

# **THE EXTANT WRITINGS OF ASTERIUS URBANUS**

ASTERIUS URBANUS

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### I. THE EXORDIUM.

HAVING now for a very long and surely a very sufficient period had the charge pressed upon me by thee, my dear Avircius(2) Marcellus, to write some sort of treatise against the heresy that bears the name of Miltiades,(3) I have somehow been very doubtfully disposed toward the task up till now; not that I felt any difficulty in refuting the falsehood, and in bearing my testimony to the truth, but that I was apprehensive and fearful lest I should appear to any to be adding some new word or precept(4) to the doctrine of the Gospel of the New Testament, with respect to which indeed it is not possible for one who has chosen to have his manner of life in accordance with the Gospel itself, either to add anything to it or to take away anything from

Being recently, however, at Ancyra, a town of Galatia, and finding the church in Pontus(5) greatly agitated(6) by this new prophecy, as they call it, but which should rather be called this false prophecy, as shall be shown presently, I discoursed to the best of my ability, with the help of God, for many days in the church, both on these subjects and on various others(7) which were brought under my notice by them. And this I did in such manner that the church rejoiced and was strengthened in the truth, while the adversaries(8) were forthwith routed, and the opponents put to grief. And the presbyters of

the place accordingly requested us to leave behind us some memorandum of the things which we alleged in opposition to the adversaries of the truth, there being present also our fellow-presbyter Zoticus Otrenus.(9) This, however, we did not; but we promised, if the Lord gave us opportunity, to write down the matters here, and send them to them with all speed.

### II. FROM BOOK I.

Now the attitude of opposition(10) which they have assumed, and this new heresy of theirs which puts them in a position of separation from the Church, had their origin in the following manner. There is said to be a certain village called Ardaba(11) in the Mysia, which touches Phrygia.(12) There, they say, one of those who had been but recently converted to the faith, a person of the name of Montanus, when Gratus was proconsul of Asia, gave the adversary entrance against himself by the excessive lust of his soul after taking the lead. And this person was carried away in spirit;(13) and suddenly being seized with a kind of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to speak and to utter strange things, and to prophesy in a manner contrary to the custom of the Church, as handed down from early times and preserved thenceforward in a continuous succession. And among those who were present on that occasion, and heard those spurious utterances, there were some who were indignant, and rebuked him as one frenzied, and under the power of demons, and possessed by the spirit of delusion, and agitating the multitude, and debarred him from speaking any more; for they were mindful of the Lord's distinction(1) and threatening, whereby He warned them to be on their guard vigilantly against the coming of the false prophets. But there were others too, who, as if elated by the Holy Spirit and the prophetic gift, and not a little puffed up, and forgetting entirely the Lord's distinction, challenged the maddening and insidious and seductive spirit, being themselves cajoled and misled by him, so that there was no longer any checking him to silence.(2) And thus by a

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kind of artifice, or rather by such a process of craft, the devil having devised destruction against those who were disobedient to the Lord's warning, and being unworthily honoured by them, secretly excited and inflamed their minds that had already left the faith which is according to truth, in order to play the harlot with error.(3) For he stirred up two others also, women, and filled them with the spurious spirit, so that they too spoke in a frenzy and unseasonably, and in a strange manner, like the person already mentioned, while the spirit called them happy as they rejoiced and exulted proudly at his working, and puffed them up by the magnitude of his promises; while, on the other hand, at times also he condemned them skilfully and plausibly, in order that he might seem to them also to have the power of reproof.(4) And those few who were thus deluded were Phrygians. But the same arrogant spirit taught them to revile the Church universal under heaven, because that false spirit of prophecy found neither honour from it nor entrance into it. For when the faithful throughout Asia met together often and in many places of Asia for deliberation on this subject, and subjected those novel doctrines to examination, and declared them to be spurious, and rejected them as heretical, they were in consequence of that expelled from the Church and debarred from communion.(5)

### III. FROM BOOK II.

Wherefore, since they stigmatized us as slayers of the prophets(6) because we did not receive their loquacious(7) prophets, for they say that these are they whom the Lord promised to send to the people, let them answer us in the name of God, and tell us, O friends, whether there is any one among those who began to speak from Montanus and the women onward that was persecuted by the Jews or put to death by the wicked? There is not one. Not even one of them is there who was seized and crucified for the name(8) of Christ. No; certainly not. Neither assuredly was there one of these women who was ever scourged in the synagogues of the Jews, or stoned. No; never anywhere. It is indeed by another kind of death that Montanus and Maximillia are said to have met their end. For the report is, that by the instigation of that maddening spirit both of them hung themselves; not together indeed, but at the particular time of the death of each(9) as the common story goes. And thus they died, and finished their life like the traitor Judas. Thus, also, the general report gives it that Theodotus that astonishing person who was, so to speak, the first procurator(10) of their so-called prophecy, and who, as if he were sometime taken up and received into the heavens, fell into spurious ecstasies,(11) and gave himself wholly over to the spirit of delusion was at last tossed by him(12) into the air, and met his end miserably. People say then that this took place in the way we have stated. But as we did not see(13) them ourselves, we do not presume to think that we know any of these things with certainty. And it may therefore have been in this way perhaps, and perhaps in some other way, that Montanus and Theodotus and the woman mentioned above perished.

### IV.

And let not the spirit of Maximilla say (as it is found in the same book of Asterius Urbanus(14)), "I am chased like a wolf from the sheep; I am no wolf. I am word, and spirit, and power." But let him clearly exhibit and prove the power in the spirit. And by the spirit let him constrain to a confession those who were present at that time for the very purpose of trying and holding converse with the talkative spirit those men so highly reputed as men and bishops namely, Zoticus of the village of Comana,(15) and Julian of Apamea, whose mouths Themison(1) and his followers bridled, and prevented the false and seductive spirit from being confuted by them.

### V.

And has not the falsity of this also been made manifest already? For it is now upwards of thirteen years since the woman died, and there has arisen neither a partial nor a universal war in the world. Nay, rather there has been steady and continued peace to the Christians by the mercy of God.

### VI. FROM BOOK III.

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But as they have been refuted in all their allegations, and are thus at a loss what to say, they try to take refuge in their martyrs. For they say that they have many martyrs, and that this is a sure proof of the power of their so-called prophetic spirit. But this allegation as it seems, carries not a whit more truth with it than the others. For indeed some of the other heresies have also a great multitude of martyrs; but yet certainly we shall not on that account agree with them, neither shall we acknowledge that they have truth in them. And those first heretics, who from the heresy of Marcion are called Marcionites, allege that they have a great multitude of martyrs for Christ. But yet they do not confess Christ Himself according to truth.

### VII.

Hence, also, whenever those who have been called to martyrdom for the true faith by the Church happen to fall in with any of those so-called martyrs of the Phrygian heresy, they always separate from them, and die without having fellowship with them, because they do not choose to give their assent to the spirit of Montanus and the women. And that this is truly the case, and that it has actually taken place in our own times at Apamea, a town on the Maeander, in

the case of those who suffered martyrdom with Caius(2) and Alexander, natives of Eumenia, is clear to all.

### VIII.

As I found these things in a certain writing of theirs directed against the writing of our brother Alcibiades,(3) in which he proves the impropriety of a prophet's speaking in ecstasy, I made an abridgment of that work.

### IX.

But the false prophet falls into a spurious ecstasy, which is accompanied by a want of all shame and fear. For beginning with a voluntary (designed) rudeness, he ends with an involuntary madness of soul, as has been already stated. But they will never be able to show that any one of the Old Testament prophets, or any one of the New, was carried away in spirit after this fashion. Nor will they be able to boast that Agabus, or Judas, or Silas, or the daughters of Philip, or the woman Ammia in Philadelphia, or Quadratus, or indeed any of the others who do not in any respect belong to them, were moved in this way.

### X.

For if, after Quadratus and the woman Ammia in Philadelphia, as they say, the women who attached themselves to Montanus succeeded to the gift of prophecy, let them show us which of them thus succeeded Montanus and his women. For the apostle deems that the gift of prophecy should abide in all the Church up to the time of the final advent. But they will not be able to show the gift to be in their possession even at the present time, which is the fourteenth year only from the death of Maximilla.(4) ELUCIDATION

(Aviricius Marcellus, p. 335, supra.)

LIKE his great predecessor in Patristic research (Bishop Pearson), the learned and indefatigable Bishop Lightfoot will leave us gold-dust in the mere sweepings of his literary work. His recent voluminous edition of the Apostolic Fathers(1) is encyclopedic in its treatment of the subject; and I had hardly corrected the last proofs of the fragments ascribed to Asterius Urbanus when I discovered, in one of his notes on Polycarp, a most brilliant elucidation of a matter which I had supposed involved in twofold obscurity. Asterius is a mere name embedded in Eusebius, and in his fragments there preserved is embedded the yet obscurer name of Aviricius Marcellus, which the reader will find, with its various spellings, in one of the translator's notes.(2) Who could have supposed that even the learning and ingenuity of Lightfoot could fish out of very dark waters such shining booty as fills the network about "Abercius of Hierapolis?" While he does not even name Asterius, the mere *nominis umbra* of

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Aviricius Marcellus is material for a truly remarkable dissertation covering nine pages of fine print, and enabling us to conclude that this Aviricius is none other than the same "bishop of Hierapolis" about whom there is such a long story in the Bollandist Acta Sanctorum.(3) The story is a silly legend, but Lightfoot understands the art *ex fumo dare lucem*; and any one who enjoys following up such elaborations will find most curious and delightful reading in the pages to which I have referred. Our Aviricius, then, was bishop of "Hierapolis of Lesser Phrygia," not of Hierapolis on the Maeander, and flourished about A.D. 163, during the reign of M. Aurelius. This date, therefore, must correct the conjecture of Tillemont and the date which I had accepted from him on the authority of Dr. Lardner.(4) ON THE CREATION OF THE WORLD(1)

To me, as I meditate and consider in my mind concerning the creation of this world in which we are kept enclosed, even such is the rapidity of that creation; as is contained in the book of Moses, which he wrote about its creation, and which is called Genesis. God produced that entire mass for the adornment of His majesty in six days; on the seventh to which He consecrated it ... with a blessing. For this reason, therefore, because in the septenary number of days both heavenly and earthly things are ordered, in place of the beginning I will consider of this seventh day after the principle of all matters pertaining to the number of seven; and as far as I shall be able, I will endeavour to portray the day of the divine power to that consummation.

In the beginning God made the light, and divided it in the exact measure of twelve hours by day and by night, for this reason, doubtless, that day might bring over the night as an occasion of rest for men's labours; that, again, day might overcome, and thus that labour might be refreshed with this alternate change of rest, and that repose again might be tempered by the exercise of day. "On the fourth day He made two lights in the heaven, the greater and the lesser, that the one might rule over the day, the other over the night,"(2) the lights of the sun and moon and He placed the rest of the stars in heaven, that they might shine upon the earth, and by their positions distinguish the seasons, and years, and months, and days, and hours.

Now is manifested the reason of the truth why the fourth day is called the Tetras, why we fast even to the ninth hour, or even to the evening, or why there should be a passing over even to the next day. Therefore this world of ours is composed of four elements fire, water, heaven, earth. These four elements, therefore, form the quaternion of times or seasons. The

sun, also, and the moon constitute throughout the space of the year four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, winter; and these seasons make a quaternion. And to proceed further still from that principle, lo, there are four living creatures before God's throne,(3) four Gospels, four rivers flowing in paradise;(4) four generations of people from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Christ the Lord, the Son of God; and four living creatures, viz., a man, a calf, a lion, an eagle; and four rivers, the Pison, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. The man Christ Jesus, the originator of these things whereof we have above spoken, was taken prisoner by wicked hands, by a quaternion of soldiers. Therefore on account of His captivity by a quaternion, on account of the majesty of His works, that the seasons also, wholesome to humanity, joyful for the harvests, tranquil for the tempests, may roll on, therefore we make the fourth day a station or a supernumerary fast.

On the fifth day the land and water brought forth their progenies. On the sixth day the things that were wanting were created; and thus God raised up man from the soil, as lord of all the things which He created upon the earth and the water. Yet He created angels and archangels before He created man, placing spiritual beings before earthly ones. For light was made before sky and the earth. This sixth day is called *parasceve*,(5) that is to say, the preparation of the kingdom. For He perfected Adam, whom He made after His image and likeness. But for this reason He completed His works before He created angels and fashioned man, lest perchance they should falsely assert that they had been His helpers. On this day also, on account of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, we make either a station to God, or a fast. On the seventh day He rested from all His works, and blessed it, and sanctified it. On the former day we are accustomed to fast rigorously, that on the Lord's day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks. And let the *parasceve* become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe

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any Sabbath with the Jews, which Christ Himself, the Lord of the Sabbath, says by His prophets that "His soul hateth;"(1) which Sabbath He in His body abolished, although, nevertheless, He had formerly Himself commanded Moses that circumcision should not pass over the eighth day, which day very frequently happens on the Sabbath, as we read written in the Gospel.(2) Moses, foreseeing the hardness of that people, on the Sabbath raised up his hands, therefore, and thus figuratively fastened himself to a cross.(3) And in the battle they were sought for by the foreigners on the Sabbath-day, that they might be taken captive, and, as if by the very strictness of the law, might be fashioned to the avoidance of its teaching.(4)

And thus in the sixth Psalm for the eighth day,(5) David asks the Lord that He would not rebuke him in His anger, nor judge him in His fury; for this is indeed the eighth day of that future judgment, which will pass beyond the order of the sevenfold arrangement. Jesus also, the son of Nave, the successor of Moses, himself broke the Sabbath-day; for on the Sabbath-day he commanded the children of Israel(6) to go round the walls of the city of Jericho with trumpets, and declare war against the aliens. Matthias(7) also, prince of Judah, broke the Sabbath; for he slew the prefect of Antiochus the king of Syria on the Sabbath, and subdued the foreigners by pursuing them. And in Matthew we read, that it is written Isaiah also and the rest of his colleagues broke the Sabbath(8) that that true and just Sabbath should be observed in the seventh millenary of years. Wherefore to those seven days the Lord attributed to each a thousand years; for thus went the warning: "In Thine eyes, O Lord, a thousand years are as one day."(9) Therefore in the eyes of the Lord each thousand of years is ordained, for I find that the Lord's eyes are seven.(10) Wherefore, as I have narrated, that true Sabbath will be in the seventh millenary of years, when Christ with His elect shall reign. Moreover, the seven heavens agree with those days; for thus we are warned: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the powers of them by the spirit of His mouth."(11) There are seven spirits. Their names are the spirits which abode on the

Christ of God, as was intimated in Isaiah the prophet: "And there rests upon Him the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of wisdom(12) and of piety, and the spirit of God's fear hath filled Him."(13) Therefore the highest heaven is the heaven of wisdom; the second, of understanding; the third, of counsel; the fourth, of might; the fifth, of knowledge; the sixth, of piety; the seventh, of God's fear. From this, therefore, the thunders bellow, the lightnings are kindled,(14) the fires are heaped together; fiery darts(15) appear, stars gleam, the anxiety caused by the dreadful comet is aroused.(16) Sometimes it happens that the sun and moon approach one another, and cause those more than frightful appearances, radiating with light in the field of their aspect. But the author of the whole creation is Jesus. His name is the Word; for thus His Father says: "My heart hath emitted a good word."(17) John the evangelist thus says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made that was made."(18) Therefore, first, was made the creation; secondly, man, the lord of the human race, as says the apostle.(19) Therefore this Word, when it made light, is called Wisdom; when it made the sky, Understanding; when it made land and sea, Counsel; when it made sun and moon and other bright things, Power; when it calls forth land and sea, Knowledge; when it formed man, Piety; when it blesses and sanctifies man, it has the name of God's fear.

Behold the seven horns of the Lamb,(20) the seven eyes of God(21) the seven eyes are the seven spirits of the Lamb;(22) seven torches burning before the throne of God(22) seven golden candlesticks,(23) seven young sheep,(24) the seven women in Isaiah,(25) the seven churches in Paul,(26) seven deacons,(27) seven angels,(28) seven trumpets,(29) seven seals to the book, seven periods of seven days with which Pentecost is completed, the seven weeks in Daniel,(30) also the forty-three weeks in Daniel;(31) with Noah, seven of all clean things in the ark;(1) seven revenges of Cain,(2) seven years for a debt to be acquitted,(3) the lamp with seven orifices,(4) seven pillars of wisdom in the house of Solomon.(5)

Now, therefore, you may see that it is being told you of the unerring glory of God in providence; yet, as far as my small capacity shall be able, I will endeavour to set it forth. That He might re-create that Adam by means of the week, and bring aid to His entire creation, was accomplished by the nativity of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Who, then, that is taught in the law of God, who that is filled with the Holy Spirit, does not see in his heart, that

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on the same day on which the dragon seduced Eve, the angel Gabriel brought the glad tidings to the Virgin Mary; that on the same day the Holy Spirit overflowed the Virgin Mary, on which He made light; that on that day He was incarnate in flesh, in which He made the land and water; that on the same day He was put to the breast, on which He made the stars; that on the same day He was circumcised,(6) on which the land and water brought forth their offspring; that on the same day He was incarnated, on which He formed man out of the ground; that on the same day Christ was born, on which He formed man; that on that day He

suffered, on which Adam fell; that on the same day He rose again from the dead, on which He created light? He, moreover, consummates His humanity in the number seven: of His nativity, His infancy, His boyhood, His youth, His young-manhood, His mature age, His death. I have also set forth His humanity to the Jews in these manners: since He is hungry, is thirsty; since He gave food and drink; since He walks, and retired; since He slept upon a pillow;(7) since, moreover, He walks upon the stormy seas with His feet, He commands the winds, He cures the sick and restores the lame, He raises the blind by His speech,(8) see ye that He declares Himself to them to be the Lord.

The day, as I have above related, is divided into two parts by the number twelve by the twelve hours of day and night; and by these hours too, months, and years, and seasons, and ages are computed. Therefore, doubtless, there are appointed also twelve angels of the day and twelve angels of the night, in accordance, to wit, with the number of hours. For these are the twenty-four witnesses of the days and nights(9) which sit before the throne of God, having golden crowns on their heads, whom the Apocalypse of John the apostle and evangelist calls elders, for the reason that they are older both than the other angels and than men.