

THE EPISTLE OF MARIA THE PROSELYTE TO IGNATIUS

by Mary of Cassobelæ

An epistle from a Christian woman requesting that faithful bishops and presbyters be sent to her community to provide spiritual leadership and guidance.

7 Chapters

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The Epistle Of Maria The Proselyte To Ignatius

Mary of Cassobelæ to Ignatius

[1354]Maria, a proselyte of Jesus Christ, to Ignatius Theophorus, most blessed bishop of the apostolic Church which is at Antioch, beloved in God the Father, and Jesus: Happiness and safety. We all [1355] beg for thee joy and health in Him.

Chapter I.--Occasion of the epistle.

Since Christ has, to our wonder, [1356] been made known among us to be the Son of the living God, and to have become man in these last times by means of the Virgin Mary, [1357] of the seed of David and Abraham, according to the announcements previously made regarding Him and through Him by the company of the prophets, we therefore beseech and entreat that, by thy wisdom, Maris our friend, bishop of our native Neapolis, [1358] which is near Zarbus, [1359] and Eulogius, and Sobelus the presbyter, be sent to us, that we be not destitute of such as preside over the divine word as Moses also says, "Let the Lord God look out a man who shall guide this people, and the congregation of the Lord shall not be as sheep which have no shepherd." [1360]

Chapter II.--Youth may be allied with piety and discretion.

But as to those whom we have named being young men, do not, thou blessed one, have any apprehension. For I would have you know that they are wise about the flesh, and are insensible to its passions, they themselves glowing with all the glory of a hoary head through their own [1361] intrinsic merits, and though but recently called as young men to the priesthood. [1362] Now, call thou into exercise [1363] thy thoughts through the Spirit that God has given to thee by Christ, and thou wilt remember [1364] that Samuel, while yet a little child, was called a seer, and was reckoned in the company of the prophets, that he reprov'd the aged Eli for transgression, since he had honoured his infatuated sons above God the author of all things, and had allowed them to go unpunished, when they turned the office of the priesthood into ridicule, and acted violently towards thy people.

Chapter III.--Examples of youthful devotedness.

Moreover, the wise Daniel, while he was a young man, passed judgment on certain vigorous old men, [1365] showing them that they were abandoned wretches, and not [worthy to be reckoned] elders, and that, though Jews by extraction, they were Canaanites in practice. And Jeremiah, when on account of his youth he declined the office of a prophet entrusted to him by God, was addressed in these words: "Say not, I am a youth; for thou shalt go to all those to whom I send thee, and thou shalt speak according to all that I command thee; because I am with thee." [1366] And the wise Solomon, when only in the twelfth year of his age, [1367] had wisdom to decide the important question concerning the children of the two women, [1368] when it was unknown to whom these respectively belonged; so that the whole people were astonished at such wisdom in a child, and venerated him as being not a mere youth, but a full-grown man. And he solved the hard questions of the queen of the Ethiopians, which had profit in them as the streams of the Nile [have fertility], in such a manner that that woman, though herself so wise, was beyond measure astonished. [1369]

Chapter IV.--The same subject continued.

Josiah also, beloved of God, when as yet he could scarcely speak articulately, convicts those who were possessed of a wicked spirit as being false in their speech, and deceivers of the people. He also reveals the deceit of the demons, and openly exposes those that are no gods; yea, while yet an infant he slays their priests, and overturns their altars, and defiles the place where sacrifices were offered with dead bodies, and throws down the temples, and cuts down the groves, and breaks in pieces the pillars, and breaks open the tombs of the ungodly, that not a relic of the wicked might any longer exist. [1370] To such an extent did he display zeal in the cause of godliness, and prove himself a punisher of the ungodly, while he as yet faltered in speech like a child. David, too, who was at once a prophet and a king, and the root of our Saviour according to the flesh, while yet a youth is anointed by Samuel to be king. [1371] For he himself says in a certain place, "I was small among my brethren, and the youngest in the house of my father." [1372]

Chapter V.--Expressions of respect for Ignatius.

But time would fail me if I should endeavour to enumerate [1373] all those that pleased God in their youth, having been entrusted by God with either the prophetic, the priestly, or the kingly office. And those which have been mentioned may suffice, by way of bringing the subject to thy remembrance. But I entreat thee not to reckon me presumptuous or ostentatious [in writing as I have done]. For I have set forth these statements, not as instructing thee, but simply as suggesting the matter to the remembrance of my father in God. For I know my own place, [1374] and do not compare myself with such as you. I salute thy holy clergy, and thy Christ-loving people who are ruled under thy care as their pastor. All the faithful with us salute thee. Pray, blessed shepherd, that I may be in health as respects God.

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