

Summary of Selected Patristics Works

Introduction

This review will summarise selected extracts of the patristics *Irenæus of Lyons*, *Cyprian of Carthage* and *Augustin of Hippo*.

It will present the historical context and the reviewer's outline of the presented themes.

Irenæus

This extract¹ is from *Against Heresies*², as it attacked the prevalent heresies of Gnosticism³ and Marcionism Irenæus encountered⁴.

The historical context of the extract is post-dispersion period due to the Judean Diaspora and Roman persecution (c.180).

The text commences with a precursive of the *sybolicum apostolicum*⁵, which the early church could use to emphasise doctrine to combat the heresies⁶.

The article continues to note the feature of the church being "scattered throughout the entire world", but this fundamental confession remains unchanged irrespective of language, nationality or culture!

Finally, Irenæus mentions the perspicuity and efficacy of Scripture can't be enhanced or diminished by human eloquence⁷.

Cyprian

The next extract⁸ examined is from the arguments for which Cyprian is renowned; namely the *Ecclesia in Episcopo*⁹, opposing the *Ecclesia in Papa*. It is historically set around the Decian Persecution of 250AD¹⁰.

Paragraphs 4-6 (abridged)¹¹, Cyprian presents Christ's response to Peter's confession of faith [Matt 16:18,19]. Cyprian continues that the same equal office and power was bestowed to all the apostles by Christ (John 20:21).

¹ Extract from "Chapter X. Unity of the faith of the Church throughout the whole world"; Schaff, Philip, *ANF01*, 876-877

² Full Title: *A Refutation and Subversion of Knowledge falsely so called*

³ Gnosticism is outlined in the first two chapters in Irenæus' tome. It was archaeologically vindicated as very accurate with the discovery of the 1945 discovery of the *Chenoboskion Manuscripts* at Nag Hammadi, Egypt [Brake, Donald L., 30,278].

⁴ Reeves, Michael. *The Breeze of the Centuries - Introducing the great theologians From the Apostolic Fathers to Aquinas*. 43-56

⁵ **The reviewer's comparison of the extract with the *Apostle's Creed*:** [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth^I; and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son^{II} of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit^{III}, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin^{III}, and the passion^{IV}, and the resurrection from the Dead^V, and the ascension into heaven^{VI} in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father^{VI}. "to gather all things in one," and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race^{VII}, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess" to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all^{VII}.

⁶ Beeke, Joel R. [Gen. Ed.]. *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible*, 1965

⁷ In the light of the following paragraph (not included in the extract), he explains, "It does not follow because men are endowed with greater and less degrees of intelligence, that they should therefore change the subject-matter [of the faith] itself."

⁸ Extract from "Treatise I. On the Unity of the Church" [Schaff, Philip, *ANF05*, 668; Douglas, J.A; Comfort, Philip W. [Eds.] *Who's Who in Christian History*, 186-187]

⁹ Cyprian was adamant that the Bishop of Rome, Stephen, who was going to excommunicate him, was not ecclesiastically more authoritative than the other bishops. The *Treatise* centres around his arguments in favour of the presbyters over the assembly.

¹⁰ Maier, Paul J. *Eusebius - The Church History - Translation and Commentary*, 212-215

¹¹ Schaff, Philip, *ANF05*, 994-996

Paul's reference to the church in relation to the unity of Spirit (Eph 4) is then explained, pertaining to "one body", one Spirit, one God, etc.

Continuing is the requirement for the presbytery to be unified and reflect the church universal. The unity of the church is metaphorically compared to light from the Sun, branch from a tree, and stream emanating from a spring. A final analogy is outlined where the church is a Spiritual "mother".

Finally, Cyprian draws from Old Testament imagery of God's comparison with Israel and the church, reiterating a *Separation or Remnant Theology*¹² expressed in the church.

Augustin

The final extract from "The City of God" by Augustin of Hippo is a compilation of several quotes¹³. It is historically set in the period of the Visigoth occupation of Rome. Consequently, surrounding regions of the empire were inundated with Roman refugees, who brought their particular paganism and ideologies¹⁴. There was also an heretical presence of Donatism and general antinomianism in the church, itself.

This entire work always reminds the reviewer of the famous allegory by John Bunyan *Pilgrim's Progress*¹⁵. Augustin continues the concept from his earlier work (against the Donatists), that the church consists of tares and wheat¹⁶.

He likens the nature of the two cities to the founders, Cain and Abel. Cain represents the concept of *love-of-self* versus Abel's *love for God*. Citizenship to the Heavenly City is imputed by God's grace, based on election¹⁷.

The worldly folk seek peace and comfort in this life, whereas the saints look to eternity in God's glorious presence as their peace.¹⁸

The final section then outlines how God has a remnant spread throughout the world in nearly every culture, and avails itself of the peace in the world (under God's providence and common grace).¹⁹

Romans distrusted novelty and elevated antiquity, which was reflected in their concern regarding Christianity.²⁰ Augustin argued that (as demonstrated in these extracts) Christianity (in conjunction with the OT Scriptures) actually encompasses the creation through to the then current era, and even the end times²¹.

¹² It is outside the scope of this review to discuss which (Separation or Remnant) Cyprian is discussing based on this extract.

¹³ Schaff, Philip, *NPNF1.02 The City of God*

Book I Chapter 35. *Of the Sons of the Church Who are Hidden Among the Wicked, and of False Christians Within the Church*. 67

Book XIV Chapter 28. *Of the Nature of the Two Cities, the Earthly and the Heavenly*. 629

Book XV Chapter 1. *Of the Two Lines of the Human Race Which from First to Last Divide It*. [Paragraph 2] 651-652

Book XIX Chapter 17. *What Produces Peace, and What Discord, Between the Heavenly and Earthly Cities*. ABRIDGED, 940-941

¹⁴ Political and religious instability of Rome was believed to have been caused by the abandoning of and retaliation by the pagan deities, for the God of the Bible. Augustin uses the Roman refugees' longing to return to Rome (the physical earthly city) as a metonym for the alternative Christian longing for the welcome in the heavenly city.

¹⁵ Full title "The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come" (1678)

¹⁶ Matt. 13:24-13:30

¹⁷ cf. Rom. 9:14-22. This is one point *The City of God* differs from *Pilgrim's Progress* - Bunyan's *Christian* could lose his certificate to enter the *Celestial City*.

¹⁸ 1 Pet. 5:10

¹⁹ The reviewer is reminded of the book of Jonah, where the city of Nineveh repented and the Assyrian Empire was at peace with Israel [and the ancient world also] for a few generations, because of God's directing Jonah. (Of course, by the time of Nahum, God wanted unrepentant Assyria punished).

²⁰ Reeves, Michael, *The Breeze of the Centuries - Introducing the great theologians From the Apostolic Fathers to Aquinas*. 95

²¹ Augustine's millennial views changed throughout his life, however his general eschatology was otherwise sound when he wrote this book.

Summary

Irenaeus lived in a tumultuous period of the post-Apostolic church, experiencing cumulative attacks from pagans, philosophies and politics. Heresies needed addressing, especially in regards to the protection and development of the neonatal church. Irenaeus contributed to buttressing the doctrines (confessions) against these heresies.

Cyprian demonstrates an increasing sample of the current separation theologies expressed in the church, which also emphasised in a period of tribulation the unity and strength of the Church.

Augustin wrote more than an apologetic work with "The City of God". He addressed that days' issues of nominalism, aligning with the political issues of Heaven against the *Christian status quo*. In doing this, he reminds us even today, not to confuse the church (merely an heavenly outpost) with Heaven itself (our destination, perfect communion with God in glory).

The undercurrent of all these extracts emphasises the unity of the catholic²² church, through the first five centuries of the post apostolic church.

²² Catholic [καθολικός] (katholikos), meaning "universal", not *Roman* Catholic.

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