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THE DOCTRINAL INTERESTS OF MARIUS MERCATOR

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From the middle of the seventeenth until the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century Marius Mercator was regarded by theologians and historians as one of the most valuable extant sources of information concerning both the Pelagian and Nestorian controversies.¹ The basis of the notable reputation which he so long enjoyed was of course the erroneous belief that he was the compiler of the Palatine Collection, a vast and impressive mass of papal and episcopal letters, remonstrances, sermons, confessions of faith, and memoirs used in the two ecumenical councils of the fifth century. This material concerned, almost exclusively, the heresies of Pelagius and Nestorius and apparently had been gathered together for use against the adherents of those two heresiarchs. Though little could be learned about Mercator himself, the available information gave him an impeccable position in the ranks of the orthodox. He was a disciple and correspondent of Augustine, whom he supported by savage attacks on Pelagius and other leaders of the Western heresy, and he was also known to Jerome, who, in a letter sent from distant Palestine to the Roman Donatus in the year 419, included a message to Mercator, encouraging him in his opposition to the Pelagians.²

The false interpretation of the *Collectio Palatina*, so long unchallenged, was finally exposed by the late Eduard Schwartz, who offered some conjectures as to the date and purpose of the connection and demonstrated that it was compiled not by Marius Mercator in the fifth century but by an unknown collector in

1 For the old opinion of Mercator as the diligent and formidable opponent of both heresies see II. de Noris, *Historia Pelagiana*, F. Loofs, *Nestoriana*, Tillemont, Bardenhewer, and the references in theological studies and ecclesiastical histories of the period. The general opinion was recognized by the devotion of the whole of the forty-eighth volume of Migne's *Patrologia latina* to Mercator's works, in the edition of Father Jean Garnier with the addition of some of the notes and opinions of Etienne Baluze.

2 Augustine, *Epistolae*, 193, *CSEL* 57 and Jerome, *Epistolae*, 154 *CSEL* 56. Augustine also refers briefly to Mercator in the *De Octo Dulcitii quaestionibus*, qu. 3 in *Patrologia latina*, XL, 159.

the sixth century.³ Schwartz's edition showed also that the compilation was not intended for use in the comparatively simple and straightforward Pelagian and Nestorian controversies of the fifth century. It was meant rather for the more involved and even more turbulent disputes of the sixth century, which in their violence wracked not only the church but also the empire and drew into their toils not only bishops, popes, and Fathers but even military commanders and emperors, eventually contributing not a little to the schism of the churches of East and West.

It is only since the appearance of this latest edition that it has been possible to assess with any accuracy the status of Marius Mercator as a doctrinal controversialist. The only works actually composed or translated by Mercator are the anti-Pelagian and anti-Nestorian treatises which together comprise about the first third of the compilation. This group includes all the anti-Pelagian writings originally attributed to Mercator but excludes most of the material directed against Nestorius. The controversialist is then as rich a course of information on the subject of Pelagianism as he ever was. But is he still to be regarded as likewise one of the chief opponents of the Eastern heresy?

Schwartz was convinced that, even though Mercator did not translate the bulk of the Nestorian works once assigned to him, he was nevertheless as deeply interested in Nestorianism as in Pelagianism and as bitterly opposed to it. He advanced several ingenious hypotheses on the subject. He attempted, for one thing, to establish some close but mysterious connection between Mercator and Cyril of Alexandria.⁴ He

3 Eduard Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1924-1925), I, 5. This work is hereafter cited as *ACO* I, 5 and the Roman numerals with this citation refer to the first preface, in which Schwartz discusses the Palatine Collection and Mercator's connection with it. For the purpose of the *Collectio* see also William Bark, "John Maxentius and the *Collectio Palatina*", soon to appear in *The Harvard Theological Review*.

4 An example of Schwartz's method of arriving at his conclusion will be revealing. It seems likely that certain Nestorian writings included by Mercator (*ACO*, I, 5, 55-50) were part of a group of excerpts from Nestorius made in Alexandria at the order of Cyril and sent by him to the pope (*Ep. to Celestine*, Mansi IV, 1016-1017. Since Schwartz had decided that Mercator obtained these works from Cyril, he concluded that Cyril must have sent copies to his agents in Constantinople, who handed them on to Mercator. It may have happened in that way, but at the same time there is nothing against the possibility that Mercator got the excerpts directly from the pope. Schwartz was so firm in his belief that Mercator was living in Thrace, from where he kept in touch with Cyril's representatives in Constantinople, that he overlooked the simpler and easier explana-

maintained that Mercator did not reside in Constantinople, where it would seem he must have lived if he really worked in close cooperation with the secret agents whom Cyril had stationed in the Eastern capital. But rather, according to Schwartz, the controversialist settled himself quietly as a monk in the diocese of Thrace, from where he carried on his attacks against both Pelagians and Nestorians. Schwartz contended also that whatever the monk Mercator wrote he planned for the use of monks. This would of course be after the condemnation of Pelagianism and Nestorianism at Ephesus. Schwartz had a reason for his valiant efforts to settle Mercator in Thrace; he had decided that Mercator's works were found in Thrace, after a hundred years, by some Scythian monk of the same diocese.⁵

Schwartz's hypotheses, in spite of their cleverness, are unacceptable. There is no proof at all that Mercator allied himself with Cyril and very little to suggest such a tie.⁶ That Mercator was a monk does not mean that he had to remain in one place, East or West. Dionysius Exiguus was a monk, too, according to his friend, Cassiodorus, and he traveled widely.⁷ The same is true of John Cassian and John Maxentius.⁸ There is no reason for concluding either that Mercator could not have

tion. For Schwartz's theories and conclusions, see *ACO*, I, 5, XII-XIV and "Die sogenannten Gegenanathematismen des Nestorius" in *Sitzungsb. d. Bay. Acad. zu München*, hist.-phil. Klasse (1922).

5 If it is true that Mercator, after becoming a monk, wrote only for the use of monks, it was a striking change, for of his two *commonitoria*, one had been presented even to Theodosius and the other was an attempt to add to Augustine's work. See *ACO*, I, 5, 65 and *ACO*, I, 5, 7. Mercator does not say in so many words that he is attempting to finish the work of his illustrious master but he makes it clear, nevertheless, that such is his ambition. What were those works, supposedly written by Mercator as a monk? No original treatises but only a few translations! Schwartz believed they indicated that Mercator had become inflamed against Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia. It seems strange that Mercator's hatred and contempt for the Eastern heresy could have stirred him to attack only after Nestorianism had been condemned, as must have been the case if Schwartz is correct, and that such feelings could have provoked him only to translation.

6 Louis Duchesne, *Histoire ancienne de l'église* (Paris, 1911), III, 408-409, wrote of Mercator as one of the most intransigent of Cyrillians, but at the time when Duchesne wrote the whole *Collectio Palatina* was still attributed to Mercator. It was to Rome, it seems to me, that Mercator looked for guidance, rather than Alexandria. Duchesne also considered this more acceptable view that Mercator was a papal agent, *op. cit.*, 331. The same suggestion was put forward by Erich Casper, *Geschichte des Papsttums von den Anfängen bis zur Höhe der Weltherrschaft* (Tübingen, 1930), I, 392.

7 Cassiodorus, *Inst.*, I, 23 (ed. Mynors, p. 62).

8 O. Bardenheuer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur* (1924), IV, 558 and (1932), V, 14-15.

traveled, or that his writings had to be found in Thrace. The Scythian collector who included Mercator's works in the Palatine Collection could have acquired them elsewhere quite as readily, since in the course of their controversies the Scythian monks spent some time in Constantinople and in Rome.

The principal reason for Schwartz's belief that Mercator and Cyril were allied was that the editor thought he saw a close connection between Mercator's attacks on the Nestorian heresy and Cyril's well-known animosity for all things Nestorian.⁹ But the relationship between Mercator's Nestorian translations and Cyril is more apparent than real. The evidence for anti-Nestorian and pro-Cyrrillian fervor on the part of Mercator turns out, upon examination, to be something quite different from what it seems.

Beyond the two *commonitoria* against Pelagian leaders, there is little to indicate Mercator's interests and labors in the period during which Schwartz thought he was showing his zeal on behalf of Cyril of Alexandria. There are a translation and refutation of the creed of Theodore of Mopsuestia, a very short piece attempting a comparison of the doctrines of Nestorius and Paul of Samosata, and translations of certain writings by Nestorius and Cyril, for some of which brief introductions were written. In his memoir against Julian of Aclanum Mercator revealed plainly the reason for his hatred of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Theodore, he declared, was responsible for the rise of the Pelagian heresy and his views were taken to the West by Rufinus.¹⁰ In addition to that enormity, Theodore had presumed to attack Augustine himself, though he was in reality attacking the Catholic faith.¹¹ Does it not appear then that it was ardor on behalf of Augustine and against the Pelagians rather than for Cyril and against the Nestorians that stimulated Mercator to his attack on Theodore? This view gains support

9 Eltester in his article, 'Marius Mercator', in Pauly-Wissowa (1930), XIV, 1932, who follows Schwartz at almost every point, naturally does not recognize Mercator's primary concern with Pelagianism. He believes that by mingling works against the Pelagians with others against the Nestorians Mercator meant to calumniate both heresies. But neither Schwartz nor Eltester explains why Mercator does not take up the Christological controversy in any of his own writings, but merely calls it 'impious,' etc. See below.

10 *ACO*, I, 5, 5.

11 *Ibid.*, 23 and see also p. 173, where the Palatine collector names Augustine as the object of an attack by Theodore. In the eyes of Mercator an attack on Augustine would in itself unquestionably be enough to earn condemnation.

from Mercator's sneering remark, in the introduction to his translation of Theodore's creed, that Julian of Aeclanum had been anathematized by Theodore after leaving Cilicia. Mercator was interested not only in exposing Theodore as the source of Pelagianism but he used him also as a means of injuring the Westerner. As for the refutation of Theodore's creed, it is comparatively mild; here Mercator's purpose seemed to be merely to present the orthodox view.

Even if it be granted that Mercator detested Theodore because of the Cilician's association with Pelagianism, the attacks on Nestorius are still unexplained. But these attacks become intelligible, when it is remembered that Theodore was the source not only of Pelagianism but also of Nestorius's Antiochene theology.¹² Thus a close connection is established between the founder of the heresy most adequately hated in the West, and Nestorius, the nominal head of the leading Eastern heresy. When we remember that Nestorius received the leaders of Pelagianism, at the time of their flight to Constantinople, Mercator's animosity becomes still clearer.¹³ Finally, Pope Celestine's coalition with Cyril of Alexandria against their hated rival of the Eastern capital is further reason why a Western theologian should have attacked Nestorius with so much venom but at the same time have given so little indication of understanding the issues involved in the Eastern dispute.¹⁴ For in all the translations of material pertaining to the Nestorian heresy, there is only one very brief work that might be said to possess any originality and then but little can be claimed for it.¹⁵

After citing a number of works by both Nestorius and Cyril, entirely lacking in interpretation, Mercator goes on again to use Nestorius and the Pelagians against each other. In order to accomplish this purpose, the translator next cites four brief tractates written, he says, by Nestorius against the Pelagian position on the question of original sin.¹⁶ There is nowhere in

12 A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1888), II, 339-340.

13 *Ibid.*, (1890), III, 169.

14 C. J. von Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, II, 183-184, and R. Seeberg, *Text-book of the History of Doctrines*, revised in 1904 by the author, translated by C. E. Hay (Philadelphia, 1905), I, 264-265.

15 That one work is the comparison of the doctrines of Nestorius and Paul of Samosata, written apparently for the purpose of vilifying Nestorius by connecting him with Paul and revealing no remarkable knowledge of Nestorianism. For it see *ACO*, I, 5, 28. In the following works of Nestorius and Cyril, pp. 28-60, there is no attempt at interpretation whatsoever.

16 *ACO*, I, 5, 60-65.

Nestorius's works any mention of the Pelagians by name but Mercator in a brief note declares that the tractates are directed against the heresy of Pelagius and Caelestius. He then adds that, though Nestorius disapproved of the Pelagian position, he still befriended the heretics and wrote a letter of consolation to Caelestius at the time when the Westerner was forced to leave Constantinople.¹⁷ This letter, the last of the translations, spoke for itself in convicting Nestorius of maintaining friendly relations with one of the leaders of Pelagianism. This course eventually proved disastrous for the unfortunate patriarch of Constantinople, for it was his aid to the Pelagians, not his doctrinal aberration, that won Nestorius the enmity of Pope Celestine.¹⁸ As it finally turned out, Celestine sacrificed Nestorius to Cyril and Cyril agreed to the condemnation of the Pelagians, in whose teachings he had previously shown no interest at all.¹⁹

The so-called "anti-Nestorian" translations of Marius Mercator then are not so much anti-Nestorian as anti-Pelagian in intent. The fiery denunciation of Theodore of Mopsuestia is a self-evident attack on Pelagianism. The trifling comparison of Nestorius's doctrine with that of Paul of Samosata is done *ignominiae causa*. And what does the controversialist say in explanation of the quotations from Nestorius? Significantly little—only that he has translated some of Nestorius's work so that his orthodox Latin-speaking brothers can avoid the heretic's errors. No explanation at all is provided for Cyril's writings, which is strange if Mercator was a fervent ally and agent of the Alexandrine bishop. If the Latin-speaking brothers were able to understand the abstruse questions involved in the struggle between the two Eastern bishops, it was not because of any light shed by Mercator. The attempt to introduce Nestorius as a foe of the Pelagian views on original

17 *ACO*, I, 5, X and 65.

18 Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, II, 339-346. The Christological dispute, so fascinating to the East, had little interest for Western leaders. Celestine ordered his legates to give their support to Cyril not because the pope condemned Nestorius's theology but because he disapproved of Nestorius's refusal to break with the Western heretics. No effects on Nestorius's part to accommodate the pope in the Christological matter could assuage the papal wrath.

19 Cyril had actually received the Pelagians into communion in the East, before he knew or cared what they believed. It was only later that they came to have any significance for him. *Collectio Avellana*, *CSEL*, XXXV, 114 and Duchesne, *Histoire ancienne*, III, 264, n. 3.

sin and the letter to Caelestius both again speak for themselves as simultaneous attacks on Nestorius and the Pelagians.²⁰

Thus it becomes clear that the views set forth by Schwartz in respect of Mercator's deep interest in Nestorianism and adopted by Eltester must be rejected. Marius Mercator was not a zealous partisan of Cyril, for like Pope Celestine, he was primarily interested in thwarting the Pelagians. If it be asked why he troubled to translate the Nestorian material, the answer must be that as a bitter opponent of the Pelagians he attacked all who dared defend his enemies. He translated material concerning the Christological controversy along with documents implicating Nestorius with the Pelagians for the purpose of weakening Nestorius's position still more in the eyes of Westerners. Cyril, the ally of Celestine, was to be quoted with tacit approval and Nestorius to be decried. Just why, Mercator did not stop to explain. It was enough to introduce Cyril, blast Nestorius, and condemn both Nestorius and Theodore by pointing to their association with the Pelagians.

It is only in opposition to the Pelagians that Mercator wrote original treatises of any importance. If it should ever be discovered that he wrote as extensively and fervently in support of the Christological views of Cyril and against those of Nestorius as he did for the beliefs of Augustine and Celestine against those of the Pelagians, Schwartz's theories could be substantiated. As matters stand, however, it is safe to assume only that Mercator was a Westerner working for a Western theology and that the little attention he gave to Nestorianism was purely incidental to his primary interest in the heresy of Pelagius.

²⁰ That is, Mercator wished to point out that the Western heretics found a warm welcome only with other heretics, viz. Nestorius and Theodore. The Pelagians were belittled for associating with Nestorius and the Nestorians for receiving the Pelagians. Then as a further insult Mercator adds the deceptive, misnamed anti-Pelagian tractates of Nestorius in order to make it look as if the Pelagians were thus attacked by their last friend.