

Erasmus' Esteem for Cyprian: Parallels in Their Expositions of the Lord's Prayer*

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1. Introduction

For more than a generation, scholars have studied Erasmus as an editor, student, and critic of the Church Fathers.¹ Despite the great interest in the relationship between Erasmus and Jerome,² a book-length study of the subject has not yet appeared. Well known are the books of Charles Béné and André Godin on the influence respectively of Augustine and Origen on Erasmus.³ Irena Backus has studied Erasmus as a translator of Basil of Caesarea, and

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¹For some general studies, see Denys Gorce, "La patristique dans la réforme d'Érasme," in *Festgabe Joseph Lortz*, 2 vols., ed. Erwin Iserloh and Peter Manns (Baden-Baden: Bruno Grimm, 1958), 1:233–76; Robert Peters, "Erasmus and the Fathers: Their Practical Value," *Church History* 36 (1967): 254–61; John C. Olin, "Erasmus and the Church Fathers," in Olin, *Six Essays on Erasmus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 33–47; J. den Boeft, " 'Illic aureum quoddam ire flumen': Erasmus' Enthusiasm for the Patres," in *Erasmus of Rotterdam: The Man and the Scholar*, ed. J. Sperna Weiland and W. Th. M. Frijhoff (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 172–81; Irena Backus, "Erasmus and the Spirituality of the Early Church," in *Erasmus' Vision of the Church*, ed. Hilmar M. Pabel (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Publishers, 1995), 95–114.

²Eugene F. Rice, Jr., *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 116–36; John C. Olin, "Eloquentia, Eruditio, Fides: Erasmus' Life of Jerome" in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Sanctandreami*, ed. I. D. McFarlane (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1986), 269–74; Olin, "Erasmus and Saint Jerome: The Close Bond and Its Significance," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 7 (1987): 35–53; Olin, "Erasmus and Saint Jerome: An Appraisal of the Bond," in *Erasmus of Rotterdam: The Man and the Scholar*, ed. J. Sperna Weiland and W. Th. M. Frijhoff (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 182–86; Olin, Introduction to *CWE 61: The Edition of Jerome* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), xiii–xxxvii; Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 55–82; Mark Vessey, "Erasmus' Jerome: The Publishing of a Christian Author," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 14 (1994): 62–99.

³Charles Béné, *Érasme et Saint Augustin* (Geneva: Droz, 1969); André Godin, *Érasme, lecteur d'Origène* (Geneva: Droz, 1982).

Robert Sider has investigated the place of John Chrysostom in Erasmus' New Testament scholarship.⁴

Within the context of patristic influence on Erasmus, the North African Father Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, has received no sustained treatment.⁵ At the end of July 1519, three years after Froben published his edition of Jerome, Erasmus addressed to Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci the prefatory dedication of his edition of the complete works of Cyprian. Froben's press in Basel produced this edition in February 1520. Froben would reissue Erasmus' edition of Cyprian's *Opera* in 1521, 1525, and 1530. Given Erasmus' well-known admiration for Jerome, the preface to Cyprian's works contains a remarkable sentence. Erasmus admitted to his readers: "For myself, I cannot deny that among orthodox writers I used to give first place to Jerome; but when I looked more closely into Cyprian, whom previously I had read at random and without attention, doubt at once assailed me which I should prefer; so true is it that each with his own special virtues makes an overwhelming impression."⁶ In style of speaking, Erasmus claims, Cyprian "far outstrips Jerome, being everywhere more serious and less artificial."⁷

We should not attribute too much importance to this compliment, for Erasmus continued to admire Jerome. Neither, however, should we dismiss Erasmus' esteem for Cyprian, which went beyond the Church Father's eloquence. As Backus reminds us, Erasmus completed his edition of Cyprian at

⁴Irena Backus, *Lectures humanistes de Basile de Césarée: traductions latines (1439-1618)* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1990), 30-31, 110-14, 125-27; Robert D. Sider, "'Searching the Scriptures': John Chrysostom in the New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus," in *Within the Perfection of Christ: Essays on Peace and the Nature of the Church in Honor of Martin H. Schrag*, ed. Terry L. Brensinger and E. Morris Sider (Napanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1990), 83-105.

⁵For biographical studies of Cyprian, see Edward White Benson, *Cyprian: His Life, His Times, His Work* (London: Macmillan, 1897); Paul Monceaux, *Saint Cyprien: Évêque de Carthage (210-258)*, 3d ed. (Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1927); Peter Hinchliff, *Cyprian of Carthage and the Unity of the Christian Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1974); Michael M. Sage, *Cyprian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975); and Charles Saumagne, *Saint Cyprien, évêque de Carthage, "pape" d'Afrique (248-258): Contribution à l'étude des "persécutions" de Dèce et de Valérien* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975). For Cyprian's religious thought, see, among other studies, A. d'Alès, *La théologie de Saint Cyprien* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1922); Simone Deléani, *Christum sequi: Étude d'un thème dans l'oeuvre de saint Cyprien* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1979); Anneliese Adolph, *Die Theologie der Einheit der Kirche bei Cyprian* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993).

⁶CWE 7:28.

⁷CWE 7:29. For modern studies of Cyprian's Latin, see M. Le Provost, *Étude philologique et littéraire sur Saint Cyprien* (Saint-Brieuc: L. & R. Prud'homme, 1889; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1889); L. Bayard, *Le latin de Saint Cyprien* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1902).