CHAPTER FIVE

HIPPOLYTUS AND THE 6000-YEAR CHRONOLOGY

Notwithstanding being known today as one of the most important theologians of the 3rd-century Christian Church in the West, Hippolytus’ life and writings are not as well known as we might initially think. Most scholars explain this by referring to Hippolytus’ schismatic activities, adding the fact that he wrote in Greek instead of Latin.

It is commonly accepted that Hippolytus lived between c.170 A.D. and 236 A.D. and that he held a solid reputation among the Roman presbyters. However, little is known regarding his early life, and what we know about his later career is still under dispute. Even Eusebius is not positive about which church he led.¹ Historical sources also do not allow us to confirm whether he was a disciple of Irenaeus (he probably was not), although it is commonly accepted that he attended one of Origen’s sermons during his stay in Rome. We also know that the historical sources refer to him both as a bishop and as a presbyter, which reflects in a certain way that his importance was different in the West than it was in the East.² In fact, Hippolytus appears to have been only a presbyter; however, in the Orient it was common to speak of him as a bishop. Later, Hippolytus, a man some said to be very strict in terms of orthodoxy, was convinced that Pope Callistus was a heretic, and therefore regarded Callistus as an antipope. During that period, he attacked not only Callistus but also his successors, namely, Urban and Pontianus. He was later exiled with the latter to Sardinia during the persecution by the Emperor Maximin (c.235–238 A.D.). Because of this event, it is frequently accepted that later in his life and before his death Hippolytus became reconciled with the Roman Church. In

¹ Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 6.20.
² A presbyter is a common figure in earlier Christianity in northern Africa. In fact, in Palestine the organization of the Christian churches was similar to that found in the synagogue. Therefore, these earlier churches were ruled by a group of “elders,” with presbyters being the most important members. However, from the 2nd century onward, these groups of presbyters had started to be led by bishops, who were distinguished in honor and prerogative from the presbyters. Therefore, if Hippolytus is known by different titles, it is almost impossible to really know to which rank he belonged.
fact, c.236 A.D. Pope Fabian transferred Hippolytus’ body to Rome, which can be taken as a sign that Hippolytus’ so-called schism was not considered as such by the Roman hierarchy. At least, it seems to have been regarded as not constituting a danger to the Roman orthodoxy.

As we have already noted, there were few details known about Hippolytus’ life until the discovery of a statue in Rome in 1551 thought to be his, although today it is considered to represent a woman. In this statue there is a list of several of his works, some of which were already known through Eusebius or Jerome, and other works not yet known to be his. Among the list of his writings, we should not forget to mention the *Refutation of All Heresies*, the treaty *De Christo et Antichristo*, the commentaries on Daniel and the Song of Songs, and the *Logos Doctrine*, among others. Nevertheless, we should not forget that most of his works were not known by his contemporaries because they were written in Greek. As G. Bardy says, it is true that until 1850 little was known about Hippolytus and his work. In fact, until the publication of his *Philosophumena* in 1851, his name was almost unknown, and only from that date onward can we observe the existence of a true interest in his works.

Before continuing to explore Hippolytus’ conceptions regarding the end of time, it seems necessary to explain a little further the historical situation in which he wrote. We have already seen that most of his work was written in the early 3rd century, a period marked by the increase of regular persecution against Christians. As B. E. Daley says, “it was only in the 3rd century, however, that persecution became, in several brief but bloody episodes, systematic and universal.” Persecution was then extended to all parts of the Roman Empire. Christians were often held responsible for famines, crises of many sorts, or even the actions of some of the emperors. In short, Christians became the scapegoats of the empire, especially under Septimius Severus. Given such situations of distress, it is not hard to imagine how eschatological hope played an important role for this population. Although the works of Hippolytus only reflect the events of the first decades of that

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