gegner*, 81: "Nicht auf die Beschaffenheit des Verkündigers kommt es an, d.h. darauf, ob er beschnitten oder unbeschnitten ist, sondern auf das, was er verkündet, nämlich Ἰουδαϊσμός oder Χριστιανισμός." So too Lieu, *Image*, 32: ". . . circumcision has no theological role for Ignatius." Frankfurter ("Jews or Not?," 422 n. 81) observes that circumcision is also absent from Revelation's critique of "Jews."

[35]Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 164: ". . . the terms circumcision and uncircumcision are simply a convenient way of referring to Jews and Gentiles."

[36]Rom 3:30, 4:9; Gal 2:7.

[37]See the fine discussion by Joel Marcus, "The Circumcision and the Uncircumcision in Rome," *NTS* 35 (1989) 67–81. The Greek here is ἀκροβυστία, which might be translated "foreskinhood" (i.e., the state of having a foreskin), but since this is barely English, I have allowed "foreskin" to stand. Better, perhaps, would be "prepuce," which, according to the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, has as an obsolete definition "the state of the uncircumcised."

[38]My translation is based on that of Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) 268. "May *x* be as forbidden to me as a sacrificial offering" is my paraphrase of the Mishnaic קוֹנָם. For a full explanation, see Moshe Benovitz, *Kol Nidre: A Study of Rabbinic Votive Institutions* (BJS 315; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 111–26.

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men are circumcised, but the physical presence or absence of the prepuce does not determine whether a man belongs to "foreskin" or "circumcision." The category "circumcised" includes even those Jewish men who for whatever reason are not circumcised, and the category "foreskinned" includes even those gentile men who for whatever reason are circumcised. "Circumcision" is Jewishness, and "the circumcised" are Jews; "foreskin" is gentility, and "the foreskinned" are gentiles. In a passage that I cited earlier, Paul, too, says that "circumcision" is not a physical but a metaphysical category (Rom 2:28–29):

> For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal.

The Mishnah and Paul agree that the category "circumcision" is not literal, even if they disagree on its application. The Mishnah believes that "the circumcision" means the Jewish descent group, which includes even those Jews who happen to be foreskinned, while Paul believes that "the circumcision" ought to mean the group of all those who believe properly in God and Christ, a category that includes foreskinned gentiles.

Perhaps Ignatius in *Phld*. 6.1 is using "circumcision" to mean "Judaism," and "foreskinned " to mean "being a gentile." Unlike Paul, Ephesians, and the Mishnah, which use the terminology of "circumcision" and "foreskin" to represent the divide between "Jews" (those who belong to a Jewish community) and "gentiles" (those who do not belong to a Jewish community), Ignatius, I suggest, is using this terminology to represent the divide between different groups or currents within the church. "Having circumcision" means "having 'Judaism,' " that is, in Ignatian terms, believing in an erroneous form of Christianity, and "foreskinned" refers to "a supporter of Christianity that is not 'Judaism.' "

If this is correct, it is just possible that the preacher of "Christianity" who "has circumcision" was not actually circumcised himself, since all Ignatius means is that the preacher regularly supports "Judaism." Possible support for this conjecture comes from Ignatius's language. Ignatius does not actually say that the proponent of "Christianity" is περιτετμημένος, which is the normal Greek way of saying "circumcised."[39] Rather, he says that the preacher is someone "having circumcision," περιτομὴν ἔχων. Grammatically and stylistically this phrase is a perfectly acceptable periphrasis for "circumcised," but I wonder whether Ignatius used it in order to avoid saying that the preacher was actually circumcised. The construction allows him to highlight the abstract noun περιτομή, "circumcision" or "the state of being circumcised," which, as we have seen, can be understood as a metonym for "Judaism." The preacher "has circumcision," that is, supports "Judaism."[40]

[39]See e.g. 1 Cor 7:18, where περιτετμημένος contrasts with ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ.

[40]Cf. Acts 11:3 ἀκροβυστίαν ἔχοντας, "foreskinned," and John 7:23, περιτομὴν λαμβάνει,

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Ignatius's reference to "circumcision" and "foreskin" should not mislead us. Circumcision vs. foreskin was not an issue that troubled either the church of Philadelphia or Ignatius himself. What did trouble Ignatius was the necessity to keep "Christianity" distinct from "Judaism." Therefore when Ignatius describes one preacher as "having circumcision," he means that this preacher is "supporting Judaism," that is, promoting a "Christianity" that for Ignatius is really "Judaism." In contrast, the other preacher is "foreskinned," that is, a promoter of "Christianity" that is not "Judaism." It is better to hear "Christianity" preached by someone who otherwise supports, or has been known to support, "Judaism," than to hear "Judaism" preached by someone who otherwise supports, or has been known to support, a non-Judaic "Christianity," because what matters is not their party affiliation, if I may use that term, but their understanding of Jesus Christ. As long as they preach the proper and correct interpretation of "Christianity," Ignatius is satisfied. Those who do not do so resemble "tombstones and graves of the dead," just as anyone who denies the corporeal reality of Christ is said to be a "bearer of a corpse" (*Smyrn*. 5.2). What matters is the message, not the medium.

The Rhetorical Pattern of *Phld*. 6.1

In the previous section I argued that Ignatius was not interested either in the "circumcision" of the preacher of "Christianity" or in the foreskin of the preacher of "Judaism" because his point was that what mattered was what these preachers said about Jesus. I argued further that "circumcision" may well be a metaphor for "Judaism," and "foreskin" a metaphor for "not-Judaism." In this section I shall adopt a different tack. Even if we deny that "circumcision" and "foreskin" are metaphors, and even if we insist that the presence or absence of the foreskin must have been important to Ignatius for him to have written *Phld*. 6.1, nevertheless this passage cannot serve as evidence for the existence of either a circumcised preacher of "Christianity" or a foreskinned preacher of "Judaism." I shall argue that neither preacher was a real person.

Several scholars have noted that, in the contrast between the circumcised preacher of "Christianity" and the foreskinned preacher of "Judaism," only one

"receives circumcision." The ambiguity turns not only on the word περιτομή but also on the verb ἔχειν, which can mean to have a given "habit, state, or condition, bodily or mental" (LSJ s.v. ἔχω, definition A 8) as well as "to possess mentally, understand" (LSJ s.v. ἔχω, definition A 9), and by extension "hold, think" (PGL s.v. ἔχω, definition A 8). (Cf. Latin *tenere* which can mean "to hold to an opinion, to uphold an argument or claim"; see the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. *teneo*, definition 16). If the preacher of "Christianity" is actually foreskinned, and his possession of "circumcision" refers only to his support for "Judaism," I suppose that it is possible that the foreskinned proponent of "Judaism" was in fact circumcised and that Ignatius has cleverly but maliciously described him as foreskinned on the grounds that he is foreskinned in the heart (cf. Acts 7:51). This is certainly a possibility, and I am surprised that this interpretation has not been advanced by any modern commentator on Ignatius, but I think identifying the preacher as a foreskinned gentile Christian is a much simpler reading.

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of the two is the "real" concern of Ignatius, the other being invented solely for the purpose of a good antithesis. Needless to say, scholars do not agree which one is the real target and which one is not. C. K. Barrett suggests that "Ignatius may be trapped in his own rhetoric: he meant to say that there was no harm in hearing Christianity from a Christian Jew, but having begun the sentence with ἄμεινον ("it is better") he constructed a comparison that he did not really intend." Niebuhr similarly suggests that Ignatius wanted to endorse Paul, and consequently approved of hearing Christianity from a man having circumcision (i.e., Paul); the contrast with hearing Judaism from a foreskinned man was spun out for the sake of rhetorical balance.[41] Lloyd Gaston suggests the opposite: "Ignatius had visited the church in Philadelphia, and it probably is in reference to something he observed there that he wrote the fascinating sentence [*Phld.* 6.1]. If the first man may refer generally to someone from the past such as Paul, the second one is a real person in Philadelphia, a Gentile, whose teachings can be called either by himself or by Ignatius 'Judaism.' " Following Gaston, Wilson writes, "Whom Ignatius had in mind when, with grudging approval, he spoke of the circumcised expounding Christianity is unclear; but whether they were the early disciples, Paul, or Jewish Christians active in his day, they serve mainly as rhetorical contrast to those who were the immediate and pressing problem—Gentiles who expounded Judaism."[42]

I believe that these scholars are on the right path but have not gone far enough. Here I shall argue that both the circumcised preacher of "Christianity" and the foreskinned preacher of "Judaism" were invented by Ignatius for the sake of a rhetorically effective antithesis. Ignatius's fondness for antitheses was noted one hundred years ago by Eduard Norden, who cited as examples the following passages from Ignatius's letter to the Ephesians: "Fleshly people cannot do spiritual things, nor yet spiritual people fleshly things; just as faith cannot do the things of faithlessness, nor yet faithlessness the things of faith" (*Eph.* 8.2); "Either let us fear the coming wrath or let us love the present grace" (*Eph.* 11.1); "I am condemned, you have been shown mercy; I am in danger, you have been strengthened" (*Eph.* 12.1).[43] Following Norden, Harald Riesenfeld describes Ignatius's style as follows:

> Ignatius writes in short-cut phrases, often arranged in a parallel or antithetic way, placed one after the other without applying those laws of paratacti-

[41]Barrett, "Jews and Judaizers," 234; Niebuhr, " 'Judentum' und 'Christentum,' " 229–31. Barrett is followed by Lieu, *Image*, 31–32 and 46.

[42]Gaston, "Judaism of the Uncircumcised," 37; Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 164. Gaston is also endorsed by Ross Kraemer, "On the Meaning of the Term 'Jew' in Greco-Roman Inscriptions," *HTR* 82 (1989) 35–53, at 51–52 (with some reservations); Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 28; and Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 33.

[43]Eduard Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa* (2 vols.; Lepizig: Teubner, 1898) 2:510–12. On Ignatius's style, see Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 7–8; Schoedel, *ANRW*, 311–14; Munier, "Ignace," 385–88. These antitheses resemble the "precise antithetical parallelism" recently analyzed by Lawrence Wills, "Scribal Methods in Matthew and *Mishnah Abot*," *CBQ* 63 (2001) 241–57.

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> cal or hypotactical structure which traditional syntax provided. There is a predilection for paradoxes and plays upon words, for all sorts of effects and figures of speech.[44]

Ignatius's fondness for antithesis and paradox is well illustrated by *Phld.* 6.1.

Our passage reads, "But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from a man having circumcision than Judaism from a foreskinned man." The sentence is a *paradoxical bipolar antithetical comparison*.[45] It is a *comparison*, either explicit or implicit: something is said to be better than something else. It is an *antithetical comparison*: something is said to be better than its opposite. The *antithetical comparison* is double or *bipolar*, in that it encompasses two single comparisons: one thing joined with another thing is said to be better than the opposite of the first joined with the opposite of the second. The comparison is *paradoxical* because the better element of one of the pairs is joined with the worse element of the other pair. In symbolic notation (I use the "greater than" symbol to mean "better than"), the two antithetical comparisons can be represented as A > not-A, and B > not-B. The conclusion that (A + B) > (not-A + not-B) is simple, straightforward, and nonparadoxical; but the conclusion that (A + not-B) > (not-A + B) is neither simple nor straightforward. It is paradoxical, because it contains the statement not-B > B, which, by itself, is false. It is the paradox that gives the figure its "punch."

Thus, in our case, Ignatius believes that Christianity is better than Judaism (A > not-A), and that listening to a foreskinned (= gentile) preacher is better than listening to a circumcised (= Jewish) one (B > not-B). Had he said simply, "But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity than Judaism," he would have given us a simple antithetical comparison, utterly bland and banal. Similarly, had he said, "But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him; for it is better to listen to a man who has a foreskin than to a man having circumcision," this, too, would have been a simple antithetical comparison, bland and banal. But Ignatius was no partisan of blandness and banality. By reversing the latter comparison and combining it with the former, Ignatius has created a rhetorically effective comparison, a paradoxical bipolar antithesis, in order to enhance his point, which is that it is so much better to hear Christianity than Judaism that it is even better to hear Christianity from a man having circumcision

[44]Harald Riesenfeld, "Reflections on the Style and the Theology of St. Ignatius of Antioch," Studia Patristica 4 (ed. F. L. Cross; TU 79; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961) 312–22, at 315.

[45]My original formulation was "paradoxical comparison of two conjoined pairs of antithetical entities." At my presentation of this paper at the 1996 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, John W. Marshall, then a graduate student at Princeton University, suggested that the figure might be called "a comparison of the degree of difference": the difference between Christianity and Judaism is greater than the difference between circumcision and foreskin. This formulation is perhaps better than my original one, but I think that my revised one works fine.

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(A + not-B) than Judaism from a foreskinned man (not-A + B). In other words, it is always and everywhere better to hear Christianity than Judaism.

In the Ignatian corpus I have not found another paradoxical bipolar antithetical comparison. At least once, however, Ignatius uses a simple (nonparadoxical) bipolar antithetical comparison. *Eph*. 15.1 reads "It is better to be silent and to be, than while speaking not to be." For Ignatius to be silent is better than to speak, and to be what one professes to be is better than not to be what one professes to be. The sentiment is simple or nonparadoxical because the antitheses are lined up in their proper or predictable relationship: (A + B) > (not-A + not-B). Had Ignatius said "It is better to speak and to be, than while being silent not to be," he would have given us another paradoxical bipolar antithetical comparison, but instead he has used a nonparadoxical comparison.

I do not know whether any ancient or modern rhetorical handbook has identified the *paradoxical bipolar antithetical comparison* as a standard figure. Nor can I present a history of this figure here, since such a history is beyond my competence.[46] Instead I would like to present a number of passages that demonstrate that the paradoxical bipolar antithetical comparison is indeed a standard figure. These passages are culled from my own desultory readings in ancient literature, and are not necessarily representative of the material as a whole.[47] I arrange my examples more or less in chronological order. After each citation I set out the two pairs of nonparadoxical antithetical comparisons out of which the paradoxical comparison has been constructed.

• Prov 15:16: "Better a little with fear of the Lord, than great wealth with confusion."[48] Fear of the Lord is better than confusion; having great wealth is better than having little. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: fear of the Lord, even at the price of poverty, is always better than confusion.

• Prov 15:17: "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened ox where there is hate." Love is better than hate; a fattened ox is a better meal than vegetables. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: love, even at the price of poverty, is always better than hate.

• Prov 17:1: "Better a dry crust with peace than a house full of feasting with strife." Peace is better than strife; feasting is better than a meal of a dry crust. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: peace, even at the price of poverty, is always better than strife.

[46]I cannot find anything relevant in the two standard works of Heinrich Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Einführung für Studierende der klassischen, romanischen, englischen und deutschen Philologie* (8th ed.; Munich: Hüber, 1984), and *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric* (trans. M. T. Bliss et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1998), or in Stanley Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[47]A thorough search of E. L. Leutsch and F. G. Schneidewin, *Corpus Paroemiographorum* (repr. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1965) would no doubt yield many more examples; a quick search yielded Thucydides 3.37.3 (see below).

[48]Translations of the Tanak are from the New Jewish Version.

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• Thucydides 3.37.3: ". . . bad laws which are never changed are better for a city than good ones that have no authority."[49] Stable laws are better than laws that, because of their mutability, have no authority; good laws are better than bad laws. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: stable laws, even bad ones, are always better than unstable ones.

• Thucydides 3.37.3 (a continuation of the previous): "unlearned loyalty is more serviceable than quick-witted insubordination." Loyalty is better than insubordination; quick-wittedness is better than ignorance. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: loyalty, even if it be the fruit of ignorance, is always better than insubordination.

• Eccl 9:4: "Even a live dog is better than a dead lion." Life is better than death; a lion is better than a dog. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former. In a rabbinic story the emperor Hadrian understood correctly that the passage means "life—even a lowly life—is better than death."[50]

• Sir 19:24: "Better those with little understanding who fear God, than those of abounding intelligence who violate the Law."[51] Fear of God is better than violation of the Law; abundant intelligence is better than understanding little. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: fear of God, even if it be accompanied by ignorance, is always better than violation of the Torah.

• Sir 29:22: "Better a poor person's fare under the shelter of one's own roof than sumptuous banquets among strangers." Eating one's own food at home is better than being fed by the charity of strangers; a sumptuous banquet is better than modest fare. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: personal independence, even at the price of poverty, is always better than dependence.

• 2 Macc 6:19: ". . . welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution." Honor is better than pollution; life is better than death. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: honor, even at the price of death, is always preferable to pollution.

• Plutarch tells the story that Caesar, while passing through a miserable little town in the Alps, remarked, "I had rather be the first one here than the second in Rome." To be first is better than to be second; Rome is better than a miserable little town in the Alps. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: to be a leader, even of an insignificant place, is always better than to be a follower.

[49]Citations of Thucydides are from the translation by Richard Crawley (*History of the Peloponnesian War* [London: Dent, 1910]).

[50]*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* on Eccl 9:4 (ed. Vilna, p. 23b), "Hadrian, may his bones be pulverized, asked R. Joshua b. Hannanyah: I am better than Moses your teacher. He said to him, how? [Hadrian replied,] because I am living and he is dead, and it is written *Even a live dog is better than a dead lion*." Cf. Homer, *Od*. 11.488–91.

[51]Translation from Patrick W. Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1987). A paradoxical comparison of two conjoined pairs of antithetical entities may also appear at Sir 42:14, but the text is uncertain.

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The opposite sentiment appears in the Mishnah: "R. Matthia ben Heresh says, Be a tail to lions and not a head to foxes." To be noble, even at the expense of being a follower, is always preferable to being ignoble. The Yerushalmi juxtaposes the two views: "The proverb is greater than the Mishnah. The Mishnah says 'Be a tail to lions and not a head to foxes,' [but] the proverb says 'be a head to foxes and not a tail to lions.'" Proverbial wisdom agrees with Caesar: it is always better to be a leader than a follower.[52] Cf. Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1.263), "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven."

• The last line of Mishnah *Horayot* reads, "A *mamzēr*[53] who is a sage outranks [lit. "precedes"] a high priest who is a boor."[54] A sage outranks a boor; a high priest outranks a *mamzēr*. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: a sage, even one who ranks low on genealogical pedigree, always outranks someone who is not a sage, even if that person is a high priest (because pedigree achieved through mastery of the Torah is superior to pedigree ascribed by noble birth).

• The Babylonian Talmud preserves the following proverb: "may my sustenance be as bitter as olive (leaves) but entrusted to your hands, O God, rather than sweet as honey but dependent on the hand of mortals."[55] Receiving sustenance provided by God is better than receiving sustenance, in the form of charity, provided by humans; food as sweet as honey is better than food as bitter as olive leaves. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: food provided by God, even if it be bitter, is always better than food provided by human charity. The same sentiment appears in Sir 29:22, cited above.

• This rhetorical figure persists in the Middle Ages, as the following citation demonstrates: "better to go to hell with the Armenian faith than to heaven with the Latin." Armenian Christianity is better than the Roman (or at least so the Armenians believe); heaven is better than hell. The latter sentiment is inverted in order to emphasize the former: loyalty to Armenian Christianity, even if it results in the torments of hell, is better than conversion to the faith of the Latins.[56]

[52]Plutarch, *Caes.* 11.712F = *Apoph. lac.* 206B; *m. ʾAbot* 4:15; *y. Sanh.* 4.10 22b. See Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1942) 146–47. In *Reg. imp. apophth.* 177D, Plutarch gives a nonparadoxical comparison of two conjoined pairs of antithetical entities.

[53]A *mamzēr* (מַמְזֵר), often mistranslated "bastard," is the unmarriageable offspring of a severely prohibited sexual union. The *mamzēr* ranks near the bottom of the mishnaic list of matrimonial castes (*m. Qidd.* 4:1).

[54]"Boor" is my translation of עַם הָאָרֶץ, lit. "people of the land," a rabbinic designation for people who do not partake of rabbinic piety.

[55]*b. ʿErub.* 18b and *Sanh.* 108b.

[56]Richard Wallach, *Das abendländische Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein im Mittelalter* (Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters Bd. 34; Leipzig: Teubner, 1928) 49. Wallach gives the citation as "lieber mit dem armenischen Glauben in die Hölle als mit dem lateinischen in den Himmel kommen," but I have not been able to locate his source. I assume that the sentence was written in Latin by a Catholic author to lampoon the Armenian refusal to accept the obvious truth and superiority of Roman Christianity.

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In this catalogue of paradoxical bipolar antithetical comparisons, some of the compared pairs clearly are "real." When Milton's Satan said (following ancient models) "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven," he was accurately setting forth the choices that were available to him. In rabbinic law, a *mamzēr* who is a sage does outrank a high priest who is a boor. The martyrs of the Hasmonean period did in fact prefer "death with honor" to "life with pollution." But others in the corpus are rhetorical constructions that do not (necessarily) derive from a real situation. When Ben Sira says "Better those with little understanding who fear God, than those of abounding intelligence who violate the Law," he is not really comparing a pious simpleton with a clever malefactor. His point, rather, is that the fear of God is a paramount virtue. Although Proverbs states, "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened ox where there is hate," the speaker is not a food critic and the topic of the sentence is not cuisine. The point rather is that love is a paramount quality. Caesar says, "I had rather be the first one here than the second in Rome," but we know that what he says is not what he means: Caesar had no desire whatever to be the leader of a miserable little town in the Alps. He meant, of course, that he would never settle for second position in Rome. His quest is for all or nothing. In these examples, the speakers are not really assessing the merits of rival claims; they use the paradoxical comparison as a rhetorical vehicle for making their point.

If we may attribute this usage to Ignatius, the circumcised preacher of "Christianity" and the foreskinned preacher of "Judaism" fade away into the rhetorical mist. *Phld*. 6.1 is not a comparison of the merits of rival preachers who were active in the Christian community. The point of the passage, rather, is that the message is more important than the medium. (I reached this same conclusion in the previous section but by a different route.) No matter who the preacher might be, it is always better to hear "Christianity" than "Judaism." So much so, that it would even be better to hear "Christianity" from a circumcised preacher than "Judaism" from a foreskinned one, because it is always and everywhere better to hear "Christianity." Whether in Philadelphia there really were circumcised proponents of "Christianity" and foreskinned proponents of "Judaism," we cannot say, because *Phld*. 6.1 does not necessarily reflect social reality.

Conclusion

My major concern in this essay was to rebut the claim that *Phld*. 6.1 is evidence for the presence of foreskinned men within the Jewish community of the city. Along the way I have also tried to decipher this difficult and enigmatic sentence. I advanced four different arguments. First, the "Judaism" to which Ignatius refers is not the "Judaism" of the Jewish community. Ignatius had no interest in that "Judaism," and gives no evidence of porous boundaries between the Jewish and

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Christian communities of western Asia Minor. The "Judaism" that aroused his indignation is a movement or tendency within the Christian community that he regarded as wrong. "Judaism" for Ignatius is incorrect "Christianity." The evidence that Ignatius provides about "Judaism" is irrelevant for an understanding of what we would call the "Judaism" of Philadelphia and its environs, because Ignatius's "Judaism" is what we would call "Christianity."

Second, there is no indication whatsoever that the foreskinned preacher of "Judaism" was an ethnic Jew or a member of the Jewish community. It is far more likely that he was a gentile member of the Christian community. Hence, even if he was foreskinned, his existence tells us nothing about the boundaries of the local Jewish community. His "Judaism" probably consisted of the ascription of too much authority to the scriptures of the Jews, what Christians would come to call the "Old Testament." Third, Ignatius was not interested in the presence or absence of the foreskin. "Circumcision" is a metaphor for "Judaism," just as "foreskin" is a metaphor for "not-Judaism"; hence the man "having circumcision" is a supporter of what Ignatius calls "Judaism," and the "foreskinned man" is its opponent. The point of *Phld.* 6.1 is that the identity of the preachers does not matter. Their party affiliation is much less important than what they say: if they speak of Jesus properly, listen to them. Here, then, is how I construe the passage in the light of my first, second, and third arguments; I interpolate my comments in ***bold italics.***

> (6.1) But if anyone expounds Judaism to you ***(that is, if anyone within the Christian community should attribute too much authority to the Jewish scriptures)***, do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from a man having circumcision than Judaism from a foreskinned man ***(that is, it is better to hear Christianity-that-is-not-Judaism from a man who otherwise would be expected to promote Judaism, than to hear Judaism from a man who otherwise would be expected to promote Christianity-that-is-not-Judaism, because what matters is not the affiliation or reputation of the preacher but what they say)***; both of them (***the preacher of Judaism and the preacher of Christianity)***, if they do not speak of ***(the real)*** Jesus Christ, are to me tombstones and graves of the dead on which nothing but the names of men is written. (6.2) Flee, then, the evil arts and plots of the ruler of this age, lest, wearied by his scheming, you grow weak in love; but all of you, come together with undivided hearts.

The Jewish community of Philadelphia, foreskinned Jews, circumcised Christians—none of these appear in the text. Ignatius is not interested in any of them.

As an alternative to my third argument, I offer my fourth. Even if "circumcision" and "foreskin" are not metaphors, *Phld.* 6.1 is still no evidence for a foreskinned preacher of "Judaism" or a circumcised preacher of "Christianity." Both preachers are Ignatian creations, invented for the sake of an effective antithesis. The sentence is a paradoxical bipolar antithetical comparison, a rhetorical form that recurs fre-

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quently in the proverbial literature, speeches, and narratives of antiquity. In order to have written *Phld*. 6.1, Ignatius did not necessarily see or hear any circumcised people preaching "Christianity," or any foreskinned people preaching "Judaism." The point of the sentence is that hearing "Christianity" being expounded is a paramount virtue for Christians, certainly far preferable to hearing "Judaism." Here, then, is how I construe the passage in the light of my first, second, and fourth arguments; I interpolate my comments in ***bold italics):***

> (6.1) But if anyone expounds Judaism to you ***(that is, if anyone within the Christian community should attribute too much authority to the Jewish scriptures)***, do not listen to him; for (***it is so much better to hear Christianity than Judaism that)*** it is ***(even)*** better to hear Christianity from a man having circumcision than Judaism from a foreskinned man ***(not, of course, that there really is among you a circumcised man preaching Christianity or a foreskinned man preaching Judaism—this is simply my way of telling you that it is always and everywhere better to hear Christianity than Judaism)***; both of them (***the would-be preacher of Judaism and the would-be preacher of Christianity)***, if they do not speak of ***(the real)*** Jesus Christ, are to me tombstones and graves of the dead on which nothing but the names of men is written. (6.2) Flee, then, the evil arts and plots of the ruler of this age, lest, wearied by his scheming, you grow weak in love; but all of you, come together with undivided hearts.

The text is not, and makes no claim to be, a description of the social reality of the Christian community of Philadelphia.

I realize that my readings of *Phld*. 6.1 are not likely to be accepted, not because they may be wrong but because they may be right. If either is right, we have thereby lost some intriguing information about Ignatius's opponents, and since we have so little to start with, we are loath to surrender any of it. Scholars no doubt will continue to contort themselves to produce ingenious and fanciful explanations of "Christianity" preached by the circumcised and "Judaism" preached by the foreskinned. But, better a reasonable explanation that yields little than an ingenious explanation that yields much.

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