From Ignatius,
whose other name is Theophorus,

To the deservedly happy church at Ephesus in Asia; notably blessed with greatness by God the Father out of His own fullness; marked out since the beginning of time for glory unfading and unchanging; and owing its unity and its election to the true and undoubted Passion, by the will of the Father and Jesus Christ our God.

Every good wish to you for perfect joy in Jesus Christ.

1. Your visit to me was a godsend. The warm affection your name inspires is yours by right of nature, as well as by virtue of your faith and your love for our Saviour Jesus Christ. Taking God as your pattern and example, you have indeed fulfilled to perfection the duties of brotherliness, with an ardour kindled into flame by the Divine Blood. For as soon as you heard that I was on my way from Syria, as a prisoner for the Name and the Hope we all share (and trusting through your prayers to be granted an encounter with the wild beasts at Rome—a boon that will enable me to become a true disciple), you were all eagerness to visit me. Thus I have now been able to play the host, in God’s name, to your whole community in the person of your bishop Onesimus.1 His endearing kindliness is beyond all words; I pray you to cherish him in the true spirit of Jesus Christ, and that every one of you may be the sort of man that he is. Blessings on Him who gave you the privilege of having such a bishop, and well indeed do you deserve it.

2. Now, about my fellow-servitor Burrhus, whom God has made your deacon and endowed with every blessing. Might I ask you to let him remain here with me?2 That would do honour both to you and your bishop. Crocus (who also deserves well of God and you, and whom I welcomed as a shining example of your love) has been a comfort to me in every way; may the Father of Jesus Christ be as much to him. So also have Onesimus and Burrhus; and Euplus and Fronto too; and in their persons I have had a loving glimpse of you all. May you be a joy to me always, if only I can deserve it.

Now, since Jesus Christ has given such glory to you, it is only right that you should give glory to Him; and this, if sanctification is to be yours in full measure, means uniting in a common act of submission and acknowledging the authority of your bishop and clergy.
3. Not that this is an order I am issuing, as though I were someone of importance. It is true that I am a prisoner for the Name's sake, but I am by no means perfect in Jesus Christ as yet; I am only a beginner in discipleship, and I am speaking to you as fellow-scholars with myself. In fact, it is you who ought really to have given me lessons—lessons in faith and admonishment and patience and toleration. All the same, where you are concerned love will not suffer me to hold my peace; and that is why I venture to recommend an action that reflects the mind of God. For we can have no life apart from Jesus Christ; and as He represents the mind of the Father, so our bishops, even those who are stationed in the remotest parts of the world, represent the mind of Jesus Christ.

4. That is why it is proper for your conduct and your practices to correspond closely with the mind of the bishop. And this, indeed, they are doing; your justly respected clergy, who are a credit to God, are attuned to their bishop like the strings of a harp, and the result is a hymn of praise to Jesus Christ from minds that are in unison, and affections that are in harmony. Pray, then, come and join this choir, every one of you; let there be a whole symphony of minds in concert; take the tone all together from God, and sing aloud to the Father with one voice through Jesus Christ, so that He may hear you and know by your good works that you are indeed members of His Son's Body. A completely united front will help to keep you in constant communion with God.

5. If I myself reached such intimacy with your bishop in a brief space of time—an intimacy that was less of this world than of the Spirit—how much more fortunate must I count you, who are as inseparably one with him as the Church is with Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ with the Father; so constituting one single harmonious unity throughout. Let no one be under any illusion; a man who excludes himself from the sanctuary is depriving himself of the bread of God, for if the prayer of one or two individuals has such efficacy, how much more powerful is that of the bishop together with his whole church. Anyone who absents himself from the congregation convicts himself at once of arrogance and becomes self-excommunicate. And since it is written that God opposes the proud, let us take care to show no disloyalty to the bishop, so as to be loyal servants of God.

6. The more reserved a bishop is seen to be, the more he ought to be respected. When someone is sent by the master of a house to manage his household for him, it is our duty to give him the same kind of reception as we should give to the sender; and therefore it is clear that we must regard a bishop as the Lord Himself. Onesimus spoke personally in the highest terms of your own correct and godly attitude in this respect; he told me that truth is the guiding principle of your lives, and heresy is so far from gaining a foothold among you that any speaker who goes beyond the simple truth about Jesus Christ is refused a hearing.

7. Nevertheless, there are some people who persistently bandy the Name about with the grossest hypocrisy, besides behaving in a number of other ways that do no credit to God. You must keep away from these men as you would from a pack of savage animals; they are rabid curs who snap at people unawares, and you need to be on your guard against their bites, because they are by no means easy to heal. There is only one Physician—

- Very Flesh, yet Spirit too;
- Uncreated, and yet born;
- God-and-Man in One agreed,
- Very-Life-in-Death indeed,
- Fruit of God and Mary's seed;
- At once impassible and torn
- By pain and suffering here below:
- Jesus Christ, whom as our Lord we know. 3

8. Let no one, then, mislead you—though being so wholly God's I am sure you have not been misled. So long as there are no deep-seated differences among you, of a kind that could do serious harm, your manner of life is just as God would have it; and my heart goes humbly out to you Ephesians and your ever-famous church. Men who are carnal are no more capable of acting spiritually, nor spiritual men of acting carnally, than deeds of unbelief are possible to the faithful, or deeds of faith to the unbelieving. But with you, even what you do in the flesh is spiritual, for your actions are all done in Jesus Christ.

9. All the same, I did hear of a visit paid to you by certain men from another place, whose teaching was pernicious. However, you refused to allow its dissemination among you, and stopped your ears against the seed they were sowing. Deaf as stones you were: yes, stones for the Father's Temple, stones trimmed ready for God to build with, hoisted up by the derrick of Jesus Christ (the Cross) with the Holy Spirit for a cable; your faith being the winch that draws you to God, up the ramp of love. Again, you are all pilgrims in the same great procession, bearing your God and your shrine and your Christ and your

* I Peter v, 5 (quoting Proverbs iii, 34).
sacred treasures on your shoulders, every one of you arrayed in the festal garments of the commandments of Jesus Christ. And I too have my part in your jubilations, since by virtue of this letter I can count myself one of you, and rejoice with you that your affections are not set upon the things of earthly life, but on God alone.

10. Regarding the rest of mankind, you should pray for them unceasingly, for we can always hope that repentance may enable them to find their way to God. Give them a chance to learn from you, or at all events from the way you act. Meet their animosity with mildness, their high words with humility, and their abuse with your prayers. But stand firm against their errors, and if they grow violent, be gentle instead of wanting to pay them back in their own coin. Let us show by our forbearance that we are their brothers, and try to imitate the Lord by seeing which of us can put up with the most ill-usage or privation or contempt — so that in this way none of the devil's noxious weeds may take root among you, but you may rest in Jesus Christ in all sanctity and discipline of body and soul.

11. The end of all things is near. From now onwards, then, we must bear ourselves with humility, and tremble at God's patience for fear it should turn into a judgement upon us. Let us either flee from His future wrath, or else embrace His present grace; no matter which, so long as we are found in Jesus Christ with our true life before us. Apart from Him, nothing else should have any value in your eyes; but in Him, even these chains I wear are a collar of spiritual pearls to me, in which I hope to rise again through the help of your intercessions. May there always be a place for me in those intercessions, so that I too may have part and lot among the men of Ephesus — Christians who in the power of Jesus Christ have ever been of the self-same mind as the Apostles themselves.

12. I know well what I am, and what you are to whom I write. I am the condemned; you are the pardoned. I am in peril; you are in security. You are the gateway, through which we are escorted by Death into the presence of God. You are initiates of the same mysteries as our saintly and renowned Paul of blessed memory (may I be found to have walked in his footsteps when I come to God!), who has remembered you in Christ Jesus in every one of his letters.

13. Do your best, then, to meet more often to give thanks and glory to God. When you meet frequently, the powers of Satan are confounded, and in the face of your corporate faith his maleficence crumbles. Nothing can better a state of peaceful accord, from which every trace of spiritual or earthly hostility has been banished.

14. Given a thorough-going faith and love for Jesus Christ, there is nothing in all this that will not be obvious to you; for life begins and ends with two qualities. Faith is the beginning, and love is the end; and the union of the two together is God. All that makes for a soul's perfection follows in their train, for nobody who professes faith will commit sin, and nobody who possesses love can feel hatred. As the tree is known by its fruits, so they who claim to belong to Christ are known by their actions; for this work of ours does not consist in just making professions, but in a faith that is both practical and lasting.

15. Indeed, it is better to keep quiet and be, than to make fluent professions and not be. No doubt it is a fine thing to instruct others, but only if the speaker practises what he preaches. One such Teacher there is: He who 

*Psalm* xxxiii, 9.
salvation and eternal life to us. Where is your wise man now, or your subtile debater?2a Where are the fine words of our so-called intellectuals? Under the Divine dispensation, Jesus Christ our God was conceived by Mary of the seed of David and of the Spirit of God; He was born, and He submitted to baptism, so that by His Passion He might sanctify water.  

19. Mary’s virginity was hidden from the prince of this world;16 so was her child-bearing, and so was the death of the Lord. All these three trumpet-tongued secrets17 were brought to pass in the deep silence of God. How then were they made known to the world? Up in the heavens a star gleamed out, more brilliant than all the rest; no words could describe its lustre, and the strangeness of all men bewildered. The other stars and the sun and moon gathered round it in chorus, but this star outshone them all. Great was the ensuing perplexity; where could this newcomer have come from, so unlike its fellows? Everywhere magic crumbled away before it;18 the spells of sorcery were all broken, and superstition received its death-blow. The age-old empire of evil was overthrown, for God was now appearing in human form to bring in a new order, even life without end. Now that which had been perfected in the Divine counsels began its work; and all creation was thrown into a ferment over this plan for the utter destruction of death.

20. I hope to write you a further letter19 — if, in answer to your prayers, Jesus Christ allows it, and God so wills — in which I will continue this preliminary account for you of God’s design for the New Man, Jesus Christ. It is a design which provides for faith in Him and love for Him, and comprehends His Passion and His Resurrection. I will certainly do this if the Lord reveals to me that you are all, man by man and name by name, attending your meetings in a state of grace, united in faith and in Jesus Christ (who is the seed of David according to the flesh, and is the Son of Man and Son of God), and are ready now to obey your bishop and clergy with undivided minds and to share in the one common breaking of bread — the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore.

21. I am offering my life on your behalf, and also for those whom you sent for the honour of God here to Smyrna, where I am writing this letter. It carries my gratitude to God, as well as my love to Polycarp and yourselves. Remember me, as Jesus Christ remembers you. Pray for the church in Syria, from which they are bringing me in chains to Rome. I was the last and least of the faithful there, and yet I have been deemed worthy to set forward the honour of God.

Farewell to you, in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, who is our common Hope.

Notes
1. It is unlikely that he was (as some have thought) the slave mentioned in St Paul’s Epistle to Philemon, who would scarcely be still living at this time.
2. This request was granted, for when Ignatius left Smyrna the Smyrneans joined with the Ephesians in finding the money for Burrhus to go on with him as far as Troas, as a companion and secretary. Most probably, therefore, it was Burrhus who brought back from Troas the letters written there to Philadelphia, Smyrna and Polycarp.
3. The rhythmical nature of this passage has tempted some commentators to see it as an excerpt from an early Christian hymn—a temptation which I have not resisted.
4. Literally ‘I am your offscouring, dregs, refuse’: a word used of the lowest of criminals, whose blood was shed as an offering to avert the anger of the gods. Later, however, it becomes an epistolary formality meaning little more than ‘your humble servant’.
5. For the remarkable building imagery of this passage, see Daniélou, op. cit., p. 278.
6. Here the metaphor changes abruptly, and is now taken from the religious ceremonies of the heathen. These were a familiar spectacle at Ephesus, where processions of worshippers in festal garments paraded the streets carrying sacred emblems, statues of the gods, model shrines, and precious objects from the famous temple of Artemis.
7. ‘He is proud of this decoration, with which his Sovereign has invested him’ (Lightfoot). The curious pleasure which Ignatius takes in his chains recurs at nearly every mention of them in his letters.
8. Here Ignatius breaks off to insert a brief apology for presuming, as a mere condemned criminal, to exhort the illustrious church of Ephesus.
9. Literally, an entrance, passage, or approach route. Ephesus, at the end of the great highway across Asia Minor, must have been a staging-point for many Christian martyrs on their way to execution at Rome.
10. St Paul had lived for a long time among the Ephesians (Acts xix, 10 and xx, 31). In his epistle to them he several times refers to the Gospel teachings as ‘mysteries’; and elsewhere (Philippians iv, 12) he describes himself as ‘initiated’.
11. Here Ignatius is probably thinking not so much of the silence