

Another Look at Silence and Knowledge of God in Ignatius's *Letter to the Ephesians*

RYAN PATRICK BUDD
St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology
Steubenville, OH

"The man whose delight is in the Lord's teaching knows the art of sitting still in the right place."

—Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*

In this essay, I attempt to supplement the better analyses of St. Ignatius of Antioch's *Epistle to the Ephesians* (Ign. *Eph.*) 14.1 through 15.3 with structural insights. The main fruit of the analysis will be to affirm the "mystical" meaning of Ignatius's concept of "hearing Christ's silence": the mature believer, who truly understands Christ's word, will be able to hear the silence of Christ—meaning, to understand Christ's hidden and mysterious Godhead—because Christ dwells within the believer as in a temple. The essay will proceed in three sections: First, a review of the more substantive commentaries on "silence" in Ign. *Eph.* 14–15; second, a presentation of a potential structure of the passage and a commentary on what that structure, if correct, would yield; and third, a very brief confirmation of the findings by reference to themes in St. Paul's own *Epistle to the Ephesians*.

Scholarly Commentary on Ignatius and "Silence"

In discussing Ign. *Eph.* 14–15, scholars have come to a wide variety of views, for almost as many reasons, as to what Ignatius means when he says the following:

It is better to be silent and to be, than to speak and not be. Teaching is good, if the one speaking should do. There is, then, one Teacher, who “spoke and it came to be,” and even the things he has done silently are worthy of the Father. The one truly hearing the word of Jesus can also hear his [Jesus’s] silence, that he might be fully made, that he might act through what he says and be understood through his (the believer’s) silence. (15.1–2)¹

There are, however, two predominant camps into which one could group the different scholarly opinions: the first camp holds that Ignatius merely is speaking about integrity, the correspondence between words and deeds;² the second camp holds that he is enunciating a kind of Christian mysticism.³ Two prominent members of the second camp, Virginia Corwin and Gregory Vall, though quite distinct in their views of the bishop of Antioch, provide reasoning that I find decisive in favor of recognizing that Ignatius—while certainly emphasizing a true correspondence between words and deeds—carries the point further than simple moralizing.

*Virginia Corwin’s “Reserve of Deity”
and the Believer’s Knowledge of Christ*

Corwin, in her analysis of the passage, points toward a “reserve” existing “behind” the visible works of Christ, which is to be identified with his invisible, and thus “silent,” Godhead, which one who truly hears his word can also “hear.” She acknowledges, however, that Ignatius first recognizes Christ as an example of a truly effective teacher due to the absolute

¹ My translation (see appendix).

² See, as typical, J. B. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 2/2:46, and William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, ed. H. Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 76–78. Mikael Isacson, *To Each Their Own Letter: Structure, Themes, and Rhetorical Strategies in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2004), seems to belong to this first “camp,” though he notes that the passage places one’s relationship with Christ in a deeper eschatological context (63). This shift toward a deeper context than mere moralizing puts Isacson somewhere in between the two “camps,” though closer to the first; to carry Isacson’s point into the second “camp,” one needs only to allow the passage to put one’s relationship with Christ in a deeper *realized*-eschatological context, which is just what this essay attempts.

³ See Gregory Vall, *Learning Christ: Ignatius of Antioch and the Mystery of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013); Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960); Simon Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Continuum, 1989), Cyril R. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: MacMillan, 1970).

correspondence between his words and his acts. She writes, "Christ . . . is a teacher unlike most, since there is no contrast at all between his profession and his actions. . . . He has an absolute clarity and a complete lack of any hypocrisy."⁴ The result of this recognition is not to stress ethical integrity, however important: it is to argue that, because of the correspondence between Christ's words and his silent acts and his even more silent person, the one who knows his words can come to a deep, profound, and infallible knowledge of who he is, himself.

Corwin argues that there is something more about this Teacher than the mere—though impressive—integrity of his message:

But it is not only the integrity of the teacher that distinguishes him, but his unique power: "He spoke and it came to pass"; at these words to the minds of both the writer and the hearers of the letter must have occurred the image of the mighty acts of creation. . . . It is precisely because the words of Jesus are in a sense mighty acts that they must be seen in the larger perspective.⁵

Which "larger perspective" she means, she explains as follows:

The silence of the Lord, and its comprehensibility to the one who truly possesses his word, suggests a kind of protest against too literal a dependence on the words, important as they are. Christ is to be understood by his followers not merely in the important but restricted sense of knowing his spoken teachings, but by comprehending the eternal significance of his life.⁶

The "larger perspective" is the perspective of Christ's life, his personal life as the Risen One who yet acts in history:

[Ignatius] places high value on truly possessing "the word of Jesus" (Eph. 15:2), and here one can only understand the concrete spoken word carried in the tradition, for the passage contrasts it with silence. It seems to mean what it meant for Paul. In some sense the historical Teacher in Galilee and Judaea is present to his mind.⁷

⁴ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 105.

⁵ Corwin, *St Ignatius*, 105–6.

⁶ Corwin, *St Ignatius*, 106.

⁷ Corwin, *St Ignatius*, 105.

This means, among other things, that the “larger perspective” includes precisely *who* Christ is—what manner of person he is.

Thus, Corwin introduces—and attributes to Ignatius—the “notion of the *reserve* of deity.”⁸ She means, by “reserve,” what remains unknown about God after one has listened to his words and observed his deeds.⁹ God the Father, she says, is the *reserve* of the Son—hence, he is Silence, “the hidden realm unknown to all except those to whom he discloses it.”¹⁰ Thus, according to Corwin, in considering Christ the fullness of God’s revelation, Ignatius means that Christ has fully revealed God according to God’s own plan to reveal himself; yet, there is a “reserve” that exists “behind” this revelation; otherwise, “the fullness of God was exhausted in the incarnation, and . . . [a] further result would be to drain the incarnation itself of meaning, for the eternal would tend to be reduced to the historical factor and so no longer be divine.”¹¹ “Silent,” therefore, means the same as “hidden” and “invisible” (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 9.1; *Epistle to Polycarp* 2.2): “The reserve of deity is beyond human ken.”¹²

Hence, Corwin holds that Ignatius’s words invite the Christian, by devout meditation on and practice of the words and deeds of Christ, to come to know him, himself, in a profound and mystical (meaning hidden but nonetheless real) way:

Not only do we meet the idea of the “stillness of God,” the world of “invisible things,” but—more suggestive because more individual—are the connotations of the silence when Ignatius considers its human expression, or as it illuminates the acts of Christ. . . . [Ign. *Eph.* 15] opens with the contrast between appearance and reality, or between hypocrisy and integrity, in the ethical life. But it does not go on with the exhortation to live as Christians; instead the center of thought becomes the meaning of the “silence” of the Lord. And this silence is

⁸ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 116.

⁹ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 116–27 (a very illuminating section of this work).

¹⁰ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 118. Her following pages, illustrating her dependence for this view on Old Testament wisdom literature, is a crucial contribution.

¹¹ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 120.

¹² Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 120, 118. See also her comments related to Ign. *Eph.* 19, the “star-hymn” section: “More than mystery is implied, for it is divine power that works in the revelation described in Eph. 19. From the silence of God welled up three mysterious events, according to the divine plan. These were mysteries to the world, wrought ‘in the stillness of God.’ This phrase seems clearly to suggest the reserve of the being of God, the unexplored stillness which is behind all revelation—the hidden, from which crucial events emerge clear-cut and unmistakable” (121).

not, as some would have it, the passive side of Jesus' life. . . . For the silence is something active and positive. What Jesus has wrought by his silence is good in the eyes of the Father. The Christian can "hear" it only after he has mastered the speech of the Lord. Then and only then can he pass on to the hearing of silence, the apprehension of the inapprehensible. This is nothing less than the knowledge of the meaning of his [Christ's] life, perhaps even of his inmost being.¹³

While Corwin does not say as much, her argument seems to require that Ignatius's ethical entrée, that one's words and deeds ought to correspond and that the Master himself provided the best example of this correspondence in his own life, gives the grounding for the mystical core of Ignatius's argument. Precisely *because* Christ's words and deeds perfectly corresponded, and because he is still living and risen, the one who comes to know most deeply his words and practices his deeds will come to intimately know him, himself.

Corwin's closing observation on this point deserves attention before transitioning to Vall's contributions:

Unless this is language other than that of ordinary ethical exhortation, it is difficult to understand how a recognition of the power of Jesus Christ when he remained silent could have taken so great a hold on the imaginations of men that knowledge of that silence should transcend in power and value the understanding of the force of his words. Unless the idea points not to the historical silences of the Lord but to the very core of his being, it is hard to see what Ignatius means.¹⁴

This argument has received scholarly critique. Yet, it remains sound if one considers the entire passage in its rhetorical context. Ignatius says that the believer who "perfectly hold[s] the faith and the love unto Jesus Christ, which are the beginning of life and the fulfillment," will certainly know "these things" (Ign. *Eph.* 14.1). What things, one might ask? It seems clear that "these things" are the contents of "chapter 13," an exhortation to gather more frequently for the liturgy.¹⁵ So, the one who has faith and love in a

¹³ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 121–22.

¹⁴ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 122.

¹⁵ See Vall, *Learning Christ*, 140 (for Ignatius, the unified Eucharistic worship of the Church is characteristically Christian, as opposed to the literally dia-bolical ways of the enemy), 164 (Christ's mysteries are present to the faithful in the liturgy), 181 (ecclesial life in unity is sharing in God's own life), and 362 (the Eucharist unites realized and future eschatology). I note these references to commend Vall's insights into Ignatius's

deep way will understand the need to gather for the liturgy; to follow that up with a mere appeal to ethical integrity (however essential) as a rationale for gathering for the liturgy does not make much sense. If, however, Ignatius calls the Ephesians to recall who abides in their midst during the liturgy—whom they will know deeply by the pondering of his word and his “deeds silently done,” by which Ignatius may even allude to the liturgy itself—Ign. *Eph.* 14–15 much more easily appears as a coherent part of Ignatius’s overall argument.

Gregory Vall and the Word Who Reveals the Silence

Vall holds that the believer who truly hears the Word can understand the underlying Silence because the Word reveals the Silence; put another way, the Word expresses the Silence to the one truly learning the Word. Hence, for Vall, the “word”–“silence” parallel primarily concerns the divine economy, as opposed to theology proper.

Vall begins grappling with Ign. *Eph.* 14–15 and “silence” by reference to the other major Ignatian text having to do with silence, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 8.2.¹⁶ Vall notes that “coming out of silence” is primarily an economic expression that still carries with it traces of theology: “The paradox of God’s ‘Word come forth from silence’ expresses the fact that Jesus Christ is the true and definitive revelation of God but . . . God loses none of his mystery in manifesting himself in this way.”¹⁷ The “silence,” therefore, is at once the economic silence of pre-Christian history, where the Word had yet to be uttered fully in time (cf. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans* 8:2), and also the silence of mystery.

Hence, Vall argues that Ignatius primarily has revelation in mind in Ign. *Eph.* 14–15. What Christ did “silently” was worthy of the Father, he says, because it was also revelatory.¹⁸ These silent deeds are his mysteries, especially the mysteries of Ign. *Eph.* 19.1–3, “mysteries of a cry accomplished in God’s silence.” These “silent” mysteries—Christ’s most significant deeds, silent because at once revelatory and full of impenetrable mystery—stand at the center of an economy of revealing mysteries, which are spatiotemporal events that make (darkly) manifest eternal and uncreated realities.¹⁹

Vall’s work shows that, as Corwin also showed, an appeal to authenticity

understanding of the liturgy, and to note that—at least according to Vall—liturgy plays a pivotal role in Ignatius’s understanding of ecclesial life.

¹⁶ Vall, *Learning Christ*, 261–66.

¹⁷ Vall, *Learning Christ*, 266.

¹⁸ Vall, *Learning Christ*, 273.

¹⁹ Vall, *Learning Christ*, 274.

and integrity does not exhaust Ignatius's meaning in Ign. *Eph.* 14–15. He, like Corwin, acknowledges that authenticity is the apparent context; the pairings in the text itself make this perfectly clear (see also the following section):

No-one promising faith sins;	nor, having obtained love, does he lie.
The tree is known by its fruits;	just so, those promising to be of Christ shall be seen by their deeds,
for “the deed” is not a promise now,	but rather in the power of faith if a man should continue unto the fulfillment.
It is better to be silent and to be,	than to speak and not be.
Teaching is good,	if the one speaking should do.
There is, then, one Teacher, who “spoke and it came to be,”	and even the things he has done silently are worthy of the Father.

The silent action of Christ, and that of the believer, becomes a “super-word” that both bears its own witness and confirms the witness of the spoken word, as Ignatius intends to do by his own martyrdom.²⁰ And so, the passage certainly yields the following (revelatory and ethical) sense: By his deeds, Christ showed that God was trustworthy, as Christ is the “fruit” from the “tree” of Old Testament prophecy. Yet, Vall also shows how the apparent theme changes in the middle of 15.1; Christ is the authentic Teacher who spoke and it came to be, but then Ignatius goes on what at first appears to be a Christological tangent to give praise to Christ, whose silent deeds are worthy of the Father. Ignatius says that the Christian who understands Christ’s “word” of his teaching can hear his silence—his deeds and mysteries. This “Christlearning” (χριστομαθία) makes a man “fully made/perfect/mature” (τέλειος), which means the man can “act through his speech” and “be understood through his silence”—in context meaning, presumably, his deeds in imitation of Christ’s own deeds and mysteries. So, the Christian

²⁰ Vall, *Learning Christ*, 283.

who can penetrate the “silent” mysteries becomes a fully formed image of his Master, who spoke and it came to be.²¹

What Poetic/Rhetorical Analysis Can Contribute to Understanding Ign. Eph. 14–15

The preceding work of Corwin and Vall allows one to grasp that Ignatius almost certainly had “mysticism” in mind, building on top of what looked like an ethical exhortation to integrity, the correspondence between words and deeds. In the following section, I will attempt to articulate the contributions that rhetorical and poetic analysis would make to the understanding of this important passage. First, I will review prominent commentators’ views on Ignatius’s style of writing; second, I will present my own view, which is that Ignatius writes with Semitic rather than Greek logic, as evidenced by his use of imagery and parallelism; third, I will present a structure of the passage broken down into “versets,” after the fashion in which Robert Alter examines the Psalms. The remarkable coherency of this breakdown argues in favor of its being the correct way of viewing the passage. Analyzing the passage in this fashion results in confirming and deepening the penetrating analyses of Corwin and Vall and like-minded scholarly readers of Ignatius.

Ignatius, His Style, and His Coherence of Thought, in Context

There is a wide variety of scholarly opinion about Ignatius’s style, and even his ability to think coherently. Corwin, perhaps among the most balanced, has the following to contribute:

The writing is broken, marred occasionally with incompleting [*sic*] sentences and above all lacking in connected argument. Nowhere is there development of ideas in measured, logical sequence. Everywhere, on the contrary, the mind of the writer passes quickly from one suggested and only half-explicated point to another.²²

She adds the following:

²¹ See Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 122, who agrees: “This ultimate knowledge carries with it perfection. It means clarity and unity of inner being and outward living in the man to whom that knowledge comes, ‘that through his speaking he may act and through his silence be known.’ That man becomes perfect as his Teacher is perfect.”

²² Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 19.

It is likely that temperament as well as circumstance accounts for the running character of thought and the lack of developed presentation of ideas. . . . It is this sort of person who might be swept along from idea to idea as he dictated, touching lightly on each and moving quickly to a new emphasis or a new figure of speech. [But] to acknowledge the lack of careful development of ideas is not in the least to suggest that the letters are without clear and vigorous thought. They etch in sharp lines the thought of the leader of a great church and the triumphant and moving confession of a sensitive person.²³

William Schoedel serves as a fine example of a less balanced view of the bishop of Antioch, whose style, in Schoedel's opinion, was

of the highest passion and formlessness. . . . [There is] no piece of literature of the time that violates the language in such a sovereign way. . . . [Ignatius's rhetoric is] of unheard-of boldness, . . . [with] inner fire and passion that frees itself from the normal bonds of expression.²⁴

Schoedel, for all his condescending view of Ignatius's passionate nature, yet classifies Ignatius as belonging to the Asiatic rhetorical school, identifying many standard rhetorical devices in his writing, all heavily trained on the development of pathos.²⁵ His thought process, for Schoedel, follows the Hellenistic pattern, and this "deeply colors his treatment of divine silence."²⁶

Corwin, it seems to me, is on the right track, however, when she notes Ignatius's heavy use of a rhetorical/logical device whose native ground is the Hebrew Scriptures: "Parallelism is natural to anyone who knows the psalms, and Ignatius is particularly fond of it."²⁷ Indeed, one amateur attempt to diagram the whole of Ignatius's *Epistle to the Ephesians* using parallelism found that the whole work might just be one long string of

²³ Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 21.

²⁴ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 7.

²⁵ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 9. For other rhetorical analyses, see Isacson, *To Each Their Own Letter*, and Harry O. Maier, "The Politics and Rhetoric of Discord and Concord in Paul and Ignatius," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (New York : Oxford University Press, 2005), 307–24.

²⁶ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 10.

²⁷ Corwin, *St Ignatius*, 178. Schoedel also notes Ignatius's use of parallelism, though not with the same clarity and emphasis.

parallelisms.²⁸ Parallelism is a characteristically Semitic thought pattern;²⁹ Ignatius's apparent deep indebtedness to what is not just a rhetorical device but a logical structure ought to cause scholars to pause before judging his thought patterns incoherent or incomplete or lacking in rigorous logic. Hebraic/Semitic logic is not less coherent for lacking the formal categories of Greek, Aristotelian logic.

Robert Alter, in *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, makes the following observations about biblical parallelism, all of which also seem to apply to Ignatius's writing. Alter insists that "it is important to recognize what is involved in the parallelism and where parallelism begins to turn into something else. The most obvious thing is the parallelism of meaning."³⁰ By "parallelism of meaning," Alter means that the biblical poet does not use parallelism "decoratively," merely to make the work fancier or more "poetic," but actually to advance the thought or even the argument of the poem: "The more one looks at this phenomenon of 'doubling' ordinary words by poetic equivalence, the more one sees a dynamic of meaning emerging from one verset to the next."³¹ One of the most prominent "dynamics of meaning" is that of heightening or intensification, whereby the imagery or vehemence of the language is increased in clarity or power, and this is not just to make a greater pathos, but to advance a line of thought.³² The same device—parallelism—can even be used to advance a story line cast into verse.³³ Alter's work reveals not just a poetic world, but a logical world, perhaps more ancient and "earthy" than that of Aristotelian logic, but potent and forcible in its own right, worthy of respect.

John Breck, in *The Shape of Biblical Language*, takes the analysis begun by Alter to the next level of clarity and profundity in his study of biblical chiasm. He notes, as does Alter, that parallelism, the basic formal characteristic of Hebrew poetry, also evidences thought progression.³⁴ The

²⁸ This is my own attempt.

²⁹ Robert Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985), 3–26.

³⁰ Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 7.

³¹ Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 14. A "verset" is one-half of a parallelism, as is Ps 88:12 (Alter's example and translation here): "Will Your steadfast care be told in the grave, / Your constancy in Perdition?" Here, the image and thought being developed is grave–Perdition, which reveals a great deal about how the poet *thinks* about the grave: it is a loss, a perdition.

³² Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 19–22, 62–84.

³³ Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 27–61; note esp. 29–31, where he notes several different kinds of parallelism structures that have different rhetorical and logical functions.

³⁴ John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 16–21.

ancient mind was educated, he argues, to recognize concentric or "helical" parallelisms within units of thought, which were so organized due to the absence of modern spacing, paragraph, and punctuation conventions, as well as being an aid to memory.³⁵ Moderns, Breck argues, often miss biblical thought patterns expressed in parallelism;³⁶ thus, he says, "at times, . . . while attempting to perceive the 'shape' of a biblical passage, it is necessary to transform it into a more familiar structure."³⁷ This structure he recognizes as concentric or "helical"; in his study, he reorganizes the chiasmic thought pattern into a train of thought more familiar to moderns, demonstrating the chiasm's logical and rhetorical power to be quite as forcible as that of the syllogism.³⁸ Two fundamental traits are *inclusio* and what Breck calls the "what's-more factor": a thought unit will be "framed" by use of *inclusio*, which to one trained to see/hear would function much as the structure of paragraphs in contemporary writing, setting off one unit of thought from another; once framed, the second part of a parallelism (whether this parallelism is a single verse of poetry, or a whole section of text arranged as a chiasm) always develops the thought of the first part.³⁹ Development can occur by means of intensification, but also by means of stressing by repetition of the same or synonymous words, or by antithesis.⁴⁰ Thus unveiled somewhat to modern eyes, the rhetorical context of the ancient world—in particular the biblical world and Semitic mindset—requires readers to take Ignatius very seriously as a thinker and a stylist.

Vall, in his study of Ignatius, makes several helpful observations that become even more compelling in light of the work of Alter and Breck. Vall notes that Ignatius writes theological formulae using parallelism (e.g., "faith and love" and "the beginning and the end of life," both from Ign. *Eph.* 14:1) to make a synthesis by putting two terms next to one another; he also notes that Ignatius uses antithetical parallelism (e.g., "true life in death," from 7.2)

³⁵ Breck, *Shape*, 26, 29, 53–4. He provides extensive evidence that this pattern of thought is fundamental to the organization of biblical narrative, argument, and poetry, finding chiasmic patterns at work in Genesis, John, Matthew, and Paul (44–46, 119, 165–205, 211–21). Most intriguing are Breck's arguments (211–221) that the Apostle Paul thought in chiasm, given that—for Breck—Paul will seem to reach intuitively for a chiasmic argument during composition of his epistles: "[Paul's] *process of reasoning* was shaped and given expression by the principles of concentric parallelism" (217; emphasis mine).

³⁶ Breck, *Shape*, 297.

³⁷ Breck, *Shape*, 27. See the appendix below for a similar rearrangement of Ign. *Eph.* 14–15.

³⁸ Breck, *Shape*, 36–43.

³⁹ Breck, *Shape*, 29–52, 311.

⁴⁰ Breck, *Shape*, 35–38.

to create paradox, thus inviting the hearer to ponder along with him the great mysteries of Christ.⁴¹ He also notes at least one instance where one can much more easily discern Ignatius's meaning by recognizing his use of chiasm.⁴²

*"What's-More": Concentric Parallelism
and the Structure of Ign. Eph. 14–15*

Given the observations of Alter, Breck, and Vall, it becomes easy to recognize that Ignatius thinks in the same patterns observed in the Hebrew Psalter and wisdom literature, as well as the writing of his hero, the Apostle Paul.⁴³ The following represents an attempt to organize Ign. *Eph.* 14–15 in "verset" form, the way one may also organize psalms and other poetry in the Bible:

1	None of these things escapes your notice,	if you perfectly hold the faith and the love unto Jesus Christ,
2	which are the beginning of life and the fulfillment;	faith on the one hand the beginning, love on the other hand the fulfillment;
3	and the two, come together in unity, are God;	and all else that tends to nobility follows after.
4	No-one promising faith sins;	nor, having obtained love, does he lie.
5	The tree is known by its fruits;	just so, those promising to be of Christ shall be seen by their deeds,

⁴¹ Vall, *Learning Christ*, 15. He argues that the epistles are themselves intrinsically dialogical, written to bring the hearer along in dialogue with Ignatius, who sees himself more as a "teacher's aide" than a teacher himself (18).

⁴² Vall, *Learning Christ*, 99.

⁴³ Alter rightly includes narrative prose and wisdom prose in his analysis. Several of the bibliographical authors note Ignatius's dependence on the wisdom literature for key concepts in Ign. *Eph.* While none of them refers to the logical structure of books like Proverbs, their establishment of Ignatius's thought-formation by the wisdom books leave the road clear to suggest Ignatius's dependence on the characteristically Semitic logic found there. The most helpful of these is Harry O. Maier, "The Politics of the Silent Bishop: Silence and Persuasion in Ignatius of Antioch," *Journal of Theological Studies* 55, no. 2 (2004): 503–19, where the author demonstrates that Ignatius's praise of the "silent" bishop depends on the wisdom-literature tradition of prudence in speech, often demonstrated by discrete silence. But Maier's other piece, "Politics and Rhetoric of Discord and Concord," shows that Ignatius—much like his hero, Paul—was formed by the mentalities of both Old Testament wisdom and the surrounding pagan culture.

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 6 | for "the deed" is not a promise
now, | but rather in the power of faith
if a man should continue
unto the fulfillment. |
| 7 | <i>It is better to be silent and to be,</i> | <i>than to speak and not be.</i> |
| 8 | <i>Teaching is good,</i> | <i>if the one speaking should do.</i> |
| 9 | There is, then, one Teacher,
who "spoke and it came to be," | and even the things he has done
silently are worthy of the
Father. |
| 10 | The one truly hearing the word
of Jesus | can also hear his silence, |
| 11 | that he might be fully made, | that he might act through his
speech and through his silence
be known. |
| 12 | Nothing is hidden from the
Lord; | even our secrets are close to him. |
| 13 | Let us therefore do all things
as though he were dwelling in us | that we may be his temples, and
he our God in us. |
| 14 | This very thing both is | and will appear before our face
by which justly we love him. ⁴⁴ |

The line numbers obviously do not represent the verse divisions found in standard editions of the text, but rather semantic or logical pairings ("doublets"). It is easy to see the same Semitic thought patterns at work as we see in the Psalms. I am not comfortable asserting that Ignatius wrote *Ign. Eph.* 14–15 explicitly in verse, but the thought pattern is so unmistakably that of biblical poetry that I will refer to it as a "prose poem," to use a more modern expression.⁴⁵

One here discerns an *inclusio* with a central pivot-point, allowing an easy division of the passage into two parts (happily, corresponding to the

⁴⁴ This setting-off is not a typo; very occasionally, Semitic verse has a triplet, instead of a doublet, on a particular line, which is what I think is happening in this line.

⁴⁵ According to Breck, *Shape*, 22, any "rigid distinction between prose and poetry" in Scripture "is overdrawn." This opinion makes good sense, especially given the lack of punctuation and spacing in ancient manuscripts and the utility of elements of poetry in prose to aid understanding and memory in a predominantly oral culture, where most of the "readers" of Ignatius's epistles would have been "hearers" listening to a literate person reading aloud.

common chapter division) that follow Breck's "what's-more" logic. In line 14, "this very thing"—clearly, the temple presence of Christ in the Christian's heart—"will appear before our face" as the motive cause of our love for Christ. In line 1, "these things"—the value of gathering for the liturgy, in chapter 13—will not escape the notice of the one who loves. By use of *inclusio*, Ignatius signals that a thought movement opens and closes;⁴⁶ while the *center* of the resulting thought movement is the ethical exhortation to integrity, the correspondence between words and deeds, the fully developed thought of the section (based on the "what's-more principle") presents the mystical indwelling of Christ in the believer, as in a temple, as the fruit of his efforts for integrity.⁴⁷ Ignatius cares deeply about integrity, but in this section he also attaches a profound, properly mystical, promise to the Christian's living out the content of his profession of faith.

The passage, then, has two sections: the first equating the dynamic of faith-love with that of words-deeds, and the second showing how this dynamic "fully makes" / perfects the Christian as a temple of God (i.e., the "what's-more" corresponding to the first section of the passage). Line 2 refers to "the fulfillment" / the end, which the believer approaches by the practice of faith and love together. The lines that make up chapter 14 go on to make clear, according to Semitic reasoning, that the union of faith and love is equivalent to the correspondence of words and deeds. Hence, when line 3 refers to "faith and love" (in the believer) as "God"—surely meaning God's *presence*—it means also that the believer's integrity of words and deeds is "God," dwelling in his heart. One has warrant then to follow "what's-more" logic and recognize that the end of the second section (temple presence) refers back to the beginning of the first section (fulfillment of life): the fulfillment of Christian life is the temple presence of Christ in his heart, whereby the believer is "fully made" and can "hear" the silence of the Master.

Because Christ dwells within the believer as in a temple, the believer can "hear his silence." Thus, Corwin, Vall, and similar commentators rightly argue that the hearing of Christ's silence means some kind of intimate knowledge of his very being, perhaps a knowledge that transcends the ability of language or even human thought to understand or describe. It seems clear, then, that Ignatius—while very concerned with integrity in Christian life—teaches the Ephesian church a lesson far more substantial than mere moralizing.

⁴⁶ The repetition of a word with the root meaning "appear" and a "love" word provide the frame for the passage (see the appendix for a more exhaustive analysis).

⁴⁷ See Isacson, *To Each Their Own Letter*, 61, where he notes that chapter 15 elaborates on chapter 14.

St. Paul's Ephesian Epistle and Ignatius's: Temple Presence

St. Paul, in his own circular letter/homily to the Asian churches now known as the Epistle to the Ephesians (which Ignatius knew),⁴⁸ makes explicit reference to the indwelling temple presence of God in the Christian soul, which makes the preceding analysis of Ignatius's Ephesian epistle easier to accept.⁴⁹ Paul closes the first major section of this epistle with the following, profound, comments:

And so, you are no longer aliens and people living outside the House; rather, you are fellow-citizens with the saints and Householders of God, built as a House upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole House [being] fitted together may grow into a holy Temple in the Lord, in whom you are also built as a House unto a Household for God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:19–22)⁵⁰

⁴⁸ There seems to be something close to scholarly consensus on this point. Far more controverted is whether Ignatius knew the Johannine tradition, and in what form he knew it. This parallel—given the Johannine Gospel's focus on Christ as the New Temple and temple presence and fulfillment of the Old Covenant liturgy—would further underscore the argument of this essay, but to argue for it is beyond the essay's scope.

⁴⁹ Of course, there is also 1 Cor 6:9 (ἢ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐστίν). There is also scholarly consensus that Ignatius knew 1 Corinthians, and indeed knew it better than any other of the Apostle Paul's works. That said, it seems more important to make the connection between Ignatius's and Paul's epistles to the Ephesian church; we can, hopefully, safely presume that, if Ignatius knew of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, the Ephesians also knew of it, and Ignatius knew that they knew. While Ignatius likely derived his teaching on Christ's indwelling temple presence from 1 Corinthians or the Johannine tradition or both, a scholar ought to presume the safest rhetorical context, given the paucity of evidence. Hence, it seems best to frame Ignatius's teaching as a "development" of Paul's—for so it would have seemed to the Ephesians themselves, unless they too knew 1 Corinthians well by this point. There is also a subtle theological difference between 1 Cor 6:9 and Ign. *Eph.* 15.3, in that the former refers to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the latter to the indwelling presence of Christ himself.

⁵⁰ This is my translation, mostly because the use of "house"/οἶκος- words in Greek is usually not reflected in English versions. Scott Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), among other works, makes clear the role of "house" and "temple" as the fulfillment of the Old Testament aspirations, where "house" means both "household"/family and "edifice"/temple. Hence, the "house" theme ought to be preserved in translation.

This densely packed sentence closes a movement begun in chapter 1, where Paul emphasizes the transformation that occurs in Christians: Once without hope and without God (ἄθεοι; 2:12), they have now become householders of God (οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ; 2:20). Christ the priest, by his paschal sacrifice, has brought near those who were far away, inaugurating the new creation promised by Isaiah.⁵¹ According to Paul, this new creation finds its completion in the Church's status as House and Temple, bearing the indwelling presence of God and shining with his glory.

What Paul says to the Ephesians about the whole Church, Ignatius says about each individual Christian. His language at the end of this passage is striking in its echoes of Eph 2: "Let us therefore do all things as though he were dwelling in us, that we may be his temples, and he our God in us. This very thing both is and will appear before our face by which justly we love him." And this refers not just to the community but also to the individual believer based on Ignatius's use of the word "temples" (ναοὶ) plural, as well as his earlier saying, that "the *one* truly hearing the word of Jesus [ὁ λόγον Ἰησοῦ κεκτημένος] can also hear his silence, that he might be fully made, that he might act through what he says and be understood through his silence." We have already established that the believer can hear Christ's silence because of Christ's indwelling temple presence; hence, Ignatius applies to the life of each believer the concept of indwelling temple presence that Paul taught concerning the Church as a whole.

Conclusion

Readers of Ignatius of Antioch who discern a profound mysticism of silence in chapter 15 of his *Epistle to the Ephesians* are reading him correctly.⁵² Scholarship focusing on the background of Ignatius's thought supports the proposal that something far more than mere moralizing is going on in that section of his epistle. My proposal is to acknowledge Ignatius's Semitic thought process, as evidenced by the prose-poetic structure of Ign. *Eph.* 14–15 and its "what's-more" logic. Ignatius's logic inescapably leads one to recognize that the goal of his emphasis on integrity is the full realization of Christ's temple presence within the Christian heart, by reason of which the

⁵¹ See Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, Anchor Bible 34 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 260, 267–68; John Behr, "Older than All Creation," *Communio Viatorum* 55, no. 3 (2013): 237–54, at 245–46.

⁵² Most prominently in recent times, Cardinal Robert Sarah, *The Power of Silence* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 38–45.

believer can “hear Christ’s silence,” wherein he says: “συχολάσατε καὶ γνῶτε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ θεός—be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 45:11).

Appendix: Ign. *Eph.* 14–15

Greek Text

(Chapter 14)

- 1 Ὡν οὐδὲν λανθάνει ὑμᾶς,
ἐὰν τελείως εἰς Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἔχητε τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην.
- 2 ἥτις ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ ζωῆς καὶ τέλος.
ἀρχὴ μὲν πίστις, τέλος δὲ ἀγάπη.
- 3 τὰ δὲ δύο ἐν ἐνότητι γενόμενα θεός ἐστιν,
τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα εἰς καλοκάγαθίαν ἀκόλουθὰ ἐστίν.
- 4 οὐδεὶς πίστιν ἐπαγγελλόμενος ἁμαρτάνει,
οὐδὲ ἀγάπην κεκτημένος μισεῖ.
- 5 φανερόν τὸ δένδρον ἀπὸ τοῦ καρποῦ αὐτοῦ.
οὕτως οἱ ἐπαγγελλόμενοι χριστοῦ εἶναι δι’ ὧν
πράσσουσιν ὁφθήσονται.
- 6 οὐ γὰρ νῦν ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἔργον,
ἀλλ’ ἐν δυνάμει πίστεως ἐάν τις εὑρεθῇ εἰς τέλος.
- 7 (start chapter 15) Ἄμεινόν ἐστιν σιωπᾶν καὶ εἶναι,
ἢ λαλοῦντα μὴ εἶναι.
- 8 καλὸν τὸ διδάσκειν,
ἐὰν ὁ λέγων ποιῇ.
- 9 εἷς οὖν διδάσκαλος, ὃς εἶπεν, καὶ ἐγένετο.
καὶ ἅ σιγῶν δὲ πεποιήκεν ἄξια τοῦ πατρὸς ἐστίν.
- 10 ὁ λόγον Ἰησοῦ κεκτημένος ἀληθῶς
δύναται καὶ τῆς ἡσυχίας αὐτοῦ ἀκοῦειν,
- 11 ἵνα τέλειος ᾖ,
ἵνα δι’ ὧν λαλεῖ πράσῃ καὶ δι’ ὧν σιγᾷ γινώσκηται.
- 12 οὐδὲν λανθάνει τὸν κύριον,
ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ κρυπτὰ ἡμῶν ἐγγὺς αὐτῷ ἐστίν.
- 13 πάντα οὖν ποιῶμεν ὡς αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν κατοικοῦντος,
ἵνα ὡμεν αὐτοῦ ναοὶ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν ἡμῖν θεὸς ἡμῶν,
- 14 ὅπερ καὶ ἐστὶν καὶ φανήσεται πρὸ προσώπου ἡμῶν,
ἐξ ὧν δικαίως ἀγαπῶμεν αὐτόν.

Commentary

As is routine, the *inclusio* is more obvious in the Greek due to the “bookend” repetition of λανθάνει and αγαπην in line 1 and φανησεται and αγαπωμεν in

line 14 (underlined in the Greek above). According to Breck's "what's-more" principle, *προ προσωπου ημων* should be considered a like repetition of the idea of *πιστιν*, in a rather blatant allusion to 1 Cor 13:12 (*βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον*).

Translation

None of these things escapes your notice, if you perfectly hold the faith and the love unto Jesus Christ, which are the beginning of life and the fulfillment;⁵³ faith on the one hand the beginning, love on the other hand the fulfillment; and the two, come together in unity, are God; and all else that tends to nobility follows after. No-one promising faith sins; nor, having obtained love, does he lie. The tree is known by its fruits; just so, those promising to be of Christ shall be seen by their deeds, for "the deed" is not a promise now, but rather in the power of faith if a man should continue unto the fulfillment. *It is better to be silent and to be, than to speak and not be. Teaching is good, if the one speaking should do.*⁵⁴ There is, then, one Teacher, who "spoke and it came to be," and even the things he has done silently are worthy of the Father. The one truly hearing the word of Jesus can also hear his [Jesus's] silence, that he might be fully made, that he might act through what he says and be understood through his [the believer's] silence. Nothing is hidden from the Lord; even our secrets are close to him. Let us therefore do all things as though he were dwelling in us, that we may be his temples, and he our God in us. This very thing both is and will appear before our face, by which justly we love him.

Restructuring in Verse, à la Robert Alter:

1	None of these things escapes your notice,	if you perfectly hold the faith and the love unto Jesus Christ,
2	which are the beginning of life and the fulfillment;	faith on the one hand the begin- ning, love on the other hand the fulfillment;
3	and the two, come together in unity, are God;	and all else that tends to nobility follows after.

⁵³ This translation choice is done to allow the alliterative parallel with *τέλειος*, later, which I translated as "fully made," given the contemporary shift in the meaning of the word "perfect" to mean "flawless," as opposed to its original Latin roots.

⁵⁴ The "what's-more" structure functions much like italicization in contemporary texts to emphasize the central point.

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 4 | No-one promising faith sins; | nor, having obtained love, does he lie. |
| 5 | The tree is known by its fruits; | just so, those promising to be of Christ shall be seen by their deeds, |
| 6 | for "the deed" is not a promise now, | but rather in the power of faith if a man should continue unto the fulfillment. |
| 7 | It is better to be silent and to be, | than to speak and not be. |
| 8 | Teaching is good, | if the one speaking should do. |
| 9 | There is, then, one Teacher, who "spoke and it came to be," | and even the things he has done silently are worthy of the Father. |
| 10 | The one truly hearing the word of Jesus | can also hear his silence, |
| 11 | that he might be fully made, | that he might act through his speech and through his silence be known. |
| 12 | Nothing is hidden from the Lord; | even our secrets are close to him. |
| 13 | Let us therefore do all things as though he were dwelling in us | that we may be his temples, and he our God in us. |
| 14 | This very thing both is | and will appear before our face by which justly we love him. |