

Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture (part 2: ff. 43-48)

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Source: Ms. 361(4), New College Library, Oxford, UK

Published online: January 2008

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An Historical Account of two notable Corruptions of Scripture in a letter to a Friend

Sir

Since the discourses of some late writers have raised in you a curiosity of knowing the truth of that text of Scripture concerning the testimony of the three in Heaven 1 Iohn V.7, I have here sent you an account of what the reading has been in all ages, & by what steps it has been changed, so far as I can hitherto determine by records. And I have done it the more freely, because to You, who understand the many abuses which they of the Roman Church have put upon the world, it will scarce be ungratefull, to be convinced of one more than is commonly believed. For altho' the more learned & quicksighted men, as Luther, Erasmus, Bullinger, Grotius & some others, could not dissemble their knowledge, yet the generality are fond of the place for its making against Heresy. But whilst we exclaim against the pious frauds of the Roman Church, & make it a part of our religion to detect & renounce all things of that kind; we must acknowledge it a greater crime in us to favour such practises than in the Papists we so much blame on that account. For they act according to their religion but we contrary to ours. In the Eastern Nations, & for a long time in the Western, the Faith subsisted without this text, & it is rather a danger to religion than an advantage to make it now lean upon a bruised reed. There can not be better service done to the truth, than to purge it of things spurious. And therefore knowing your prudence & calmness of temper, I am confident I shall not offend <44r> you by telling you my mind plainly: especially since 'tis no article of Faith, no point of discipline, nothing but a criticism concerning a text of Scripture, which I am going to write about.

The History of the Corruption in short is this. First some of the Latines interpreted the Spirit, water, & blood of the Father, Son & Holy Ghost to prove them one. Then Ierome for the same end inserted the Trinity in express words in his Version. Out of him the Africans began to allege it against the Vandals about 64 years after his death. Afterwards the Latins noted his variations in the margins of their books, & thence it began at length to creep in to the text in transcribing, & that chiefly in the twelfth & following centuries, when disputing was revived by the Schoolmen. And when printing came up, it crept out of the Latin into the printed Greek, against the authority of all the greek MSS & ancient versions, & from the Venetian presses it went soon after into Greece. Now the truth of this history will appear by considering the arguments on both sides.

The Arguments alleged for the testimony of the three in heaven are the authorities of Cyprian, Athanasius & Ierome, & of many Greek manuscripts & almost all the Latin ones.

Cyprians words run thus. ^(a)[1] "The Lord saith I & the Father are one, & again of the Father & son & Holy Ghost it is written; And these three are one." The Socinians here deal too injuriously with Cyprian, while they would have this place corrupted. For Cyprian in another place repeats almost the same thing ^(b)[2] "If, saith

he, [one baptized amongst heretics] be made the Temple of God, tell me I pray of what God: – If of the Holy Ghost; since these three are one, how can the Holy Ghost be reconciled to him who is the enemy of either the Father or the Son." These places of Cyprian, being in my opinion genuine, seem so apposite to prove the testimony of the three in heaven, that I should never have suspected a mistake in it, could I but have reconciled it, with the ignorance I meet with of this reading in the next age amongst the Latins of both Africa & Europe, as well as amongst the Greeks. For had it been in Cyprian's Bible, the Latins of the next age, when all the world was engaged in disputing about the Trinity, & all arguments that could be thought of were diligently sought out & daily brought upon the stage, could never have been ignorant of a text, which in our age, now the dispute is over, is chiefly insisted upon. In reconciling this difficulty, I consider therefore that the only words of the text quoted, by Cyprian in both places are, And these three are one; which words may belong to the eighth verse as well as to the seventh. For (c)[3] Eucherius Bishop of Lion in France, & contemporary to S^t. Austin, reading the text without the seventh verse, tells us that many then understood the Spirit, the Water & the Blood to signify the Trinity. And (d)[4] S. Austin is one of those many, as you may see in his third book against Maximus: where he tells us that the Spirit is the Father, for God is a spirit; the Water, the Holy Ghost, for he is the Water which Christ gives to them that thirst, & the Blood the Son, for the word was made Flesh. Now if it was the opinion of many in the western Churches of those times that the Spirit, the Water & the Blood signified the Father, the Son & the Holy Ghost, it is plain that the Testimony of the three in Heaven in expresse words was not yet crept into their books. And even without this testimony it was obvious for Cyprian, or any man else of that opinion, to say the Father & Son & Holy Ghost, it is written And these three are one. And that this was Cyprian's meaning, (e)[5] Facundus, an African Bishop in the sixth century is my author. For he tells us expressly that Cyprian in the abovementioned place understood it so; interpreting the water, spirit & blood to be the Father, Son, & Holy Ghost, & thence affirming that Iohn said of the Father, Son, & Holy Ghost, These Three are one. This at least <46r> {may} be gathered from this passage of Facundus, that some in those early ages interpreted Cyprian after that manner. Nor do I understand how any of those many who took the Spirit Water & Blood for a type of the Trinity, or any man else who was ignorant of the testimony of the Three in Heaven (as the Churches in the time of the Arian controversy generally were) could understand him otherwise. And even Cyprian's own words do plainly make for this interpretation. For he does not say, The Father The Word & the Holy Ghost, as 'tis now in the seventh verse, but the Father & Son & Holy Ghost as 'tis in Baptism, the place from whence they used at first to derive the Trinity. If it be pretended that the words cited by Cyprian are taken out of the seventh verse rather than out of the eighth, because he reads not *Hi tres in unum sunt*, but *Hi tres unum sunt*; I answer, that the Latines generally read *Hi tres unum sunt* as well in the eighth verse as in the seventh, as you may see in the newly cited places of Austin & Facundus, & those of Ambrose, Pope Leo, Beda & Cassiodorus which follow, & in the present Vulgar Latin. So then the testimony of Cyprian respects the eighth, or at least is as applicable to that verse as to the seventh, & therefore it is of no force for proving the truth of the seventh. But on the contrary, for disproving it, we have here the testimonies of Facundus, S. Austin, Eucherius & those many others whom Eucherius mentions. For if those of that age had met with it in their books, they would never have understood the Spirit the Water & the Blood to be the three Persons of the Trinity in order to prove them One God.

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I have now given you an account of the corruption of the text: the sum of which is this. The difference between the Greek of the Ancient Versions puts it past dispute, that either the Greeks have corrupted their MSS, or the Latins Syrians & Ethiopians their Versions. And it is more reasonable to lay the fault upon the Greeks than upon the other three, for these considerations. It was easier for one nation to do it than for three to conspire. It was easier to change a Letter or two in the Greek than six words in the Latin. In the Greek the sense is obscure, in the Versions clear. It was agreeable to the Interest of the Greeks to make the change; but against the Interest of the three nations to do it: and men are never false to their interest. The greek reading was unknown in the times of the Arian controversy; but that of the Versions, then in use amongst both Greeks & Latins. Some Greek MSS render the Greek reading dubious; but those of the Versions hitherto collated agree. There are no signs of corruption in the versions hitherto discovered: but in the Greek we have shewed you particularly when, on what occasion, & by whom, the text was corrupted.

I know not whether it be worth the while to tell you, that in the printed works of Athanasius there is an Epistle, De Incarnatione Verbi, which reads Θεός. For this Epistle relates to the Nestorian heresy, & so was written by a much later author than Athanasius, & may also possibly have been since corrected, like the works of Chrysostom & Cyrill, by the corrected text of S^t. Pauls Epistles. I have had so short a time to run my eye over Authors, that I can not tell whether upon further search, more passages about this falsation may not <48r> hereafter occur pertinent to the argument. But if there should, I presume it will not be difficult, now the falsation is thus far laid open, to know what construction to put upon them, & how to apply them.

You see what freedom I have used in this discourse, & I hope you will interpret it candidly. For if the ancient Churches in debating & deciding the greatest mysteries of religion, knew nothing of these two texts; I understand not, why we should be so fond of them, now the debates are over. And whilst its the character of an honest man to be pleased, & of a man of interest to be troubled at the detection of frauds, & of both to run most in to those passions when the detection is made plainest: I hope this letter will to one of your integrity prove so much the more acceptable, as it makes a further discovery than you have hitherto met with in Commentators.

[1] (a) Dicit Dominus Ego et Pater unum sumus, et iterum de Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto scriptum est, et tres unum sunt. Cypr. de. unit. Eccles.

[2] (b) Si templum Dei factus est, quæso cujus Dei? — — — — Si Spiritus Sancti, cùm tres unum sint, quomodo Spiritus Sanctus placatus ei esse potest, qui aut Patris aut Filii inimicus est. Cypr. Epist. 73 ad Iubaianum

[3] (c) Eucherius reads the text thus. Tria sunt quæ testimonium perhibent, Aqua, Sanguis & Spiritus, & then adds this interpretation. Plures hîc ipsam interpretatione mysticâ intelligunt Trinitatem, eo quòd perfecta ipsa perhibeat testimonium Christo: Aquâ Patrem indicans, quia ipse de se dicit, hic dereliquerunt fontem aquæ vivæ; Sanguine Christum demonstrans, utique per passionis cruorem; Spiritu verò Sanctum Spiritum manifestans. Eucher. de Quæst. N. Test.

[4] (d) Sane falli te nolo in Epistolâ Ioannis Apostoli, ubi ait, Tres sunt testes, Spiritus, Aqua, et Sanguis, et tres unum sunt: ne fortè dicas Spiritum et aquam et sanguinem diversas esse substantias, et tamen dictum esse tres unum sunt. Propter hoc admonui te ne fallacis. Hæc enim sunt, in quibus non quid sint, sed quid ostendant {semper} attenditur ——— {Si verò} ea quæ hîc significata sunt {velim} inquærere, non absurdè incurrit ipsa. Trinitas, quæ unus solus summus est Deus, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus, de quibus verissime dici potuit tres unum sunt. Vt nomine spiritûs significatum accipiamus Deum Patrem (de Deo ipso quippe adorando loquebatur Dominus ubi ait Spiritus est Deus) nomine autem Sanguinis Filium, quia verbum caro factum est, nomine Aquæ Spiritum sanctum. Cùm enim de Aquâ loqueretur Iesus, quæ datum erat sitientibus, ait Evangelistas "Hoc autem dixit de Spiritu quem acceptum erant credentes in eum. D. Augustin. cont. Maximum. cap. 22

[5] (e) Facundus in the begining of his book to the Emperor Iustinian, pro defensione trium Capitulorum Concilii Chalcedonensis, first recites the Text after the manner of Cyprian, but more distinctly in these words. Nam Ioannes Apostolus, in Epistolâ suâ, de Patre, Filio, et Spiritu Sancto, sic dicit: Tres sunt qui testimonium dant in Terrâ, Spiritus, Aqua, et Sanguis et Hi Tres unum sunt: in Spiritu significantes Patrem (Ioan 4.21) ——— in Aquâ Spiritum Sanctum (Ioan. 7.37) ——— in sanguine verò <45v> filium. And a little after he thus confirms this Interpretation, by Cyprians Authority saying; aut si forsân ipsi qui de Verbo contendunt, in eo quod dixit tres sunt qui testificantur in terrâ, Spiritus Aqua et Sanguis, et hi tres unum sunt, Trinitatem nolunt intelligi, secundum ipsa verba quæ posuit pro Apostolo Ioanne respondeant. Numquid hi tres, qui in terrâ testificari, & qui unum esse dicuntur, possunt spiritus et aquæ et sanguinis dici? Quod tamen Ioannis Apostoli testimonium B. Cyprianus Carthaginensis Antistes et Martyr, in Epistolâ sive Libro quod de Trinitate [immo de Vnitate Ecclesiæ] scripsit; de Patre Filio et Spiritu Sancto dictum intelligit. Ait enim, Dicit Dominus Ego et Pater unum sumus; et iterum de Patre Filio et Spiritu Sancto scriptum est, Et hi tres unum sunt. Facund. l. 1. p. 16. ex edit. Sirmondi Parisiis 1629
