

**Canadian Society of Church History, Canadian Theological
Society, and Canadian Society for the Study of Religion**

PANEL DISCUSSION

“How Ought Church Historians to do Church History?”

What Do Church Historians Study?

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By rights answering this question ought to be as easy as shooting fish in a barrel. Everybody knows that decent historians take pride in facing the facts, the material that is given. When they are told to study the church, then they study the church. And that's it.

And if a church historian such as myself is ever tempted to forget this, there will always be a theologian or two around who will be glad to remind me at length that it is my task to stick to the facts. No theologian, of course, has ever suffered such inhibitions but they certainly know how to remind church historians how to observe boundaries. Take, for example, Schleiermacher who presented *An Outline of Theology* and placed church history along with statistics at the base of the totem-pole of knowledge, leaving all the interesting questions for the theologians to play with up at the top.¹

There is a part of me that relishes the prospect of stupidly insisting that a church is a church if it calls itself a church, and church historians had better take that seriously. Consider, for example, the position taken by the Anglican bishop who happened to head up the chaplaincy corps (Protestant) during the Second World War in Canada. Like many of the

mainstream clergy in Canada he had little respect for the Salvation Army and early in the War he paid an official visit to the Minister of National Defence and informed him that Salvationist officers were not clergy, that they had never been clergy, that they had never served in the armed forces as clergy during the First World War, and he was not going to countenance their presence in the chaplaincy services in this war. All of this is recorded in the bishop's personal memoirs published later by the Anglican Church.²

Of course it is all nonsense. Salvation Army officers served with distinction in the First World War, ministering to the troops. They served again in the Second World War as Protestant chaplains, and the papers of the Ministry of National Defence clearly show that the government admired and relied upon the work of Salvationists in both wars.³

Yet the bishop was perfectly sincere in his report of the facts in his official memoirs – including the totally untrue assertion that the Minister of National Defence was in complete agreement with him. And therefore I want to make two opening observations. First, sincerity is probably the most over-rated of all the Christian virtues. And second, it is not enough simply to take the word of church leaders about what is a church.

In order to avoid the little lapses into prejudice that sometimes afflict church leaders, theologians often state some variation of the “marks of the Church” that are traditionally invoked to determine what is a church and what is not. But rather than resort to an abstract definition I want to pursue the possibilities inherent in the notion that historians must above all focus their “inquiries” – a word that adequately translates the Greek word that gave us both the word “history” and the word “story” – on the material that is given to them by what has happened.

This may help me to make sense of some fairly difficult historical events in which the question of what is a church has arisen. Consider, for example, the efforts of the Metropolitan Community Church to get itself recognized by sister churches as an honest-to-goodness church. I do not know what their experience has been in Canada but at the level of the National Council of Churches in the United States their effort to be admitted was brought to nought by the Presbyterian representatives who arranged to table the motion to grant membership. (Those who treasure the notion that Presbyterians are renowned for doing things “decently and in right order” should recall that this is the only abuse of parliamentary procedure which General Roberts permitted to stand in his *Rules of Order* but which he decried to his dying day.) In Massachusetts the story was

slightly different: here a Reformed theologian wrote an analysis of the MCC application for membership in the state council of churches, arguing successfully that the application should be refused outright on the grounds that it was in fact a play for legitimacy by a body that is not a church.⁴

Sometimes the notion of what is a church shows up when groups are being included in interchurch bodies. Here in Canada, for example, the Catholic Church has become an “Associate Member” of the Canadian Council of Churches – a category of membership that was created solely to accommodate that church. My reading of the Vatican II documents, by the way, suggests that the official Catholic position is still that it is the one true Church.⁵ The decision to seek Associate Membership status in the Canadian Council of Churches is therefore an interesting if somewhat messy compromise.

So how are we to determine what is a church? Let me suggest going back to the root meaning of the word: *ton kuriakon*. I know that words change their meaning over the years. And I know that this particular etymology is more than a bit sticky in light of our customary understanding of the word “church.” But I think that we can learn something very interesting from an inquiry into the original meaning of the word that people produced in order to identify the body of Christ.

It literally means “the things that belong to the LORD.” Now you know that this term “LORD” has all kinds of complexities swirling around it because of traditional Jewish reservations about the pronunciation of the name of God. But you may not know that the Greek word for “lord” [*kyrie*] – which is preserved today in the modern Greek honorific that plays the part for Greeks that “Mister” plays for us – is in fact not a Greek word at all. It is a Persian word. And it comes from the period of the conquests of Kurush – we know him as Cyrus the Great – when the Greeks themselves were so impressed by the extraordinary reach, magnificence and power of this oriental ruler that they took his personal name into their language as a means of recognizing rulers or lords in the most generic sense.

Consider the possibilities. This means that the “church” – or the “kirk” if you come from Nova Scotia and prefer to use the language that was used in the Garden of Eden – refers to the things that belong to the conqueror of the world. I infer that evidence in support of the authenticity of any particular body’s claim to the name “church” must demonstrate mastery of the world – or at least a significant part thereof. If you genuinely belong to the LORD, then it is a lord who has mastered the vast

world.

That immediately casts into disrepute the claims of many modern churches to be *kuriaka* purely on the grounds that these churches pursue an increasingly private form of religion. But it opens up some interesting possibilities when it comes to considering the rôle of other bodies in history.

My favorite example here is the body whose deliberations are recorded by A.S.P. Woodhouse as *The Putney Debates*.⁶ This body calls itself the Council of the Army, and sure enough it consists of the officers and men's representatives of Oliver Cromwell's army, meeting at Putney on the outskirts of London to debate the terms on which they will wage war against the King's last stronghold during the English Civil War. But according to Woodhouse the Council of the Army looks like a church, walks like a church and talks like a church. I think that he is right. Its commitment to the authority of Christian revelation – whether in the form of scripture, personal experience or tradition – is wonderful to behold.

Or consider the record of the Colonial Office under William Knox during the American Revolution. William Knox was the British under-secretary of state for America during 1770-1782, and he drew the conclusion that “the most effectual means of excluding Republicans” from British North America would be to establish the Church of England “in all its forms” (i.e., including a school and university system under Anglican hegemony) and to grant “full toleration to the Roman Catholic.”⁷ Alas, Knox and his successors repeatedly underestimated the resources required for effective establishment, and never resolved with the Anglican hierarchy the contradiction implied by what they called “toleration” in British North America for the Roman Catholic.

I think it is interesting, however, to note that William Knox was a layman of the Anglican Church, serving on the advisory board of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and in that respect he was like many other influential officials of the British government. His statement reflected the assumption that church and state are one. Officials of the colonial government were often religious men themselves – and in particular men who saw no need to isolate their religious inclinations from their government activities. In the late eighteenth century the “church” to be studied was the British state, including that branch of the civil service known as the Church of England.

This is not to say that any group with ambitions to recognize the

lordship of God in the world merits the name “church.” By contrast I set before you the comments of evangelical leader Brian Stiller in *Faith Today* where he asserts that the preamble to the proposed Canadian Constitution contains a reference to God’s lordship “with a clear and concise definition that Christians can not merely support, but celebrate.”⁸

I think that this claim lacks the solid investment of real, secular power that characterized the assertions of God’s lordship that you find in the Putney debates and in William Knox’s documents. Chesterton may once have described the United States as “the nation with the soul of a church,”⁹ but I doubt that anyone will every describe Canada in this manner – at least not on the basis of the preamble to our existing or proposed constitution.

Before I offer two criticisms of this insistence that a church has by definition a solid investment in recognition of God’s real, secular power, let me adduce a comparativist argument in support of it. The traditional Jewish address to God as *malkhuto le-olam* or Master of the Universe supports, I think, my inclination to think that early Christians wished the LORD to be honored as lord of this world. So too does the Muslim appellation of God as *malik* of the Day of Judgment in the opening *sura* of the Qur’an. This is one of the few words in the Qur’an about which there is some ambiguity because the absence of vowels in the written form of classical Arabic leaves us unsure whether God is an “owner” above all other owners or a “king” above all others. Within the narrow bounds of this disagreement among the commentaries, however, there is no doubt that God is master of all worlds.¹⁰

Now let me offer two criticisms of the argument that the “church” by definition is the institution that offers honor to God as ruler of the world. First, if Jesus can stand before Pilate and say, “My kingdom is not of this world,”¹¹ why would early Christians choose to call their institution after an oriental conqueror? I simply put it to you that both views are part of the earliest *kerygma* (proclamation) of the Christian community and must therefore be taken seriously.

My second criticism cannot adequately be discussed in this language. Il nous faut l’exprimer en français, la première langue officielle de notre pays. J’étais en train d’écrire un manuscrit intitulé “Christianity” pour *L’Encyclopédie Canadien* et j’envoyai un exemplaire à mon cher collègue, Louis Rousseau à l’Université du Québec à Montréal. “Ils sont foux, ces Anglais,” cria Louis. “Le mot ‘église’ n’est pas basé sur le mot

grec qui veut dire ‘ceux qui appartiennent au Seigneur.’ C’est tiré de la langue grecque, c’est vrai, mais il signifie ‘ceux qui sont appelés à sortir (du monde).’”

And of course Louis was right – *grosso modo*, to use one of his own favorite phrases. The French word “église” has the same pedigree of antiquity that the word “church” has and it even shows up in English as “ecclesiastical” and related words. It means the opposite of “church”; it means “those who are called out [of the world],” not “those who belong to the LORD [of the world].”

How do we reconcile these opposites? If we are theologians then we shall follow either Martin Luther’s lead, arguing that only one can be right and therefore we should trash the other,¹² or John Calvin’s pattern, insisting that both are right and that properly conceived (by me!) they really mean the same thing.¹³

But a church historian cannot do that. The church historian has to accept both as valid explanations of the consciousness of the Christian community, and has to accept that it is possible that the two historic meanings of “church/église” cannot be reconciled. Instead they must simply be recounted.

Endnotes

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966).
2. George Anderson Wells, *The Fighting Bishop* (Toronto: Cardwell House, 1971), p. 452. See also minutes of the meeting of the Protestant Advisory Committee on the Chaplaincy (3 June 1941) in the papers of Right Reverend Arthur Carlisle (Anglican Diocesan Archives, Montréal).
3. See, for example, a letter from Charles Burns (Assistant Deputy Minister of National Defence) to Commissioner Carpenter (8 October 1938) in the file entitled “Salvation Army to Render Service to the Troops of the CASF” (Public Archives of Canada).
4. Max Stackhouse, private communication (14 October 1989).

5. When this essay was originally presented Dr. Walter Principe disagreed with my reading, pointing out that the Second Vatican Council had declared that the Orthodox Churches of the East and the Anglican Church of the West are recognized as “ecclesial communities,” virtually churches. And indeed it is true that the conciliar document *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism) does introduce this reconciling formulation, offering an explanation of the carefully chosen phrase “ecclesial communities” (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. [New York: Guild Press, 1966], note 45, p. 355). While I respect Father Principe’s authority and am personally grateful for his interpretations of Catholic doctrine that are consistently generous towards other Christians, I note that many other Catholic authorities continue to insist that the comments in the Council documents must not be construed as undermining the traditional claim of the Catholic Church that it alone is the one true Church. See, for example, Michael Richards, *The Nature and Necessity of Christ’s Church. An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (New York: Alba House, 1983), especially pp. 84-100.
6. *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).
7. Excerpts from Knox’s papers were republished in *The United Empire Loyalists: Men and Myths*, ed. L.F.S. Upton (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1967), pp. 50-55.
8. *Faith Today* (May/June 1992), p. 90.
9. Quoted by Sidney E. Mead, “The ‘Nation with the soul of a Church,’” *Church History* 36 (1967): 262-283.
10. Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters* (Albany: State University Press, 1984), I:48.
11. John 18:36.
12. See for example, Luther’s famous dismissal of works-righteousness

in the Letter of James in the light of grace as it is described in the letters of Paul (“Preface to the New Testament, 1522,” in *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961], p. 19).

13. John Calvin, “James against Paul?” in *The Institutes*, trans. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), book III, chapter xvii(11), pp. 814-5.

How Do Historians Determine What is Authentic Christianity?

WALTER PRINCIPE

We panellists ended up with two different titles for this discussion, titles not so entirely different that they cannot be related. The title I received and will speak to was: “How do historians determine what is authentic Christianity?” My first instinctive reaction was to say that to determine the authenticity of Christianity is something that falls outside the competence of historians and belongs rather to theologians – theologians needing and using the help of biblical theologians, historical theologians (to be distinguished from historians of theology) and contemporary theologians using all the resources available today, including especially the new developments in hermeneutics, analysis of paradigm shifts, etc.

But then, realizing that theologians are not inspired (at least usually!), that they carry the weight of their own particular tradition, their times, their methodologies, I thought that neither can theologians be judges of authenticity. To put it in another way, when we do historical work, we tend to judge the meaningful content to be examined and the fundamental causes at work, especially in changes, by *analogy* with what we ourselves

consider most important. I remember one of my professors, Harold Innis, remarking that one knows better the century of the historian who is writing than the century the historian is writing about!

This approach to the past by analogy can be both beneficial and distorting. On the one hand, it was certainly a gain for history when Marxist ideas pointed to the economic forces at work in history and helped replace the overly simplified “great persons” or purely political approach to history, and when they tested the ideological assumptions of many historians. On the other hand, when this approach insists that economics is the basis of everything, its analogical approach becomes distorted by failing to take account of other forces or causes at work.

Another example: although the hermeneutics of suspicion and deconstructionism have helped overcome too easy assumptions, they can become ideologies suppressing legitimate conclusions. On a Ph.D. examination a while ago, I saw such an attempt to apply the hermeneutics of suspicion to a discussion of Trinitarian theology. Surely, one professor said, these debates had little meaning or importance in themselves; they were simply a camouflage for ideological positions of people seeking power for themselves. The student being examined pointed out that these doctrinal issues were important enough that some persons were ready to give up their lives for them, so that they were not simply meaningless intellectual skirmishes hiding other motives.

Again, the feminist approach to history has made great contributions by overcoming the blindness of historians, whether men – or women trained in their mindset – to the important roles played by women in history. I had an example of the blindness of historians to women when I wanted to give some examples of important medieval women in a lecture. I went to the quite recently published *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* for its article on one of the most brilliant and learned women of the twelfth century, Heloise. What I found under Heloise was the laconic note: “See ‘Abelard’”! Even the article on women in the middle ages, which did speak of women abbesses who ruled men as well as women and exercised functions denied women today in the Catholic Church, failed to give the names of any but a very few. So the efforts being made by feminist historians – and I believe that there is growing sensitivity to this issue among men – is a good example of how analogy with the present can help us to know the past better. But, one might ask whether, in redressing the balance, some feminist historians are not falling into their own distortions

of the past. I think of the book by Marina Warner,¹ which contains rich historical material on Mary, the mother of Jesus, but is constantly distorted by her prejudicial assumptions revealed in the very preface of the book and frequently invoked throughout.

All this is to say that I do not think historical theologians can, while able to make important contributions, be any more than historians the true arbiters of what is authentic Christianity. Where is such judgment to be found, if indeed it can be found?

Here I do speak as a theologian – that is, as a person beginning from faith and seeking understanding of that faith by the use of all available intellectual tools – as opposed to stricter religious studies people, who bracket faith and use approaches such as history of religions, phenomenology of religion, comparative studies in religion, philosophy, psychology, sociology of religion, etc. I do not mean to denigrate such religious studies approaches. I remember, when being interviewed at the time the Centre for Religious Studies was being thought of at the University of Toronto, saying to Vann Harvey that I thought such a centre needed both kinds of scholars, those personally involved in a religious tradition and those not so involved. I am sure, I said, that I could learn something about Buddhism or Islam from persons truly committed in these religions that I could not get from an outsider giving a non-experiential or non-experienced description of Buddhism or Islam. However, such a centre would need equally if not more the other approaches I have mentioned. Those of us in the Christian tradition know – or are informed by those in other fields about it – how biased we can be, and how much we need the challenge at those examining Christianity from the viewpoints of various methods in religious studies.

To return to my theological point. For me, the determination of what is authentic Christianity belongs to the working of the Holy Spirit of God leading *the entire Christian Church* into truth. To find this leading into truth by the Spirit requires dialogue among all the Christian Churches – and, indeed, in our day more than ever, dialogue with Christians who are unchurched, with religious studies scholars, and with those of other religions or no religion. It is here, in this dialogue, that are needed the necessary and valuable contributions of historians of all types, secular or ecclesiastical historians, historians of theology and philosophy, historians of popular religions, comparative religionists, etc. But also needed are social historians, sociologists, social psychologists, anthropologists,

economic and political historians, and the contributions of those engaged in hermeneutics.

In a paper delivered at the 1991 convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, I tried first to convince our theologians of the absolute need of history of all kinds for contemporary theology. When invoking all that is needed for historical work, plus all that is needed in our contemporary disciplinary explosion of knowledge, I concluded, as I do here, that the only way any scholarship of this kind can be done is by multidisciplinary focus on particular topics.² It is high time that we all acknowledge that no one person, no one discipline or department, can do everything, that there is a professional hubris in those who think that they can work alone without consulting many others.

Two big problems I see in such a search for authenticity are those raised by Scripture and those raised by Tradition. With respect to Scripture, we are more aware that there is no one theology in the Scriptures, even in the Christian Scriptures, but rather a certain pluralism of approaches. To determine authentic Christianity by recourse to biblical studies runs into the problem of such diversity. Indeed, one result of such inquiry may lead to the conclusion that authentic Christianity can take several different forms by stressing different aspects of the Christian message so long as it does not neglect essential aspects of the message. As for Tradition, the problem is with the distinction between what is a tradition that truly hands on authentic Christianity and one that is either secondary and changeable or even contrary to authentic Christianity. This question has occupied us in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States.

In any case, I think we need, in dialogue, to build up a list of questions to be put to any presentation of Christianity claiming to be authentic. Such a list has proved useful in testing authentic Christian spirituality, and the same or similar questions could be used to test authentic Christianity, since authentic spirituality and authentic Christianity go hand in hand.³ Perhaps something like this could be developed in the multidisciplinary dialogue that I see as the way to find what the Spirit is saying to the Christian Churches and to all who are interested in authentic Christianity.

Endnotes

1. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976). Warner ignores or denies the beneficial role of Marian devotion, despite its evident aberrations, in overcoming exclusively masculine symbolization of God; she also fails to appreciate the role of popular religious practice in the pastoral field or the profound psychological import of a benevolent female intercessor.
2. See, "Presidential Address: Catholic Theology and the Retrieval of its Intellectual Tradition: Problems and Possibilities," *Proceedings of the 46th Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 46 (1991): 75-94.
3. For this list see my article, "Theological Trends: Pluralism in Christian Spirituality," *The Way: Contemporary Christian Spirituality* 32, No. 1 (January 1992): 54-61.

How Ought Church-Historians to do Church-History?

Martin Rumscheidt

I begin by delineating my underlying assumptions. 1) The notion of “objective” as understood in the academy as *Wissenschaft*, as “unbiased,” rigorously guided methodical pursuit of knowledge, is untenable to me. I reject it as a useful tool. It is too steeped in the objectification of what I need to deal with when I do church-history. It pushes me into the position of the outsider, the observer who believes that by hovering above things one may form an indeed correct judgment. Also, it rests on the false assumption that whatever is to be “studied” can be studied adequately, and consequently known appropriately, by projecting one’s own self-perception unto the reality studied. I mean some thing as follows: *homo sum, nihil humanum a me alienum puto* wrote Terrence; because I am a human being there is nothing about humanity that is alien – I would read: inaccessible – to me. This perception, when I see it at work, for example, in Adolf von Harnack, becomes the motor of the belief that as an “objective” scholar of things pertaining to humanity one can understand, know, interpret everything authoritatively. I reject this as simple academy-imperialism. 2) A crucial dimension of truth, for me, is relationality; relations mid-wife truth. Since relations are experiential, truth to be found and known is dependent on the imagination of people, on their ability to use what Germans call *Phantaise*, possible translatable as “fantasy” if that means the ability to use creativity in experimental ways unchartered by established method. Truth requires, I believe, experiences in which there are dimensions that objectivity and rationality do not by themselves provide.

I speak of the activity I engage in as church-historian as “remembering,” putting things back together as well as bringing things before the mind so as to have them present. In this activity there is objectivity, of course: meticulous respect for what emerges as factual and, in a second instance in the way conclusions and interpretations are shaped. It is the process of *understand*, of seeking to establish meaning or significance which also depends on imagination or fantasy.

We know that Paul said some dreadful stuff about women: they were

to submit. *Why* did he say that? What did that mean to him and then also to his hearers? Here my imagination has to come in. And this requires attention to the simple fact that it is I who put questions to Paul, to the past. It is, of course, always helpful to look at other ages' answers to those questions. But as ages change so do the questions they put to the past; our questions, even if they are identical in their wording, cannot be simply assumed to be the same as those of our forebears.

I work with an approach to the study of the church's history I learned from Samuel Laeuchli of Temple University. The first point to note is that when I venture into that study I re-member, that is, I do not merely describe but I also confront: I recreate. In re-creation I am aware of being involved. The attempt to understand, to com-prehend, demands the imposition of structures, patterns on the material studied. This is needed because I am in and of my century and that history is of another; without re-creating the twain do not meet. Through what Laeuchli calls "the drama of replay" one can bridge the gap to a reasonable extent. It is not a reproduction as if on a film of what others there and then did, said and meant; I cannot watch it from the outside; I need to enter, re-create and experience – in "the drama of replay" (in which I am very much an actor) – the event, etc. studied. It is as if I were there, involved.

I use now, as if a case-study, the example of Ignatius of Antioch and his seven letters. The letters illustrate the problem. The cities he wrote to and visited still exist: either in ruins (Ephesus, Sardis) or as modern-cities (Smyrna, Rome). The fact of their cultural mutation is obvious: the cities that live today are not what they were in Ignatius' time. The town-square of Smyrna has been excavated and some marble columns and inscriptions remain as monuments, some from the very age of Trajan when Ignatius passed through the city. But quite another city now lives around that square, a bustling seaport of some 400,000 people. It is now called Izmir, the Jonians and Romans have been replaced by Turks. In order to re-create the city as it was under Trajan – so that I may not only see but, above all, understand Ignatius – I must dig, like an archaeologist, beneath the surface: I must discard and save, I must reconstruct.

But more: Ignatius is dead; there is no direct analogy between him and me, no direct access from me to him. All I have is his words. Words are problematic, they hide and reveal. I cannot assume that everytime he used words like *henosis*, *soter*, *kyrios*, *thanatos*, etc., he did an adequate job; I must keep before me that these words include evasion, expectation,

illusion; Ignatius may have tried to talk himself into believing what he had perhaps not deeply experienced or he might indeed be saying in those words precisely what he meant. And yet we are dealing here with a concrete product of a concrete event: a Christian from Antioch on the Orontes River in Syria, captive to Roman soldiers, sent in their company to Rome to face charges of insulting the Emperor and this man wrote letters. Sitting on board ship in the harbour of Ephesus he received people who came to speak to him; he tried to communicate, surrounded by slaves loading and unloading other ships, workers rebuilding the city – houses, streets, temples – under a new, aggressive administration. We have none of that action, we don't have the sounds of the words, the motions of human bodies; we have a single consequence of all that: written letters. All I have is words with which to reconstruct that action. The duality of Ignatius' words, which have survived and can be analyzed, and his actions, which can be inferred only from their verbal expressions, is the matrix of my historian's work: "the drama of replay."

Re-enactment, or remembering, in order to experience in order to gain and understanding, knowledge, to find wisdom, truth.

I begin by making myself aware of where I am culturally, intellectually, personally (race, gender, class). Indeed, I must begin my study of church history (Ignatius in the present case) by knowing where I am and who for it is *I* who seeks to know. I live in a pluralistic twentieth-century town and province, in a crisis-laden, fragmented, democratic culture, an age of new sensitivities towards war, justice, creation, women, sex, an age with its entirely new ways of communicating. Having determined as best I can where and who I am, I can then ask – where and who was Ignatius? What was his context culturally, intellectually, personally? And how far back does that quest have to take me? To Herodotus or Homer? The immediately history must suffice (a decision not above dispute!). But what a large amount of information one could produce on that immediate period – about its religious, social, economic, gender questions, the New Testament, the city of Antioch, the Jewish diaspora. Thus, once again, I must set limits; like the archaeologist I must discard and save, reject and reconstruct. And again this is *our* choosing at work here; an activity not of simple methodic objectivity. What contexts come to mind then? *Geography*: Asia Minor; *an urban milieu*: Antioch, the empire's third largest

city, and the cities to whom Ignatius writes; *politics*: Trajan was Emperor, Domitian, the oppressor, was dead, the new ruler was humane; *economics*: a new highway was being built from Asia Minor to the Euphrates, peasants were allowed to burn their debts, but the poor (like today) were getting ever poorer; *the law*: Pliny, the Governor, wondering what to do with all those crazy sectarians called Christians and being told: don't seek them out specifically but if they are captured and refuse to do homage to my statue kill them on the spot, if they comply send them home; *religion*: highly pluralistic; *psychology*: a mass urban culture in its form of alienation looking for immortality, rebirth, salvation, seeking unity in meaning because their world had come apart. The context of Ignatius is that, plus Jewish and Christian, it had intimate communal groups and mystery cults. This was Ephesus with the library of Celsus, symbolic of learning; outside the city the Temple of Artemis, a fertility deity. Amphitheatres teeming with people, cities teeming with slaves, brothels, wine shops, dealers of drugs to heal, to make love, to destroy. Here, Ignatius, a man the church beatified, a man who, as I see it, pathologically sought martyrdom, wrote letters, the focus of my study.

The letters are fragments, not only because they offer a small bit of evidence written in moments of intense excitement, but also because all language is limited and all data are fragments. But in engaging in what is called here "the drama of replay," I discern that they are not closed bits, but open documents both in relation to his life and to mine. And there lies for me the clue not only as to how, but also as to why, I ought to do church history.