

Fragments on superstition and monasticism (section 7.3e)

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ome against this heresy. And in his decretal epistle to Anastasius bishop of Thessalonica, he ordeined that that bishop should hold two Provincial Councils every year & refer the harder causes to the sea of Rome: & that if upon any extraordinary occasion it should be necessary to call a Council he should not be troublesome to the bishops under him but be content with two bishops out of every province & not detain them above fifteen days. And in the same epistle he describes the form of Church government the{n}{re} set up to consist in a subordination of all the Churches to the sea of Rome. De qua forma, saith he, episcoporum quo est orta distinctio & magna dispositione provisum est, ne omnes sibi omnia vindicarent, sed essent in singulis Provincijs singuli quorum inter fratres haberetur prima sententia, & rursus quidam in majoribus urbibus constituti sollicitudinem susciperent ampliorem per quos ad unam Petri sedem universalis Ecclesiæ cura conflueret & nihil usq a suo capite dissideret. Qui ergo scit se quibusdam esse præpositum, non moleste ferat aliquem sibi esse præpositum: sed obedientiam quam exigit etiam ipse dependat. Et sicut non vult gravis oneris sarcinam ferre ita non audeat alijs importabile pondus imponere. These words sufficiently shew the monarchical form of government then set up in the Churches of the western empire under the bishop of Rome{ , } by means of the imperial decree of Gratian & the decretal epistles grounded thereupon.

In these epistles the authority of the Council of Nice is frequently alledged. And Pope Zosimus A.C. 417, receiving the appeal of Pelagius & Celestius from the sentence of an African Council & absolving them, alledged the authority of the Council of Nice for what he did: But the African Bishops sent to the Bishops of Alexandria & Antioch for copies of the Acts of that Council & thereby detected the fraud & preserved their liberty for a time. But about 28 years after, upon a dispute between the bishops of Arles & Vien about superiority, when Pope Leo I in a Council at Rome had passed sentence against the Bishop of Arles, he took occasion from thence to procure the following edict from the western Emperor Valentinian for establishing the authority of his sea more fully over all the Churches of the western Empire.

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Impp. Theodosius et Valentinianus A. A. Actio viro
Illustri Comiti & Magist. utrius Militiæ & Patricio.

Certum est & nobis & imperio nostro unicum esse præsidium in supernæ divinitatis favore, ad quem promerendum præcipue Christiana fides & veneranda nobis religio suffragatur. Cum igitur sedis Apostolicæ Primatum sancti Petri meritum, qui princeps est episcopalis coronæ & Romanæ dignitas civitatis, sacræ etiam synodi firmarit autoritas, Ne quid præter auctoritatem sedis istius illicitum præsumptio attemperare nitatur. Tunc enim demum ecclesiarum pax ubi servabitur, si rectorem suum agnoscat universitas. Hæc cum hactenus inviolabiliter fuerint custodita, Hilarius Arelatensis, <2r> sicut venerabilis viri Leonis Romani Papæ fideli relatione comperimus) contumaci ausu illicita quædam præsumenda tentavit, et ideo transalpinas ecclesias abominabilis tumultus invasit, quod recens maxime testatur exemplum. Hilarius enim, qui Episcopus Arelatensis vocatur, Ecclesiæ Romanæ urbis inconsulto Pontifice indebitas sibiordinationes Episcoporum sola temeritate usurpans invasit. Nam alios incompetenter removet, indecenter alios invitis et repugnantibus civibus ordinavit. Qui quidem, quoniam non facile ab his qui non elegerant, recipiebantur, manum sibi contrahebat armatam, & claustra murorum in hostilem morem vel obsidione cingebat, vel

aggressionem reserabat & ad sedem quietis, pacem prædicaturus per bella ducebat. His talibus contra imperij maiestatem et contra reverentiam Apostolicæ sedis admissis, per ordinem religiosi viri urbis Papæ cognitione discussis, certa in eum ex his quos male ordinaverat lata sententia est. Erat quidem ipsa sententia per Gallias etiam sine imperiali sanctione valitura. Quid enim Pontificis auctoritati in Ecclesias non liceret? Sed nostram quoque præceptionem hæc ratio provocavit, nec ulterius vel Hilario (quem adhuc episcopum nuncupari sola mansueta præsulis permittit humanitas) nec cuiquam alteri ecclesiasticis rebus arma miscere, aut præceptis Romani Antistitis liceat obviare. Ausibus enim talibus fides & reverentia nostri violatur imperij. Nec hoc solum quod est maximi criminis, submovemus: verum ne levis saltem inter ecclesias turba nascatur, vel in aliquo minui religionis disciplina videatur, hoc perenni sanctione discernimus, ne quid tam Episcopis Gallicanis quam aliarum provinciarum contra consuetudinem veterem liceat sine viri venerabilis Papæ urbis æternæ auctoritate tentare. Sed illis omnibus pro lege sit, quicquid sanxit vel sanxerit Apostolicæ sedis auctoritas, ita ut quisquis Episcoporum ad iudicium Romani Antistitis evocatus venire ~ neglexerit, per moderatorem ejusdem provinciæ adesse cogatur, per omnia servatis quæ divi parentes nostri Romanæ ecclesiæ detulerunt, Aeti pater carissime Augusti. Vnde illustris & præclara magnificentia tua præsentis edictalis legis auctoritate faciet quæ sunt superius statuta servari, decem librarum auri multa protinus exigenda ab unoquoque Iudice qui passus fuerit præcepta nostra violari. Divinitas te servet per multos annos parens carissime Dat. VIII Id. Iun. Romæ, Valentiniano A. VI consule. A. C. 445.

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Suis dabit [Antichristus] characterem in dextera manu & fronte, nequis dextra sua pretiosam illam crucem pingat in fronte. Author lib. de consummatione munde et Antichr. qui falso inscribitur Hippolyto martyri . In dexteram manum ac frontem insculpturus est [Antichristus] homini characterem hunc suum impium, ne scilicet facultas sit homini dextera se signandi signo Christi salvatoris nostri, ne rursus in fronte ~ ullatenus tremendum sanctum Domini nomen imprimere queat, ne etiam gloriosam atque formidabilem Salvatoris crucem insculpere. Novit enim infelix ille per ~ impressionem crucis Domini potestatem sibi omnem ~ adeptam iri. Quamabrem signat hominis dexteram quod ea scilicet cuncta nostra membra signemus. Similiter frontem quod illa, candelabri in modum, lucernam lucis, hoc est signum Salvatoris nostri ~ in altum præferat. And a little after: Draco signaculum suum loco signi crucis Salvatoris nostri modis omnibus conabitur imprimere. Hæc Ephræm Syrus de Antichristo. This mark is therefore amongst the Roman Catholics, what the marks of the heathen Gods were amongst the heathens, & what the mark of Antichrist was expected to be amongst the Antichristians. And hence it is that receiving the mark of the Beast is in the Apocalypsis put for indication into his religion.

And its further observable that as the miracles ~ attributed to the reliques of the Martyrs introduced the invocation of the Saints, so the miracles attributed to the reliques of Christ & to the signe of his cross introduced the promiscuous use of the names of the father & son in prayer, as if it were indifferent whether men prayed to the Father or to the Son, for Christ's sake or for God's sake: and therefore the third Council of Carthage A.C. 398 for preserving the characters & properties of the divine Persons ~ decreed in their 23^d Canon: Vt nemo in precibus vel Patrem pro Filio vel Filium pro Patre nominet. Et cum altari ~ assistitur, semper ad Patrem dirigatur Oratio. Et quicumque sibi preces aliunde describit, non eis utatur nisi prius eas cum instructoribus fratribus contulerit. It seems there was not yet any common form of prayer enjoined, but every Presbyter used such forms as he liked & some corrupt forms began to go abroad, & therefore the Council here for preventing the corruptions which were creeping into the publick prayers, restrained single Presbyters from using transcribed new forms without the approbation of their able brethren.

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At the same time with the invocation of dead men & the superstitious use of the signe of the cross & the consecrating of all things by it & placing a vertue in things so consecrated, came in the going on pilgrimage in crouds to the sepulchre of Christ & the shrines of saints, & the placing religion in abstinence from lawfull meats & marriage, the consecration of virgins, the celibacy of the clergy, the praying by stones or beads, & many other superstitions of all which Austⁱn bishop of Hippo makes this general mention. Hoc nimis doleo quia multa quæ in divinis libris saluberrima præcepta sunt minus curantur, et tam multis præsumptionibus sic plena sunt omnia, ut gravius corripiatur qui per octavas suas terram nudo pede tetigerit, quam qui mentem vinolentia sepeliverit. — Ipsam religionem quam paucissimis et manifestissimis celebrationum

sacramentis misericordia Dei esse liberam voluit, servilibus oneribus premunt, ut tolerabilior sit conditio Iudæorum, qui etiamsi tempus libertatis non agnoverint, legalibus tamen sarcinis, non huma{nis} præsumptionibus subijciuntur. Augustin. Epist 119 ad Ianuarium.

And least you should think all this to be excusable seing the people still remained Christians: hear what opinion the ancients Christians had of these times before they came to pass. For Cyprian bishop of Carthage thus describes the Antichrist whose coming was then expected. Cavenda sunt autem non solum quæ sunt aperta atq̃ manifesta, se{d} et astutæ fraudis subtilitate fallentia. Quid verò astutius, quidve subtilius, quam ut Christi adventu detectus ac prostratus inimicus-videns idola derelicta, & per nimium credentium populum sedes sua{s} ac templa deserta, excogitaverit novam fraudem, ut sub ipso Christiani nominis titulo veritatem corrumperet, scinderet unitatem? Quos detinere non potest in viâ veteris cæcitate, circumscribit et decipit novi itineris errore. Rapit de ipsa ecclesia homines, et dum sibi appropinquasse jam lumini, atq̃ evasisse sæculi noctem videntur, alias nescientibus tenebras rursus infundit; ut cum evangelio Christi, et cum observatione ejus & lege non stantes, Christianos se vocent; & ambulantes in tenebris habere se lumen existiment, blandiente adversario atq̃ fallente, qui secundum Apostoli vocem, transfigurat se velut angelum lucis, & ministros subornat suos velut ministros justitiæ; asserentes noctem pro die, interitum pro salute, desperationem sub obtentu spei, perfidiam sub prætextu fidei, Antichristum sub vocabulo Christi; ut dum veresimilia mentiuntur, veritatem subtilitate frustrentur. Cyprian. de unitate Ecclesiæ, sub initio. Here Cyprian tells you that when the Gospel

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[Editorial Note 1] should prevail against the heathen religion & the Devil should see his idols thrown down & temples deserted he should insinuate himself into the Christian Churches & deceive them with false & specious pretenses of piety & make them err & fall away & under the name of Christians become hereticks or Antichristians For in the language of the Apostle Iohn & the first Christians, all hereticks were Antichrists & the great Antichrist was nothing else then the great or catholic heresy. For Cyprian speaking of the baptism of hereticks saith, Hæreticos secundum Evangelicam & Apostolicam constitutionem adversarios Christi et Antichristos appellatos, quando ad Ecclesiam venerint, unico Ecclesiæ baptismo baptisandos esse ut possint fieri de adversarijs amici & de Antichristis Christiani. While the Empire continued heathen there were many Antichrists, that is many sorts of hereticks, but the true Christian Church catholick prevailed against them & hindred them from growing catholick; but when the Empire became ~ Christian the heathens meeting with a heresy which differed little from their old religion & suited with their pleasures, flowed into it & under the specious name of Christian prevailed against the primitive Church & became the catholick Antichrist. For if the placing supernatural virtue in words & figures & ceremonies & things consecrated & reliques & images & invocations of dead men, be abominable actions of the same kind with charms & magic & sorcery & idolatry, & if Christian sorcerers & Christian Idolaters be the worst of hereticks: then the Roman Empire before the end of the fourth century became very heretical, that is, in the language of Cyprian & the primitive Christians it became very antichristian. Which change of religion from heathen to Christian & from Christian to Antichristian being one of the greatest revolutions which ever happened in the Roman Empire deserved here to be explained. For this is that Apostasy which Saint Paul calls the man of sin & the son of perdition, telling us that so soon as that which hindred (namely the heathen Roman Empire) should be taken out of the way, it should be revealed & appear by a strong delusion with all power & signes & lying wonders & with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, & at length be destroyed by the brightness of Christs second coming. It began to work in the Apostles days, & was to continue till the second coming of Christ, & therefore is now in being.

The men who chiefly promoted these superstitions were the Moncks, & the religion of the Moncks was of the same kind with the superstitions of the Encratites & Cataphrygians but more absurd. This religion was propagated in Egypt by Antony & in Syria by Hilarion two Encratites, & spread so fast that soon after the reign of Iulian the Apostate a third part of the Egyptians were got into the deserts of Egypt. They lived first singly in cells, then associated <6r> into {cæpbia} and at length came into towns & filled the Churches with bishops præbyters & deacons. Athanasius in his younger days poured water upon the hands of his master Antony. He was first a monck then a Deacon & then a ~ Bishop & finding the Moncks faithfull to him made many of them Bishops & Presbyters in Egypt, & these Bishops erected monasteries in their cities, out of which they chose Presbyters & sent bishops to other cities. And the like was done in Syria. Spiridion & Epiphanius of Cyprus, Iames of Nisibis, Cyril of Ierusalem, Eustathius of Sebastia in Armenia Eusebius of

Emissa, Titus of Bostra, Basilius of Amcyra, Acacius of Cæsarea in Palæstine, Elpidius of Laodic{æ}a, Melitius & Flavian of Antioch, Theodorus of Tyre, Protogenes of Carrh{æ}{œ} , Acacius of Berrhœa, Theodotus of Hierapolis, Eusebius of Chalcedon, Amphilochius of Iconium, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory Nyssen & Iohn Chrysostom of Constantinople were both bishops & Moncks. Eustathius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen & Gregory Nyssen had monasteries of clergimen in their cities & were the first who propagated this sort of monckery in Armenia & Pontus. Eusebius Vercellensis & Martin carried this sort of Monckery into the west, & Austin carried it into Afric, & all these being both bishops & monks erected monasteries of Clergy-men in their cities out of which bishops were sent to other cities who in like manner erected monasteries in their cities till the Churches were supplied with bishops out of the monasteries. [3] Whence Jerome in a letter written about the year 385, saith of the Clergy: Quasi et ipsi aliud sint quam monachi & non quicquid in Monachos dicitur redundet in Clericos qui patres sunt Monachorum. Detrimentum pecoris pastoris ignominia est. And in his book against Vigilantius: Quid facient Orientis Ecclesiæ? Quid Ægypti & sedis Apostolicæ? Quæ aut virgines Clericos accipiunt, aut continentes, aut si uxores habuerint mariti esse desistunt. And even the Emperors commanded the Churches to chuse Clergimen out of the Monasteries by this law.

Impp. Aread. Et Honor. AA. Cæsario PF.P.

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Siquos forte Episcopi de esse sibi Clericos arbitrantur, ex Monachorum numero rectius ordinabunt: non obnoxios publicis privatis rationibus cum invidia teneant sed habeant jam probatos. Dat VII Kal. Aug. Honorio A. IV & ~ Eutychiano Coss. A.C. 398.

Thus the Encratites invaded the Churches of God & got the Empire into their hands. And now you may understand the meaning of the Apostles words where he saith Now the Spirit speaks expresly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits & doctrines of ghosts: speaking lies in hypocrisy (in the Legendary lives of their saints & stories of miracles done by the dead) having consciences seared with a hot iron: forbidding to marry & commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them who beleive & know the truth. For every creature of God is good & nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving.

[1] Novel. Tit. 24.

[2] 2 Thes. II.

[Editorial Note 1] Continuation from 4r.

[3] Epist 10

[4] L. 32 de Epicopis
