Fragments from Victor of Capua

Pseudo-Polycarp (6th century)

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Authorship. These fragments are not by Polycarp of Smyrna; they are known only from a sixth-century Latin source and their authorship is doubtful.

Fragments from Victor of Capua

[Translated by Stephen C. Carlson] Victor, Bishop of Capua, from the response to the chapters of St. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, disciple of John the evangelist. § 1. Matthaeus Dominum dixisse testatur, quod Moyses scribit Adam locutum fuisse hos modo Hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis et caro ex carne mea propter hoc relinquet homo patrem et matrem etc. [Matt 19:5] Sed non concordant Domini verba cum Moysis sermonibus. Quia enim Adam praebens officium inspiratione divina prophetavit, ipse a Moyse hoc dixisse refertur; Deus vero, qui per inspirationem divinam in corde Adam ista verba formavit, ipse pater a Domino recte locutus fuisse refertur. Nam et Adam hanc prophetiam protulit et pater, qui eam inspiravit, recte dicitur protulisse. § 1. Matthew testifies that the Lord said that Moses writes that Adam spoke in this way: Now this is a bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh, because of this a man will leave [his] father and mother etc. [Matt 19:5] But the words of the Lord do not agree with the discourses of Moses. For, because Adam, showing deference, prophesied by divine inspiration, he was related by Moses to have said this; yet God, who formed these words in the heart of Adam by divine inspiration, the father himself was related correctly by the Lord to have spoken. For both Adam produced this prophecy and the father, who inspired it, is rightly said to have produced.

§ 2. Idem ad haec verba Christi: Calicem meum bibetis etc. [Matt 20:23] Per hujusmodi potum significat passionem, et Jacobum quidem novissimum martyrio consummandum, fratrem vero ejus Joannem transiturum absque martyrio, quamvis et afflictiones plurimas et exsilia toleravit, sed praeparatam martyrio mentem Christus martyrem judicavit. Nam apostolus Paulus Quotidie, inquit, morior; cum impossibile sit quotidie mori hominem ea morte qua semel vita haec finitur. Sed quoniam pro evangelio ad mortem jugiter erat praeparatus, se mori quotidie sub ea significatione testatus est. Legitur et in dolio ferventis olei pro nomine Christi beatus Joannes fuisse demersus. § 2. The same to these words of Christ: you drink my cup etc. [Matt 20:23] By this kind of drink he means the passion that James indeed was to most recently perfect by martyrdom, yet his brother John to depart without martyrdom, although he also withstood many afflictions and exiles, but Christ judged the mind prepared for martyrdom to be a martyr. For the apostle Paul said I die daily; while it is impossible for a person to die daily, in his death by which this life is ended once. But since for the gospel he is continually prepared for death, he testified about

himself to die daily under this meaning. It is also read that the blessed John had been plunged in a vat of boiling oil in the name of Christ.

§ 3. Idem de initio evangelii secundum Marcum. Rationabiliter evangelistae principiis diversis utuntur, quamvis una eademque evangelizandi probetur intentio. Matthaeus, ut Hebraeis scribens, genealogiae Christi ordinem textuit, ut ostenderet ab ea Christum descendisse progenie, de qua eum nasciturum universi prophetae cecinerant; Joannes autem ad Ephesum constitutus, qui legem tamquam ex gentibus ignorabant, a causa nostrae redemptionis evangelii sumpsit exordium; quae causa ex eo apparet, quod filium suum Deus pro nostra salute voluit incarnari. Lucas vero a Zachariae sacerdotio incipit, ut ejus filii miraculo nativitatis et tanti praedicatoris officio divinitatem Christi gentibus declararet. Unde et Marcus antiqua prophetici mysterii competentia adventi Christi declarat, ut non nova sed antiquitus prolata ejus praedicatio probaretur vel per hoc. Evangelistis curae fuit eo uti prooemio, quod unusquisque judicabat auditoribus expedire. Nihil ergo contrarium reperitur, ubi licet diversis scriptis ad eandem tamen patriam pervenitur. § 3. The same on the beginning of the gospel according to Mark.

Reasonably, the evangelists used different beginnings although the one and the same purpose of evangelization is represented. Matthew, as writing to Hebrews, composed the order of the genealogy of Christ, so that he would show that Christ had descended from this progeny, from which all the prophets had foretold him to be born. But John, based in Ephesus, made the beginning of the gospel from the reason of our redemption, of us who from the gentiles as it were did not know the law, which reason is evident from him that God wished his son to be incarnated for our salvation. Luke, however, began from Zacharias the priest so that he would declare the divinity of Christ to the gentiles by the miracle of the birth of his son and by the office of so many preachers. From which Mark too declares the ancient qualifications of the prophetic mystery of the coming of Christ so that his preaching had been proven not to be new but uttered from ancient times or account of that. The evangelists were concerned with using introductions, which each decided to set forth that for the listeners. Thus nothing is found to the contrary where even for different writings the same basis is arrived at.

§ 4. Idem in illud: Noli vocare amicos tuos sed pauperes et debiles etc. (Luke 14:12-13) Praecipit non amicos, sed infirmos quosque vocandos ad prandium. Quodsi claudus aut quilibet eorum sit amicus, sine dubio talis pro amicitia minime est rogandus, unde ipsa quasi videntur se impugnare mandata. Nam si non amici, sed claudi et caeci sunt invitandi, ipsosque quoque amicos esse contingat, nequaquam rogare debemus. Sed amicos arbitror intelligi hoc loco debere illos, quos mundi hujus terrena consideratione diligimus, non pro divinae contemplationis intuitu. Hi sunt igitur amici relinquendi. Denique ideo debilium exempla proposuit, quos pro nullius possumus appetere necessitate, nisi tantum pro fructu retributionis aeternae. § 4. The same in this: I do not want to call your friends but the poor and the weak etc. (Luke 14:12-13) He teaches that not friends but whoever are sick are to be called to a meal. But if the lame or anyone of them would be a friend, without a doubt

such is at least to be called for friendship, where these com-mands almost seem to oppose each other. For if not the friends but the lame and blind are to be invited, it would affect those that are friends too, then we should by no means call. But, I decide to understand first to owe them in this place whom of this would esteem the earthly considerations, not in view of divine contemplation. These are, therefore, friends to be left.

Accordingly, he proposed examples of weakness, which we can necessarily desire for none, unless so much for the fruit of the eternal reward. § 5. Idem in illud: Opus consummavi quod dedisti mihi, ut faciam(John 17:4). Quomodo opus salutis humanae adimplesse commemorat, cum necdum crucis vexillium conscenderat? Sed definitione voluntati, de qua cuncta venerandae passionis insignia adire decreverat, jure se opus perfecisse significat. § 5. The same in this: I have completed the work you have given me to do (John 17:4). How does he commemorate the fulfillment of the work of human salvation when he had not yet climbed the standard of the cross? But by the determination of his will, by which he decided to undergo all the marks of the venerable passion, he properly means that he completed the work himself. 1. Perhaps the most accessible discussion of the Pseudo-Polycarp fragments along with Latin text (but with no translation) can be found at J. B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp (1889; repr. Hendricksons, 1989), vol.3 pt.2, pp.419-422. These fragments were translated from Lightfoot. They have been attributed--successfully in my opinion--by Harnack back in 1921 to a certain Latinius Drepanius Pacatus who wrote the a Latin response to Porphyry in the early 5th century. Harnack's argument can be found conveniently at: https://archive.org/stream/HarnackPorphyriusGegenDieChristen/HarnackPorphyriusGegenDieChristen1916#page/n115/mode/2up

2. The odd part about this fragment is that Matt 19:5 does not include the citation of the "bone from my bones and flesh of my flesh" bit from Gen 2:23. 3. The detail of John being plunged in boiling oil is usually conjectured to have been in the lost beginning of the late-second-century apocryphal Acts of John and has generally been responsible for the skepticism for the attribution to Polycarp.

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