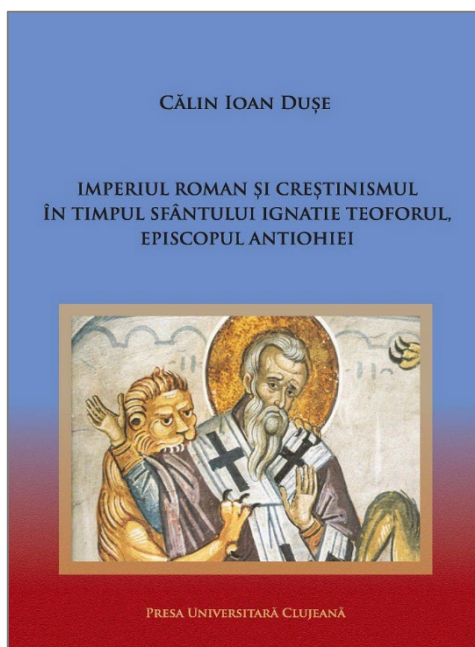


**Marius TELEA**<sup>1</sup>

**Călin Ioan DUȘE, *Imperiul Roman și creștinismul în timpul Sfântului Ignatie Teoforul, Episcopul Antiohiei* [The Roman Empire and Christianity during the Time of Saint Ignatius Theophorus, Bishop of Antioch], Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022, 510 p.**

The work *The Roman Empire and Christianity during the Time of Saint Ignatius Theophorus, Bishop of Antioch*, elaborated by Rev. Assoc. Prof. Dr Călin Ioan DUȘE from the Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology, Department of Oradea, Babeş–Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, is part of a restorative process in Romanian theology. This is in the sense of the need to delve into a significant aspect during the life of Saint Ignatius Theophorus. Hence the importance of this editorial endeavour. The present work is dedicated to Saint Ignatius of Antioch's life, works, and teachings, also known as Theophorus, the God-bearer. He was one of the Apostolic Fathers who contributed



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to translating divine Revelation into the cultural language of the Hellenistic world, developing the early elements of theology by the issues of the time and subordinating them to kerygmatic theology. This theology is dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel and not to highly speculative conjectures, sterile to the life of the early Church.

Saint Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch, is at the foundation of the dissemination centre of Antiochian Apostolic Christianity, which later became one of the patriarchal centres of the ancient Pentarchy. Additionally, Saint Ignatius of Antioch is one of the early martyrs of the Church. During the persecution of Christianity under Emperor Trajan (98–117), he was sentenced to death and sent to Rome to be devoured by wild animals in the Colosseum.

In the first chapter, the author presents the Roman society in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the persecution against Christians, which came to an end with the ascension of Emperor Constantine the Great (306–337) to the leadership of the Roman Empire and the Edict of Milan (313). The second chapter is titled *The Seleucid Empire 312–63 BC* and is dedicated to presenting the history of this territory and Antioch. It was the third metropolis of the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Antiochian Christianity developed significantly through the missionary activities of Saint Apostle Paul.

Through the dedicated study of the literature of the Church Fathers, Patrology maintains its importance among autonomous and foundational theological disciplines alongside biblical study and Church history. The other dogmatic disciplines, moral theology, ascetics, and mysticism, are articulated around the foundations of biblical theology, patristic theology, or the magisterial evolution to build a clear picture in line with the doctrinal body expressed in the evolution of knowledge and the discernment of the ecclesial body.

Evangelization, the proclamation of the Good News, and the testimony of faith represent the first and most important mission of the historical Church. From the beginning, the Church fulfilled the mission of confessing the faith, updated through word, living, and defending the faith in the face of internal or external enemies (heresies or persecutions). The most significant confession of faith is living in a state of holiness; however radically, martyrdom has been undertaken at the cost of life, starting with Saint Stephen, the first martyr, through the deeds and martyrdom of Saint Ignatius Theophorus and ending with the martyrs of our days – a testimony that strengthens and edifies the Church of Christ.

The work at hand meets the requirements regarding the nature of research regarding substance and form. Concerning the substance of the research, the present work touches on essential elements related to the configuration of early Christianity. It demonstrates how these elements determine the evolution of Christianity as a whole and the Christian Church in particular.

Profoundly humble and always attentive to the spiritual needs of the Church, Saint Ignatius showed concern for the dangers that threatened the new Christian faith and that could break its unity. At the same time, he was deeply attached to the needs of his community in Antioch. Saint Ignatius Theophorus always expressed that his purpose in life was to shed his blood for our Lord Jesus Christ, considering it the means par excellence to become one with his Master.

Enflamed by the “comforting zeal” and “wounded by perfect love” (“Sticheron, to the Lord, I Have Cried”, in the December Menaion, Bucharest, Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2005, p. 310), Saint Ignatius openly confessed his Christian identity, aware that this confession would bring him a martyr’s death. Like the “sun”, he set out and “quickly passed from East to West, enlightening” (“Sticheron, to the Lord, I Have Cried”, in the December Menaion, p. 311) the cities he traversed, preaching, and celebrating the liturgy, forming disciples and sending letters – despite his imprisonment. According to his wishes, secretly embraced by Christ, he became the grain for the “immortal ploughman”, ground “between the teeth of wild beasts” so that in the end, as a reward for serving the Gospel, he became “sweet bread” (ibid.). Martyred on 20 December 107, only some large bones remained of his body, which were collected by Christians and sent to Antioch.

Saint Ignatius correctly interpreted Emperor Trajan’s policy of prohibiting the assembly of Christians as a genuine attack against the Eucharistic assembly of those baptized around the Body and Blood of Christ. He took his mission seriously to repel this attack by imperial authority and even aimed to oppose it openly. The self-appellation Theophoros is explained in the sense of this opposition, which “becomes intelligible precisely against the backdrop of the imperial cult: in countercultural opposition to bearers of the imperial image (*sebastophoroi*) during processions within the imperial cult rituals” (Deacon Ioan I. Ică Jr., *The Canon of Orthodoxy: I. The Apostolic Canon of the Early Centuries*, Sibiu, Deisis/Stavropoleos Publishing House, 2008, p. 269).

For Saint Ignatius, the entire ecclesial typology becomes an inverted reflection of the typology of the ancient imperial cult, including the journey into captivity transformed into a veritable procession from Antioch to Rome. Against this backdrop, in the final chapter, the author achieves a proper patristic synthesis about the great Antiochian hierarch, the result of serious scientific research drawing on multiple sources of high credibility in the field of research: sources, books, studies, and articles. The sources employed demonstrate an excellent articulation of the research in national and international bibliographic material.

Father Călin Ioan Dușe provides students, master's and doctoral theology students, with the necessary material for the study of patristic theology through the present work dedicated to Saint Martyr Ignatius Theophorus. The time in which he lived, through illustrations, maps, synoptic tables, and the bibliography provided for each chapter, the printed material has become a valuable course support. Moreover, in line with the author's sensitivity, it situates the life and work of Saint Ignatius Theophorus in the historical and cultural context of the Greco Roman civilization of the 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries. An apostle, bishop, and martyr, Theophorus, the God-bearing writer, who has left us a wonderful collection of letters across time, Saint Ignatius of Antioch is proposed to readers for a deeper understanding of knowledge in the field of theology and spiritual life. This allows us to comprehend the Revelation of Jesus Christ and how it was received in apostolic times.

Considering the above, I warmly recommend this work as a representative in the field regarding the addressed issues.