

## OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

### LECTURE 6 – CYPRIAN AT CARTHAGE AND CHURCH GOVERNMENT

We'll start with a prayer about the period to be studied.

Almighty God, who gave to your servant Cyprian boldness to confess the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ before the rulers of this world, and courage to die for his faith: Grant that we may always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and to suffer gladly for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture.

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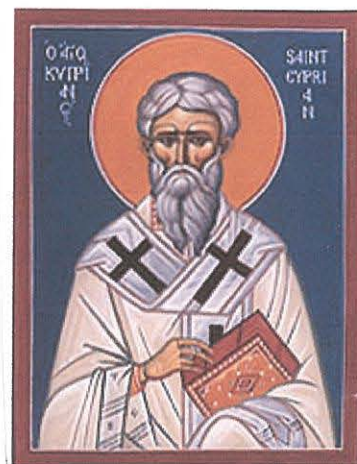
3.2 Two major problems for the Church

Who should readmit Christians who had 'lapsed'?  
When, if ever, should they be re-admitted?

3.3 Cyprian divided the lapsed into four categories

3.4 All-African Council in 252 approved Cyprian's policies

- (1) bishops alone could readmit to Communion,
- (2) bishops could grade the terms of readmission, and
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Icon of Cyprian

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Why spend time on Cyprian?

In the last lecture, we saw Tertullian creating some of the Christian language we use today. Now we're going to see how and why another church leader at Carthage, Cyprian, developed a Church organization, based on Roman civil government, that became normative for the Church for the next twelve hundred years, until the Reformation in the sixteenth century – government by a hierarchy of bishops, the structure still used by 80% of the world's professing Christians today. (More details of that in 5.2 of this lecture.) Cyprian did not create the complex structures by which Episcopal Churches are organised today, but he laid the foundation for them – government through bishops.

(Cairns, 110-111; Vos, 18, 47, 48; Lion, 93, 95; Olson, 80-83, 113-123; Lane, 24-26; Hanks, 70 *Great Christians*, 21-24.)

## 2. EARLY BIOGRAPHY OF CYPRIAN

While Tertullian was growing old at Carthage, a young man, Thascius Cyprianus (first name, family name – he added Caecilius later, for reasons we'll see) was growing up in Carthage. He was not a Christian at that stage and there is no evidence that he and Tertullian ever met. He was born c205 into a pagan family of social standing and wealth, with estates and gardens in Carthage. Cyprian was brought up in high society, enjoying a good and thorough education. He excelled as an orator and, while still young, he launched into a profitable career as a professor of rhetoric (art of public speaking). He also appeared in the law courts as an advocate, but his greatest strength was in administration. He had the prospect of a glittering career in the Roman civil service, such as becoming a Provincial Governor.

Cyprian, like Tertullian, was converted to Christ in middle life, in his case in 245/46, in his early forties. It was through his friendship with a Church elder called Caecilius, who had brought him to faith and disciplined him as a young Christian; it was out of respect for his mentor that Cyprian took Caecilius as an additional name. He had lived a fairly upright and serious life, searching for something purer and nobler than the corruption and immorality of pagan society, and he found the answer in Christ and in the Church.

There had been no persecution of Christians in Roman Africa for nearly forty years, and the Church had grown rapidly, but Christianity was still an illegal religion, so to confess Christ was the end of Cyprian's career in the civil service. He gave all his worldly possessions to the Church, symbolic of his break with his old life; he was baptized and trained to become a full-time deacon. He was soon made a presbyter/elder, and, only a year later, in 248/9, he was elected bishop of Carthage, the most important church in the Roman Province of Africa. He never married.

In a further break with his past, he resolved to read no more secular literature, but to read only the Bible and Tertullian. He admired Tertullian's works so much that he asked his secretary every day to 'bring me something from the works of the master'.

(The chronology of his ten years as bishop is set out on the following page. The text resumes at page 4.)

The chronology of Cyprian's ten years as Bishop of Carthage is relatively fully documented, but complicated. The scheme given below may be helpful

AD

- 249 Cyprian becomes Bishop of Carthage (? early in the year).
- 250 *January*: Persecution of Decius. Cyprian retires from Carthage.  
*20 January*: Martyrdom of Fabian, Bishop of Rome.  
*November*: Persecution relaxed at Carthage.
- 251 *March*: Cornelius becomes Bishop of Rome. Novatian's schism.  
*After Easter (23 March)*: Cyprian returns to Carthage.  
*April*: First Council of Carthage confirms Cyprian's excommunication of his opponents (Novatus, etc.). Cyprian's *De Unitate Catholicae Ecclesiae*.  
*July*: Arrival of envoys from Novatian announcing his election as Bishop of Rome.
- 252 *April*: Persecution of Gallus. Plague at Carthage.  
*May*: Second Council. Readmission of the lapsed. Consecration of Fortunatus and Maximus (Novatianist) as opposition bishops at Carthage.
- 253 Exile and (*June*) death of Cornelius.  
*September*: Third Council of Carthage.  
 Lucius Bishop of Rome.  
 Valerian becomes emperor.
- 254 *March*: Death of Lucius.  
*May*: Stephen becomes Bishop of Rome.  
 Fourth Council of Carthage.  
 The apostate Spanish bishops. The case of Marcian of Arles.
- 255 First Council of Carthage on Baptism (Council 5).
- 256 *Spring* Second and (*autumn*) Third Councils on Baptism (Councils 6 and 7).
- 257 *July*: Persecution of Valerian. Internment of Cyprian.  
*2 August*: Death of Stephen.  
*August*: Sixtus II (Xystus) Bishop of Rome.
- 258 *6 August*: Martyrdom of Sixtus.  
*14 September*: Martyrdom of Cyprian.

Cyprian's gentleness, love and peaceable spirit led to his election, with the strong approval of the congregation, but with opposition from five elders who envied the rapid rise of the 'new boy' to bishop. They formed a cabal and worked against him over the following years, as we will see.

Church government at that time was one bishop in every major city, with elders and deacons leading individual congregations within the city and its environs. Remember (Lecture 2) how, early in the second century, Ignatius was anxious to see a bishop appointed for every local church, supported by elders and deacons, but by the end of the second century, the pattern was for the bishop to have oversight of a number of congregations, with elders and deacons leading the congregations around the city and surrounding country areas. Cyprian was one of 88 bishops in North Africa – the Church was really taking off, for reasons we'll see – but the bishops were all independent and they were all equal – there was no structure of leadership for the wider Church.

### 3. PERSECUTION OF 250-251

#### 3.1 Order for universal sacrifice

When Cyprian became bishop, the economy of the Roman Empire was in a mess, and barbarians were invading its north boundaries. The Emperor, Decius, who was a pagan, decided this was because the Roman national gods were angry because so many people, especially Christians, were not honouring them. In January 250, the Emperor ordered everyone throughout the Empire - not just Christians – to sacrifice to the pagan gods of Rome and to get an official written certificate from a locally established commission confirming that they had complied with the edict. (There are three samples of *Libelli* on the next page.) There had been no systematic persecution of Christians at Carthage for decades and so many had joined the Church without any real commitment to it. Many nominal Christians complied with the edict right away, in some congregations three-quarters of the members; some of them did actually sacrifice to the gods, as the edict required; but others bribed the magistrates to give them an official certificate, falsely stating that they had done so, without actually sacrificing. Both groups were known as Lapsed Christians, from the Latin word *lapsi* (lapsed)

But many refused and were imprisoned and tortured - the Emperor didn't want martyrs, he wanted to make Christians sacrifice to the ancient gods of Rome, so the captors didn't kill them, they tortured them to make them acknowledge the pagan gods, but some died under torture, still refusing to give in. Others remained defiant until the persecution stopped. Those who were imprisoned and resisted were known as 'confessors', Church leaders and ordinary Church members who had continued to confess only Christ as Lord.

We're going to look at the history of persecution in our next lecture, but for now just this one persecution and its consequences. Cyprian decided that it was prudent to withdraw from Carthage and to go into hiding, in order to preserve himself for further service to the Church. From his hide-out not far outside Carthage, he sent letters to the church at Carthage, using a faithful deacon as his messenger.

While the persecution was still raging – it lasted for 14 months, until the Emperor was killed in battle and his successor discontinued the policy – some of the lapsed asked/

(There are three samples of *Libelli* on the next page; the text continues on page 6.)

## *Libelli* of the Persecution of Decius, 250

Text in *Harvard Theological Review*, 16 (1923), pp. 363ff.

First Hand. To the commission chosen to superintend the sacrifices at the village of Alexander's Isle. From Aurelius Diogenes, son of Satabous, of the village of Alexander's Isle, aged 72 years, with a scar on the right eyebrow. I have always sacrificed to the gods, and now in your presence in accordance with the edict I have made sacrifice, and poured a libation, and partaken of the sacred victims. I request you to certify this below. Farewell. I, Aurelius Diogenes, have presented this petition.

Second Hand. I, Aurelius Syrus, saw you and your son sacrificing.

Third Hand. ...onos...

First Hand. The year one of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, Epeiph 2 (26 June, 250). (J. R. Knipfing, *Harvard Theological Review*, loc. cit., p. 363, slightly altered.)

To the commission chosen to superintend the sacrifices. From Aurelia Ammonous, daughter of Mystus, of the Moeris quarter, priestess of the god Petesouchos, the great, the mighty, the immortal, and priestess of the gods in the Moeris quarter. I have sacrificed to the gods all my life, and now again, in accordance with the decree and in your presence, I have made sacrifice, and pour a libation, and partaken of the sacred victims. I request you to certify this below. (J.R. Knipfing, *Harvard Theological Review*, loc. cit., p. 365, slightly altered.)

The second of the *libelli* given above shows that pagans, who *could be under no suspicion of being Christians*, had to secure *libelli*. The priestess has added the words 'all my life' to emphasize her declaration.

A complete, though hypothetical, text of such a *libellus*, the composite result of a combination of the data of our forty-one texts, would read somewhat as follows:

First Hand. To the commission of...chosen to superintend the (sacred offerings and) sacrifices. From...son (or daughter) of... (and of...) (together with his brother and their wives) (and his children), who comes from the village of...(in the division of...), and is domiciled in the village of...(or in the...quarter of the city) (or dwelling beyond the town gates), (aged... years with a scar on the right eyebrow) (and member of the household of..., who functioned as exegete in the famous city of Alexandria, not to mention the offices he now holds) (or priestess of the god Petesouchos the great, the mighty, the immortal, and priestess of the gods in the...quarter). I (or we) have always and (all my life) without interruption sacrificed and poured libations and manifested piety toward the gods (in accordance with the divine decree), and now (again) in your presence in accordance with the edict, I (or we) have made sacrifice and poured a libation (or poured a libation and sacrificed) and partaken of the sacred victims (in company with my wife and children) (acting through me). (Wherefore I present this petition and) I (or we) request you to certify this (for me, or for us) below. Farewell. I (or we) have presented this petition (aged... and injured) (or aged...) (and I... wrote in his behalf, for he is illiterate) (or Second Hand, I... presented this petition, I... signed for him since he is illiterate).

Second Hand. I...(prytanis) (and I...) saw you sacrificing (together with your son, or sons).

Third Hand. I...have signed.

First Hand. The year one of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, 12 June (or any date thereafter up to 14 July).

asked for readmission to the Church, often because they were severely ill and wanted to die in the fellowship of the church. Like Peter in the courtyard of the High Priest, they had denied their Lord and now they wept bitterly. Cyprian's message was to undertake penance until the persecution was over, when he would consider their position.

When the persecution ended, many more Lapsed Christians asked for readmission.

3.2 This raised two major problems for the Church:

(a) Who should readmit Christians who had 'lapsed'?

'Confessors of the faith' believed that they, not the bishops, had earned the right to decide the question of readmission. They had refused to sacrifice, they had been imprisoned and tortured, deprived of food, water, fresh air and light to make them recant – remember Decius' idea was not to kill them, which would make them into martyrs, he wanted them to sacrifice to the Roman gods – so the 'Confessors' believed that they, not the bishops, had earned the right to decide whether the lapsed could be readmitted to the church, and on what terms.

The current understanding was that martyrs went straight to heaven – others had to wait for the Resurrection, as we saw in Lecture 5 – so the 'confessors' in prison at Carthage issued what were called 'letters of peace' to their friends who had lapsed, promising that if they were martyred, they would intercede with God and to ask him to forgive the apostasy of those who had lapsed. Accordingly, if these 'confessors' died in prison, the lapsed presented their letters of peace to the clergy at Carthage and demanded readmission to communion. Cyprian was adamant that only the bishop could do this.

The second question was:

(b) When (if ever) should they be re-admitted?

If people were not prepared to stand up and be counted as Christians during persecution, should they be accepted back into the Church? If so, immediately? or only after period of time of repentance and public penance? or never?

When the persecution ended on the death of Decius at Easter 251, Cyprian returned to Carthage after a 14-months absence.

3.3 Cyprian divided the lapsed into four categories:

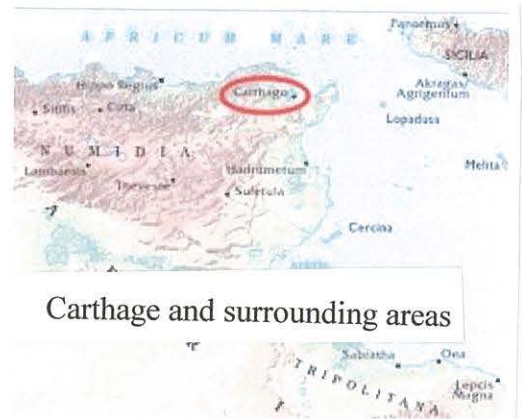
- (a) Those who had given in and sacrificed only after torture could reasonably say that only their bodies, not their faith, had given way, Cyprian decided that they should be treated leniently and a graded but lenient system of penance was appropriate for them.
- (b) Christians who had purchased false written certificates from the civil authority, saying that they had obeyed the order of the emperor to sacrifice to idols when they had not, whom he called *libellatici*, (in Latin, the certificates were known as *libelli*, so those who had bought them were *libellatici*); after doing more serious penance, Cyprian ruled that they could be received back into the Church in their lifetime and admitted to communion.

- (c) Those who had actually taken part in heathen sacrifices, whom he called *sacrificati*, were to continue penance on the understanding that they would be received back into the church only as death approached - not before, and
- (d) Clergy, who could be re-admitted on confession but only as a layman. They could never again perform clerical duties.

Some malcontents among the clergy, especially the five who had never wanted Cyprian to be bishop in first place, undermined Cyprian's position; they charged him with over-severity. Some of them left the Church in Carthage and formed rival congregations in the city, with laxer discipline. Cyprian was appalled – to him, schism within the Church was unthinkable and the unity of the Church was paramount. For him, you could leave the Church if you disagreed with it (although that was spiritual suicide, as there was no salvation outside the Church) but you mustn't divide the Church.

### 3.4 All-African Council in 252 approved Cyprian's policies

What Cyprian did next has had repercussions for the Church to this day – he called a Council of all the African bishops, all 88 of them, to consider the treatment of the lapsed. He chaired the Council, and summoned bishops from all over Africa to meet in Carthage. This was a novel and specifically Western way of organizing Church affairs. Until then, churches had been linked together loosely for Christian fellowship, but until Cyprian, there was no organisation, no administration, for them to make binding decisions.



Carthage and surrounding areas

Cyprian persuaded his fellow bishops: (1) that bishops alone could decide on readmission, not the lay people who had suffered during the persecution. The 'letters of peace', issued by the confessors, were of no value to Cyprian – the decision was to be made by the bishops and the bishops alone. (2) that the bishops could grade the terms of readmission, based on the seriousness of the sin, and (3) that when these terms had been met, the bishop could grant absolution from the sin. In other words, after sinners had done what the bishop required – and this varied from person to person – the bishop laid his hands on them and restored them to communion. It was a short step from there for lay people to think that when the Church said, 'Bishops alone can say that your sins are now forgiven', the bishop was saying: 'I forgive your sins' – clerical absolution. This led, in later Church life, to what became known as the penitential system, confession to a priest, doing the penance imposed by him, and receiving absolution, which we will look when we get to the Middle Ages.

TOPIC – CYPRIAN AND THE EUCHARIST – was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

### 4. CYPRIAN'S TEACHING/

## 4. CYPRIAN'S TEACHING

### 4.1 Another two All-African Councils, these ones in 256

Some who disagreed with Cyprian's teaching about penance and readmission set up rival churches, with their own bishops. Cyprian did what he always did in a disputed situation – he called another All-African Church Council, this one in two parts, in the Spring and Autumn of 256, and he presided over them. He was determined to preserve the unity of the Church, the true Church as he saw it; he did this by securing unanimous support for his policy that those who wouldn't accept the teaching of the bishops in the mainline church, on this or any other point, were to be excommunicated - and that set quite a precedent.

You can see where we are going – one Church, one visible, organized, hierarchical, Church, with one leader – the senior bishop. Other cities throughout Roman Africa had their bishops, eighty-seven of them, and groups of bishops regularly met together, locally, in what were called synods, but when they all met together in the capital city, Carthage, with the bishop of Carthage presiding, these All African Church Councils became known in Church language as 'the College of Bishops' or 'the Episcopal College'.

When someone complained that Cyprian's Councils, with the bishops gathered round him and Cyprian in charge, resembled the government of secular Roman Africa, Cyprian took it as a complement - he was deliberately modelling Church government on Roman government, with its sense of unity, its emphasis on law and order, its magistrates and consuls and pro-consuls. This was a novel and specifically Western way of organizing Church affairs.

When, some years later, another Roman Emperor (Diocletian) divided the Roman Empire into 12 administrative areas, and called them 'dioceses', the Church adopted this name, dioceses, for its administrative areas, and that is how Episcopal churches describe their administrative areas to this day.

### 4.2 Cyprian's doctrine of the Church (ecclesiology):

Cyprian taught 'Where the bishop is, there is the Church'. That's his ecclesiology - (1) one bishop per city, with presbyters/priests pastoring other churches in the city, but just one bishop per city, and

(2) the bishop of the chief city in the Province (in his case, Carthage), as the senior bishop in that Province.

Cyprian linked his doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) with his doctrine of salvation (soteriology).

### 4.3 Cyprian's doctrine of salvation (soteriology)

Three of Cyprian's most famous sayings are: 'Outside the Church there is no salvation.'

'You cannot have God as your Father unless you have the Church as your mother.'

'No one was able to escape the flood outside of Noah's ark, so how can you escape judgment if you are outside the doors of the Church?'



In other words, salvation now depended on membership of the Church controlled by the bishops – they alone could administer baptism and, for sin after baptism, they alone could give absolution.

To conclude this section –80% of the Church today is in a highly structured system, where government is by bishops, seen today (among others) in the world-wide Anglican Church and, supremely, in the Roman Catholic Church, where the hierarchy of bishops is headed by the Pope.

Before we see what happened next, we'll look briefly at the rest of Cyprian's life.

#### 4.4 Completion of the biography of Cyprian

When the Emperor Decius was killed in 251, there was peace – no persecution – for six years. The Church in Roman Africa regained the ground it had lost. Then, at the end of 256, the next Emperor, Valerian, made the same demands as Decius had made, and for the same reasons. A new persecution broke out, this time directed primarily at the leaders of the Church.

Cyprian was arrested on 30 August 257 and sent into exile. A year later, the Emperor ordered the execution of all Christian leaders who would not sacrifice to the Roman gods. Cyprian was brought back to Carthage, and the consul interviewed him on 12 September 258. Cyprian refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods, so the consul sentenced him to be beheaded. He replied: 'Thanks be to God' He was executed on the next day, in the garden of the consul. A vast crowd followed Cyprian on his last journey. He knelt down, and prayed. He was the first bishop in Roman Africa to be martyred. His body was reverently interred by Christians near the place of execution.

## 5. CYPRIAN'S LEGACY

### 5.1 Metropolitan Sees

It was not long before the senior bishops in the chief cities elected an archbishop, one per Province, modelled on the Roman government, - see the orange areas on the map below – Rome, Carthage, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria.



The following chart starts in the New Testament; the establishment of Metropolitan Sees – the orange areas in the map on the previous page – are described in section 5 of the chart, that the Metropolitan bishops gained ascendancy over country bishops.

### Development of Episcopacy in the First Five Centuries

PERIOD	SOURCES	DESCRIPTION
1st century	New Testament	Elder-bishops and deacons in each church were under the supervision of the apostles.
Early 2nd century	Ignatius	Elders and bishops were differentiated. Each congregation was governed by bishop, elders, and deacons.
Late 2nd century	Irenaeus Tertullian	Diocesan bishops—a bishop now oversaw a group of congregations in a geographical area; they were thought to be successors of the apostles.
Mid-3rd century	Cyprian	Priesthood and sacrifice. Elders (presbyteros) come to be seen as sacrificing priests. Primacy of bishop of Rome was asserted.
Early 4th century	Council of Nicea	Metropolitan bishops (archbishops) by virtue of their location in population centers gained ascendancy over <i>chorepiscopi</i> (country bishops).
Late 4th century	Council of Constantinople	Patriarchs. Special honor was given to the bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. Patriarch of Constantinople was given primacy next to the bishop of Rome.
Mid-5th century	Leo I Council of Chalcedon	The supremacy of Rome—Leo I claimed authority over the whole church on the basis of succession from Peter.

The next step is described in the next section in the chart, about Patriarchs, and is illustrated in this map, where the senior churchman in five of these six areas – Carthage has now dropped out of Church leadership – were considered higher than archbishops, and their leaders were called

Patriarchs, and the Patriarch of Rome was known as the Pope.



Why is the present-day Roman Catholic Church not a member of the World Council of Churches? – because 349 other churches are members, and for the Roman Catholic Church to join would be an admission that it was just another Church among many. Until 1966, the Roman Catholic Church officially described all other Christians – including us – as ‘heretics’; since 1966, we have been classified as ‘separated brethren and sisters’, but we are still seen as outside the One True Church. Cyprian would thoroughly have approved – it was his idea.

## 5.2 Episcopal Church government

There are, today, basically three forms of Church government. There are many variations, which we'll look at in Lecture 25, but not until then because (b) and (c) below were not developed until the Reformation in the sixteenth century. However, to appreciate the immensity of Cyprian's legacy, they are mentioned briefly here, with the percentage of the world's Christians adhering to them.

### (a) Episcopal (government by bishops)

where bishops take decisions without being accountable to the congregation. 80% of the world's professing Christians today are Episcopal in their government – Anglican churches world-wide, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Roman Catholic Church, where the senior bishop is called the Pope, and the Orthodox Church in Russia and Greece and more than a dozen other countries. Authority flows from the top down, from archbishop to bishops to priests to members. Methodist and Lutheran and other Churches have the same structure, but call their leaders 'superintendents' or 'overseers' rather than bishops - but their church structure is still 'episcopal', because authority flows downward.

### (b) Congregational

where the congregation decides policy. 16% of the world's Christians today – for example, Baptists, Christian Brethren, Congregational and many Pentecostals.

### (c) Presbyterian

where elders take decisions on behalf of the congregation. 4% of the world's Christians today, e.g., the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, and many more. The local church is governed by its 'Session', and 'Sessions' group together to form a 'Presbytery'. It sends delegates to a General Assembly. Authority in the Presbyterian structure moves from the bottom up (by way of suggested agenda) and from the top down, by means of decisions of the General Assembly.

## 5.3 Cyprian's legacy – unity (good) but uniformity (bad)

Cyprian created a stable Church in North Africa; we have come a long way from Ignatius, whom we looked in lecture 2, urging that every autonomous local church should be led by its own bishop, supported by a number of elders and deacons. That was about the year 115 – now we have, by the year 260, one centrally-organised visible Church in North Africa, outside of which there was no salvation:

'You ought to know that the bishop is in the church and the church in the bishop. If anyone is not with the bishop, he is not in the church.'

and this became the model for the Western Church for the next thousand years.

The up sides and the down sides of Cyprian's legacy:

### The up-side

was its power to unify. Without the dominating authority of bishops and their synods (official meetings) to settle disputes, Christianity was in danger of dissolving into heresies and schisms.

## The downside

was its power to crush dissent and individual initiative, the priesthood of believers, and freedom and spontaneity in worship and church life. The church became firmly institutionalised, along the lines of the Roman Empire.

## Tension in Cyprian's thought

On the one hand, when the bishops were united, there was one Church, one visible, organized, hierarchical, Church. On the other hand, Cyprian also insisted that every bishop was supreme in his own church. The bishops were like shareholders in a company (the episcopate) - every shareholder had a share in the company, in conjunction with all the other shareholders, but they had freedom to control their own churches as they thought best for it.

This insistence on 'the independence of the bishop' led to controversy, when people who had been converted to Christianity through the break-away Church in North Africa and baptised into it, later wished to join the Catholic Church. Did they need to be rebaptized? Cyprian, following traditional African practice, said 'yes'. Stephen, bishop of Rome, (Lecture 3 at 2.5 and 2.6) said 'no', and sought to impose his view on others. This led to a breach of communion between Rome and Africa. A number of Eastern bishops sided with Cyprian and rebuked Stephen for his arrogance in forcing his view on others.

The situation was overtaken by a further wave of persecution, in 257, and by Stephen's death that year. The common threat led to closing of ranks. Africa and Rome tacitly agreed to go their own ways over rebaptism, a victory for Cyprian's position. (His views on rebaptism were later, in the fourth century, rejected by the Catholic Church in Africa.)

In due course Cyprian's view of a College of equal bishops was overtaken by the Roman Catholic idea of the Pope as the 'bishop of bishops', at least in the West. Cyprian's legacy was the nature and unity of the Church. As mentioned, his doctrine remained normative for more than a thousand years.

## Roman Africa's legacies

So we leave Carthage, with Tertullian's legacy of language that we still use today, Cyprian's legacy of Church government that many still use today, and we will come in Lecture 9 to the North African leader whose legacy of theology many still use today – Augustine.

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## Post-script

'I'm now reading Tertullian, Cyprian and others of the church fathers with great interest. In some ways they are more relevant to our time than the Reformers.'  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*.

Born in 1906, Bonhoeffer was a Protestant Lutheran Pastor, active in the German resistance to the policies of Hitler and Nazism. For his opposition to the Nazi regime, he was arrested and executed in April 1945.

## OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

### TOPIC FOR LECTURE 6 – CYPRIAN AND THE EUCHARIST

#### ‘Eucharist’

The earliest name for commemorating the death of Christ was ‘the Breaking of Bread’. Paul’s phrase ‘The Lord’s Supper’ was not widely used by early Christians. Some called it *koinonia*, Communion (the commonest word for it in modern Scotland), but in Cyprian’s time, the usual description was ‘Eucharist’ (from Greek, ‘thanksgiving’). The Roman Catholic word ‘Mass’ was not used by the Church until the fifth/sixth century.<sup>1</sup>

Eucharist before Cyprian - for a typical second-century Sunday service, see Topic 2.

Cyprian’s Treatise 63 ‘On the Sacrament of the Cup of the Lord’ is the only ante-Nicene work (that is, work written before the year 325) that deals exclusively with the celebration of the Eucharist.

Cyprian was the first to speak explicitly about two aspects of the Eucharist, which then became the norm. One was the idea of ‘spiritual food’ and the other was the idea of ‘sacrifice’. He combined them in a way that transformed the Church’s view of the Eucharist; his teaching that the Eucharist in some way perpetuated the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was developed and dominated later Western thinking

It might be helpful to read Section III, pages 313-15 of:

[http://www.academia.edu/4638920/The\\_Lords\\_Supper\\_in\\_the\\_Theology\\_of\\_Cyprian\\_of\\_Carthage](http://www.academia.edu/4638920/The_Lords_Supper_in_the_Theology_of_Cyprian_of_Carthage)

There is no need to ‘sign up’ – just read it as you find it.

If you type ‘Cyprian Eucharist’ into Google, you will get many articles. In reading them, remember that Protestants and Roman Catholics read Cyprian differently, each seeking to justify their present practice by reference back to him.

Be careful not to read all later controversies about the Eucharist back into the writings of Cyprian, even though the seeds of later thought may have been sown by his writings.

If you have time, Google ‘Cyprian of Carthage Letter 62’ and read about the issue of using wine and not wine mixed with water for the Eucharist, a practice which had developed in some of the Christian communities.

What do you make of all this in light of the New Testament teaching about ‘the Breaking of Bread’?

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<sup>1</sup> There are two explanations of where the word ‘Mass’ came from: (1) that catechumens were ‘dismissed’ (Latin ‘*missio*’) before the Eucharist or (2) that the closing words of the Latin liturgy, ‘*ite, missa est*’ – ‘Go, the congregation is dismissed’, were said by bishop or presbyter at the end of the service and so gave their name to it.