

## VALIDITY OF BAPTISM AND ORDINATION IN THE AFRICAN RESPONSE TO THE "REBAPTISM" CRISIS: CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE'S SYNOD OF SPRING 256

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*While Cyprian's Epistula 72, sent to Stephen of Rome after the spring 256 synod of African bishops, is well known for its part in what is known as the rebaptism controversy, it is less well known for what it says about the question of clerics who wished to leave a breakaway Christian sect and rejoin (or join) the mainstream ecclesial community. After considering the question of how frequently Cyprian wrote to Rome after African synods, this article explores Cyprian's understanding of the character of ordination. His concerns are relevant to the question of the validity of Anglican orders and the status of clergy recently ordained by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.*

IUBAIANUS, A BISHOP from an unknown church in Roman North Africa,<sup>1</sup> received a letter (*Epistula* 73) from Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, in response to one he had sent in mid-256.<sup>2</sup> In the letter there is mention of

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\* I am grateful for the funding from the Australian Research Council that made this research possible.

<sup>1</sup> On Iubaianus's church see Hans von Soden, "Die Prosopographie des afrikanischen Episkopats zur Zeit Cyprians," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 12 (1909) 261, who put forward the idea that Iubaianus was from Mauretania. This is repeated by Michael M. Sage, *Cyprian*, Patristic Monograph Series 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975) 321. J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, Routledge Early Church Monographs (New York: Routledge, 2002) 216 n. 37, suggests that the fact that Cyprian's letter to Iubaianus, read to the synod of September 256, tends to indicate that Iubaianus was a bishop well known to the Africans, thus probably an African himself. G. W. Clarke, in Saint Cyprian, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 4: *Letters 67–82*, Ancient Christian Writers 47 (hereafter cited as ACW) (New York: Newman, 1989) 221 n. 1, leaves it an open question.

<sup>2</sup> On the date of the letter see Joseph A. Fischer, "Das Konzil zu Karthago im Frühjahr 256," *Annuario historiae conciliorum* 15 (1983) 12 (hereafter cited as

(1) a synod that had met to discuss the question of the necessity of baptizing those who wished to join the church who had received baptism into a heretical or schismatic sect,<sup>3</sup> (2) a letter Cyprian had sent to Quintus (*Epistula 71*),<sup>4</sup> and (3) a recent (*nunc*) synod of 71 bishops from Africa (Proconsularis) and Numidia.<sup>5</sup> That latter synod, securely dated to spring 256, had reaffirmed the position taken at the earlier synod: “statuentes unum baptismum esse quod sit in ecclesia catholica constitutum ac per hoc non rebaptizari sed baptizari a nobis quicumque ab adultera et profana aqua uenientes abluendi sint et sanctificandi salutaris aquae ueritate.”<sup>6</sup> This places *Epistula 73* and the spring synod of 256 firmly within the so-called “rebaptism” controversy that plagued the last years of Cyprian’s episcopacy, and it is on this basis that they receive scholarly attention. However, as we are told in *Epistula 72*, the synod considered more than this one question. I shall turn to this other question toward the end of this article, as I consider the issue of how Cyprian operated as bishop in relation to other bishops in the context of the synod of spring 256. This second question also concerns the validity of a sacrament, in this case ordination, celebrated in a heretical or schismatic sect. First, though, I shall review the discussion of the validity of heretical or schismatic baptism at the spring 256 synod in the light of the interactions between Cyprian and other bishops.

### VALIDITY OF BAPTISM

The question of what to do about those who had received “baptism” at the hands of a schismatic or heretical minister had been addressed by a synod of 32 African bishops, only twelve months previously—in spring 255 I would argue—in response to a question from a group of Numidian bishops (*Epistula 70*). The decision of the synod—that those who had received baptism among heretics and schismatics were not baptized validly and needed to be baptized if they decided to join the church (which meant

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AHC); Clarke, *Letters* 4:219; idem., “Praecedit Dissertatio Biographica/Chronologica de Cypriani vita ac scriptis quam composuit,” in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi opera*, pars 3, 3: *Prolegomena*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 3D (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999) 703 (hereafter cited as CCL); Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* 109.

<sup>3</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula 73.1.1* (CCL 3C.529–30). This synod, I have argued, should be dated to spring 255. See Geoffrey D. Dunn, “Sententiam nostram non nouam promimus: Cyprian and the Episcopal Synod of 255,” *AHC* 35 (2003) 211–21. See also Joseph A. Fischer, “Das Konzil zu Karthago im Jahr 255,” *AHC* 14 (1982) 227–40.

<sup>4</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula 73.1.1* (CCL 3C.530).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 73.1.2 (CCL 3C.530).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: “We ruled that there is but one baptism and that is established within the Catholic Church; by this baptism we do not rebaptize but rather *baptize* all those who, coming as they do from spurious and unhallowed waters, need to be washed clean and sanctified in the genuine waters of salvation” (Eng. trans. in Clarke, *Letters* 4).

the churches loyal to Cyprian)—was communicated not only to the Numidian bishops but to a Mauretanian bishop, Quintus, as well (*Epistula* 71).<sup>7</sup> Yet, it would appear from the opening lines of *Epistula* 72, which Patout Burns describes as “routine communication,”<sup>8</sup> written soon after the spring synod of African bishops in the next year (256), that it was only then that Cyprian wrote to Stephen, bishop of Rome, about this matter for the first time.<sup>9</sup> In other words, it would seem that Cyprian had not written to Rome after the 255 synod. If this conclusion is right, then it is surprising that Cyprian had not written to him a year earlier (in 255), given that his practice was to write to Rome after African synods of bishops. We must investigate this practice a little further.

### CYPRIAN'S COMMUNICATION WITH ROME AFTER AFRICAN SYNODS

Cyprian had written to Cornelius of Rome in the aftermath of the 251 synod primarily because of the controversy that surrounded the delay of the African bishops in recognizing Cornelius as having been validly elected bishop, a situation that was due to the election of Novatian as a rival bishop (*Epistulae* 44, 45, 48).<sup>10</sup> There is no mention in these letters of the question of the readmission of the *lapsi* to communion, which had been the dominant issue at the synod, although there is a brief mention in a letter to Cornelius<sup>11</sup> of the synod's confirmation of Cyprian's excommunication of Felicissimus, the Carthaginian deacon,<sup>12</sup> to which excommunication the bishops in synod had joined five rebellious presbyters.<sup>13</sup> Yet, we do know, from a letter he wrote to another bishop, that Cyprian had written to

<sup>7</sup> In this paper I am ignoring the issue of those who had been baptized in a mainstream church before joining a schismatic or heretical sect and who now wanted to rejoin their former church.

<sup>8</sup> Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* 105.

<sup>9</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.1.1 (CCL 3C.523–24): “Sed de eo uel maxime tibi scribendum et cum tua grauitate ac sapientia conferendum fuit . . . eos qui sint foris extra ecclesiam tincti et apud haereticos et schismaticos profanae aquae labe maculati, quando ad nos atque ad ecclesiam quae una est uenerint, baptizari oportere.”

<sup>10</sup> On this synod see Joseph A. Fischer, “Die Konzilien zu Karthago und Rom im Jahr 251,” *AHC* 11 (1979) 263–86; Geoffrey D. Dunn, “The Carthaginian Synod of 251: Cyprian's Model of Pastoral Ministry,” in *I concili della cristianità occidentale secoli III–V* (XXX Incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana, Roma 3–5 maggio 2001), *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 78 (Rome: Institutum patristicum Augustinianum, 2002) 235–57; Luc Duquenne, *Chronologie des lettres de S. Cyprien: Le dossier de la persécution de Dèce*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 54 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1972) 29–32; Jean-Louis Maier, *L'Épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale, et byzantine*, *Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana* 11 (Rome: Institut Suisse de Rome, 1973) 19.

<sup>11</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 45.4.1–2 (CCL 3B.221–22).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 42 (CCL 3B.199).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 45.4.1–2 (CCL 3B.221–22). On the number see 43.3.1–2 (CCL 3B.202–203). See also 59.9.1 (CCL 3C.350–51).

Cornelius about the question of the *lapsi* in the light of the 251 synod—this letter is no longer extant.<sup>14</sup> It was a problem that was shared by both churches, and they both wanted the support of their overseas colleagues in their own struggles to control the local situations.

After the synod of 252 Cyprian wrote to Fidus, a bishop who, since he had been unable to attend the episcopal gathering, had posed some written questions for it to consider.<sup>15</sup> Cyprian informed Fidus of the resolutions of the synod with regard to his questions (*Epistula* 64). From a letter Cyprian wrote to Cornelius late in 252 we know that he had written to his Roman colleague, most likely just after the May synod, in light of the problem of rival bishops appearing in a number of places. Cyprian wanted to provide Cornelius a list of legitimate African bishops<sup>16</sup> and to inform him about, among other things, developments with regard to Fortunatus, the rival laxist bishop in Carthage appointed by Privatus, the deposed bishop of Lambaesis.<sup>17</sup> There is no actual evidence that a letter about the synod's proceedings was sent to Rome.

Cornelius was again the recipient of a letter (*Epistula* 57) from Cyprian after the synod of 40 bishops had met in Carthage, an event that I have argued ought to be dated to 253.<sup>18</sup> The African bishops informed Rome of their decision that, because of further impending persecution, reconciliation ought now to be given to the *sacrificati* who had been doing penance since their lapse during the Decian persecution. They wrote to Cornelius, hoping he would agree with their decision.<sup>19</sup>

The synod that met in late 254<sup>20</sup> took a negative stand on the issue of whether two deposed Spanish bishops, Basilides and Martialis, could be

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 55.6.2 (CCL 3B.262–63); Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.43.3 (*Eusebius Werke* II/2: *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Friedhelm Winkelmann, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, neue Folge 6/2 [Berlin: Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999] 614).

<sup>15</sup> On this synod see Joseph A. Fischer, “Das Konzil zu Karthago im Mai 252,” *AHC* 13 (1981) 1–11; Geoffrey D. Dunn, “Cyprian and His *Collegae*: Patronage and the Episcopal Synod of 252,” *Journal of Religious History* 27 (2003) 1–13, esp. 4 n. 22 for those who would identify *Epistula* 57 rather than 64 with the synod of 252.

<sup>16</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 59.9.3 (CCL 3C.351–52).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 59.10.1 (CCL 3C.353); 59.9.4 (CCL 3C.352). G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 3: *Letters 55–66*, ACW 46 (New York: Newman, 1986) 250 n. 45, suggests that this could have been a summary of the synod's reply to Fidus's questions.

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey D. Dunn, “*Censuimus*: Cyprian and the Episcopal Synod of 253,” *Latomus* 63 (2004) 672–88. See also Joseph A. Fischer, “Das Konzil zu Karthago im Frühjahr 253,” *AHC* 13 (1981) 12–26.

<sup>19</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 57.5.1 (CCL 3B.309): “Quod credimus uobis quoque paterna misericordiae contemplatione placitum.”

<sup>20</sup> On the dating of this synod see Joseph A. Fischer, “Das Konzil zu Karthago im Herbst 254,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 93 (1982) 223–39; Geoffrey D.

reinstated to their former positions, a stand directly opposed to Stephen of Rome's.<sup>21</sup> The African bishops wrote back to the Spanish churches that had sought their help to counter Stephen's support for the reinstatement of Basilides and Martialis (*Epistula* 67). Cyprian's letter makes no mention that he had heard of Stephen's position from the Roman bishop himself. There is no indication that the Africans wrote to Stephen about this matter at all.<sup>22</sup> Has such a letter not been preserved, or did they not inform him that their conclusions about the Spanish matter were different from his? What would have been the point of writing to Rome about this? Would the Africans simply have wished to keep Stephen informed, or would they have wanted him to reverse his opinion in the light of their own fuller understanding of what had transpired? Were they trying to avoid conflict by not telling him? We do not know. We can only hazard a guess that, at least directly, the situation in Spain was not seen by the Roman or Carthaginian churches as having a bearing on their own individual communities or on their mutual relationships.

If it was a feature of episcopal interaction in the Western Mediterranean in the third century for bishops to communicate synodal results to each other, what explanation can we offer for the apparent failure of the Africans to inform Rome of the decisions of the 255 synod? It would seem that Cyprian had written to Rome over the years about issues that affected them both, particularly when he needed the support of the western Mediterranean's most significant bishop, but that it might not have been such a regular occurrence as one first presumes. Burns suggests that in 255 the Africans were more concerned with what was going on in rival laxist communities (those who had broken away from the mainstream churches because they supported the easy readmission of all who had lapsed during the Decian persecution), which predominated in Africa, rather than in rigorist communities (those who, like the Novatianists, had broken away from the mainstream churches because they rejected the readmission to communion of anyone who had lapsed), which predominated in Rome.<sup>23</sup> If true, Burns's suggestion would go some way toward offering an explanation.

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Dunn, "Cyprian of Carthage and the Episcopal Synod of Late 254," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 48 (2002) 229–47.

<sup>21</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 67.5.3 (CCL 3C.455); 67.6.2–3 (CCL 3C.456–57).

<sup>22</sup> J. Patout Burns, "On Rebaptism: Social Organization in the Third Century Church," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993) 367–403, at 378 n. 65, suggests that a copy of *Epistula* 67 was included with the material that accompanied *Epistula* 72 to Rome. There is nothing in *Epistula* 72 to indicate that this was the case.

<sup>23</sup> Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* 105. On 216 n. 34, he suggests that *Epistula* 72 demonstrates that "not only did the Africans seem to have been unconcerned about a different Roman tradition of reception by imposition of hands but they made no reference to what could have been a problem in Rome: the practice of Novatian,

Elsewhere, though, I have commented about my reluctance to divide the “rebaptism” controversy in Africa into a laxist and then a rigorist phase.<sup>24</sup>

My first suggestion would be to say that, at the time of the 255 synod, Cyprian was unaware that those wanting to join the church from a heretical or schismatic sect (whether laxist or rigorist) and who had been “baptized” only in their sect posed a problem for the Romans. More to the point is that at the time of the 255 synod Cyprian did not anticipate how serious a problem admission of sectarians was to become for him.<sup>25</sup> It may have been only after Quintus wrote to Cyprian later in 255 and the topic came up for discussion again at the spring synod of 256 that Cyprian began to appreciate that this issue was not going away. Given that some African bishops had not been adopting Cyprian’s desired solution, this may have been the first moment when he and the bishops, gathered in synod in 256, decided that they needed to try to enlist the support of their significant Roman colleague. Despite all these theories, it may be a simple case of a letter from Carthage to Rome not having survived, so I am aware of the tentative nature of my suggestions. Yet, I would continue to argue that the opening lines of *Epistula* 72 seem to suggest that this was the first time Cyprian had written to Stephen about this matter.

### THE SYNOD OF SPRING 256

Certainly, the African bishops wrote to Stephen hoping that he would endorse their position.<sup>26</sup> The question is whether the Africans were simply informing Stephen or whether they knew that he was a supporter of the alternative practice of not “rebaptizing” and were writing to persuade him to change his mind.<sup>27</sup> Immediately after this comment to Stephen, Cyprian

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who did rebaptize converts.” On whether the Novatianists in Rome did rebaptize, see Dunn, “*Sententiam nostram*” 215 n. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Dunn, “*Sententiam nostram*” 216.

<sup>25</sup> Sage, *Cyprian* 310, makes the unjustified statement that at the end of *Epistula* 70 Cyprian invited the Numidian bishops to a further synod to discuss the matter. However, there is no reason to believe other than that Cyprian hoped that the issue would be resolved after the 255 synod.

<sup>26</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.3.1 (CCL 3C.527): “Haec ad conscientiam tuam, frater carissime, et pro honore communi et pro simplici dilectione pertulimus, credentes etiam tibi pro religionis tuae et fidei ueritate placere quae et religiosa pariter et uera sunt.”

<sup>27</sup> Of course, the practice of not “rebaptizing” was to become the church’s position. Augustine, *De bapt. con. Don.* 1.1.2 (Agostino, *Polemica con i Donatisti I*, ed. A. Lombardi, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana [hereafter cited as NBA], vol. 15/1 [Rome: Città Nuova, 1998] 266; ) would later argue: “Quod si haberi foris potest, etiam dari cur non potest?”

mentioned those bishops who would not change their viewpoint, and he repeated a characteristic comment: bishops could do whatever they wanted provided they were prepared to answer to God for it.<sup>28</sup> Graeme Clarke does not think that this is a subtle or veiled attack on Stephen's own position, given that in *Epistula* 71 the same comment referred undoubtedly to African bishops only.<sup>29</sup> Yet, Clarke believes, "Stephen's divergent views on the baptismal problem—and the Roman tradition itself—can hardly have been unknown."<sup>30</sup> The question, though, is when did Cyprian become aware of Stephen's practice?<sup>31</sup> Michael Sage accepts that Cyprian was aware of Stephen's opposition to the African practice as early as when he wrote *Epistula* 70 to the Numidian bishops.<sup>32</sup> I think this is reading too much into the letter. If Cyprian had been aware of Rome's divergent practice at the time of the 255 synod, he would surely have written to Rome in 255 seeking to persuade its bishop to change his practice, which, it seems, he did not do. If, on the other hand, Cyprian became aware of what was happening in Rome only some time after the 255 synod, at about the same time as he was becoming aware of how intransigent the "rebaptism" problem was in Africa, it would make sense to think that he then waited until he had discussed this newly discovered situation at another African synod before writing to Rome seeking to effect change. Perhaps, and this is the position I support, even at the time he wrote *Epistula* 72, after the spring

<sup>28</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.3.1–2 (CCL 3C.527–528). Cf. Sage, *Cyprian* 319.

<sup>29</sup> Clarke, *Letters* 4:217–18 n. 15. In this he is supported by Maurice Bévenot, "Cyprian's Platform in the Rebaptism Controversy," *Heythrop Journal* 19 (1978) 129. See Cyprian, *Epistula* 71.3.2 (CCL 3C.520–21). Likewise, the references in 71.3.1–2 to Peter and Paul should not be seen as indicating Stephen and Cyprian, particularly so because Cyprian did not identify Peter with Rome but with every episcopal see (*pace* Sage, *Cyprian* 311). On this point about Peter see Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Clement of Rome and the Question of Roman Primacy in the Early African Tradition," *Augustinianum* 43 (2003) 17–19, especially nn. 57 and 58, for references to the works of Maurice Bévenot and others that establish this point. See also Dunn, "Cyprian and the Synod of Late 254" 242 n. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Clarke, *Letters* 4:213. Fischer, "Das Konzil zu Karthago" 1, 4, likewise believes the Africans knew of Stephen's position already.

<sup>31</sup> Burns, "On Rebaptism" 377, with a note to *Epistula* 69, dated to between the middle of 253 and spring 255, stated: "The question [of rebaptism] may already have been under consideration for some time when Stephen was elected bishop of Rome in May 254." In his revision of this part of his article, which forms the first chapter of his *Cyprian the Bishop*, he writes now on 9: "The question might already have been under consideration for some time *in Africa* when Stephen was elected bishop of Rome in May 254" (my emphasis). This more nuanced position leaves open the question of how much Carthage knew about what was happening in Rome.

<sup>32</sup> Sage, *Cyprian* 310.

256 synod,

he did not know the situation in Rome, for the letter tends to suggest that it was the divergent practice in Africa that concerned Cyprian, not what was going on in Rome.<sup>33</sup>

This was the second synod of African bishops to address this issue, a fact that reinforces the point Cyprian often made in his letters, that bishops were free in their own churches to implement their own policies independently of synodal decisions. No doubt, if all the bishops who attended a synod stuck to the agreed policy, then the sheer weight of numbers would have pressured most other bishops to follow suit. That only 32 bishops had met in 255 would indicate that the scope for a united front was limited. Despite Cyprian's church being by far the largest, wealthiest, and most prestigious in Africa, many other churches did not automatically fall into line after the 255 synod. This would suggest that each local church prided its own independence and that the universality of the church—at least in Africa—was expressed through a consensus-building process among bishops.

In *Epistula* 72, Cyprian informed Stephen of some of the theological argument that supported the African stance. It would seem that Cyprian interpreted the alternative practice<sup>34</sup> of a penitential imposition of hands on a sectarian person seeking entry to a “mainstream” church (because those other mainstream churches accepted the validity of the heretical or schismatic initiatory practice) as an attempted part of the initiatory process itself.<sup>35</sup> In other words, Cyprian believed that there were churches that accepted the validity of one part of the heretical or schismatic initiatory process (the immersion in water) but did not accept the validity of the second part (the laying on of hands to impart the Spirit) because they insisted on repeating that second part (this is Cyprian's claim rather than his opponents' own understanding). I say “repeating,” for presumably the laying on of hands would have been celebrated once already as part of a

<sup>33</sup> Of course, the synod of spring 256 did not alter the African position posited a year earlier. In the face of continuing opposition, Cyprian had modified nothing, but rather had dug in his heels.

<sup>34</sup> Here the question is whether Cyprian's comments indicate that he knew that penitential imposition of hands was the practice in Rome or whether he was simply informing Stephen about what the Africans had discussed as being an issue in their own regions of Africa. Later, of course, Cyprian provides evidence that he did know the Roman practice (*Epistula* 74.1.2 [CCL 3C.564]), but I do not think we can tell whether he knew it at the time he wrote *Epistula* 72.

<sup>35</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.1.1 (CCL 3C.524): “eo quod parum sit eis manum inponere ad accipiendum spiritum sanctum, nisi accipiant et ecclesiae baptismum.” From *Epistula* 70.3.1 (CCL 3C.511) we discover that Cyprian had used the same kind of argument with the Numidian bishops with regard to anointing with chrism and reception of eucharistic communion in relation to immersion in water: “Neque enim potest pars illic inanis esse et pars praeualere.”

sect's baptismal practice.<sup>36</sup> According to Cyprian, these churches could not pick and choose which parts of a sect's baptism were valid. John 3:5 would indicate that water and the Spirit went together; if one part were not valid, neither would be the other part.<sup>37</sup> Of course, Cyprian's position does not accurately reflect his opponents' viewpoint and is rather disingenuous: They were not picking and choosing; they were laying on hands as a penitential, not as an initiatory action, because they accepted the validity of the complete initiatory process in schismatic and heretical sects.

Cyprian himself knew of the penitential laying on of hands,<sup>38</sup> and he later knew that Stephen was claiming to be doing this,<sup>39</sup> yet he could not accept that this is what ought to be or even could be done. Cyprian believed that one could not reconcile someone with the community who had not first been baptized into it.<sup>40</sup> His argument would have been clearer if he had put it like that rather than accuse his opponents of dividing the initiation ritual into what they were supposed to consider a valid and invalid part. Cyprian did not delve into his other arguments at this point but referred Stephen to the letters he had written to Quintus (*Epistula* 71) and the Numidian bishops (*Epistula* 70).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Rome replied that it accepted the validity of the laying on of hands in a sect's baptism (as well as the immersion in water). What it was doing in laying on of hands was for an entirely different purpose, namely, reconciliation. For Stephen's position we depend on Cyprian's *Epistula* 74. Even though Burns, "On Rebaptism" 399, makes the point that "in rejecting the practice of rebaptizing converts, therefore, Stephen argued primarily not for the validity of schismatic baptism but for the efficacy of the catholic ritual of reconciliation," it must be stated that one could only make an argument about the efficacy of reconciliation if one first accepted the prior validity of their baptism. Sage, *Cyprian* 305, states that we can find what Stephen believed from *Epistula* 73.16.1 (CCL 3C.547-48). It is not, in fact, explicitly clear that Cyprian was reporting Stephen's view.

<sup>37</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.1.2 (CCL 3C.524-25). Augustine, *De bapt. con. Don.* 1.1.2 (NBA 15/1.266) would later indicate that not even the Donatists would argue that those validly baptized could lose their baptismal status whether through apostasy or schism.

<sup>38</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 71.2.2 (CCL 3C.518).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 74.1.2 (CCL 3C.564).

<sup>40</sup> This is why I would qualify Bévenot, "Cyprian's Platform" 126, where he wrote that "Cyprian confused" the two impositions of hands. I do not think Cyprian was confused; he just could not accept the premise upon which the alternative position was built, viz., that this was a second laying on of hands (for reconciliation). He could not accept it because he believed that the first laying on of hands (for conferring the Spirit) in a sect's baptism was ineffectual for true initiation (as was the immersion in water) and hence, as I said, they could not be reconciled who had not first been initiated validly. I see Cyprian deliberately trying to confuse the issue rather than being confused himself.

<sup>41</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.1.3 (CCL 3C.525).

### VALIDITY OF ORDINATION

We may now consider the second topic that Cyprian brought to Stephen's attention in *Epistula* 72, that of the validity of ordination performed in a heretical or schismatic sect. Cyprian tells the Roman bishop that the African bishops gathered in synod agreed that those clergy who had left the church to join a heretical or schismatic sect, as well as those lay people who were given clerical office in such sects, and who now wished to be received (back) into a mainstream church could be received into communion, but would lose their clerical status.<sup>42</sup>

Although two types of rebellious clergy are covered by this provision, it is really the first type, those who had been clergy in a mainstream church before their defection, who were the main targets of this decision.<sup>43</sup> The decision is only natural, given that they would be the more numerous of the two types of clergy in a sect. This would cover those who continued to hold the same office in their breakaway community as in their mainstream church as well as those advanced to a higher rank like bishop.

In one sense there really is nothing new here, from Cyprian's perspective, except a clarification of a position he had long held. The contemporary theological distinction between validity and legality in sacraments, such that one could be ordained validly but illicitly, or the situation where validly ordained persons no longer exercise their ministry for some reason but still remain ordained were not ones that Cyprian could have accepted.<sup>44</sup> As far as the bishop of Carthage was concerned, someone who was ordained validly but joined a breakaway community in heresy and schism was a cleric no longer.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when Novatian engineered to have himself ordained as a rival bishop in Rome to Cornelius, Cyprian was able to write that, once a bishop had been appointed for a church, it was not possible (while he was the legitimate bishop) for another to be created in his place.<sup>46</sup> But it went further than this; the other was then nothing at all. Someone made bishop outside the unity of the one church was adulter-

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 72.2.1 (CCL 3C.525–26).

<sup>43</sup> Clarke, *Letters* 4:217 n. 12. My claim is obvious when one considers Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.2.3 (CCL 3C.527), where he writes about clergy who *seducti* lay people into leaving the Church. His statement would not apply to those only "ordained" in a sect.

<sup>44</sup> I see no evidence in Cyprian's writings that an issue like retired clerics, which may have forced him to consider this question, ever arose at this time.

<sup>45</sup> See Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Heresy and Schism according to Cyprian of Carthage," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 55 (2004) 551–74, where I argued that Cyprian did not clearly distinguish between heresy and schism, and therefore he would never have been able to accept Augustine's position against the Donatists.

<sup>46</sup> Cyprian, *Epistulae* 44.3.2 (CCL 3B.214): "alium constitui nullo modo posse"; 55.8.4–5 (CCL 3B.265).

ous.<sup>47</sup> Fortunatus and Maximus, who were the heads of breakaway communities in Carthage, were considered by Cyprian to be only pretend bishops, there being no validity to their episcopal ordinations at all.<sup>48</sup> Cyprian was more outraged that such disunity could exist than he was with technical issues of validity or legality.<sup>49</sup> A cleric who broke the unity of the church lost not only his capacity to exercise his ministry but his very identity as an ordained person—as in the case of Evaristus, a bishop who had been a supporter, if not an ordaining prelate, of Novatian as bishop and who was deposed from his position and, because he remained unrepentant, was not even considered a lay Christian.<sup>50</sup> Even confessors lost their status as confessor when they joined in schism.<sup>51</sup> Yet, it has to be admitted that Cyprian's concern was not primarily with the sacramental character of ordination but with a cleric's capacity to function, and it seems to have followed automatically, as far as he was concerned, that when one lost the capacity, one lost the character. One lost the capacity when one was no longer part of the church, and those caught up in heresy or schism were not part of the church as Cyprian defined it. In fact, such persons deserved death.<sup>52</sup> Cyprian saw the punishment of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram from Numbers 16:1–35 as the example of what happened to those who set themselves up as priests, even though, as Cyprian acknowledged, they did not do so outside the community, as had the schismatic and heretical Novatian.<sup>53</sup>

Previously, the Africans as well as the Italians had considered what to do with apostate clergy (those who had denied the faith as a result of Decius's edict) and who repented of this sin. They had not joined any breakaway community, yet they too were considered to be no longer members of the church. For them to be reconciled they had to rejoin the church from which their sin had not only excluded them but stripped them of membership. Clergy who had lapsed during the Decian persecution were readmitted to communion, but only as lay people.<sup>54</sup> Cornelius had decided this in Rome in the case of bishop Trofimus.<sup>55</sup> The 66 bishops gathered in synod in Africa in 252 reprimanded bishop Therapius for readmitting Victor, a

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 45.1.2 (CCL 3B.216).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 59.9.1–2 (CCL 3C.350–51). On these two pseudo-bishops see Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Cyprian's Rival Bishops and Their Communities," *Augustinianum* 45 (2005) 61–93.

<sup>49</sup> Cyprian, *Epitulae* 46.1.2 (CCL 3B.224–25); 59.5.2 (CCL 3C.345).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 50.1.2 (CCL 5B.239); 52.1.2 (CCL 3B.244).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 52.1.2 (CCL 3B.244).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 59.4.1 (CCL 3C.432–23).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 69.8.1–3 (CCL 3C.480–82); 73.8.1 (CCL 3C.538); 75.16.2 (CCL 3C.596).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 67.6.3 (CCL 3C.457).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 55.11.3 (CCL 3B.269). At this time, the churches had agreed to readmit only *libellatici* to communion, not *sacrificati*; thus the emphasis on Trofimus and his community being only *turificati* (incense offerers) might have been Cornelius's

former presbyter, to communion, not because of his clerical status but because he was a *sacrificatus*, and readmission at this point only had been granted to *libellatici*.<sup>56</sup> That he was readmitted as a lay person and not as a presbyter was taken for granted by Cyprian. In his letter to Epictetus, quite possibly the new bishop of Assuras, Cyprian expressed his displeasure at the fact that Fortunatianus, the former bishop who had lapsed by offering sacrifice, was attempting to reclaim his position.<sup>57</sup> This was unacceptable to Cyprian, who spent much of the rest of his letter outlining his theological objections to anyone who had sinned trying then to act in a ministerial capacity. Fortunatianus, as a *sacrificatus*, had not even been readmitted to communion as a lay person, this option not being adopted by the Africans until 253.<sup>58</sup> The former Spanish bishop, Basilides, for a while had accepted that as a lapsed Christian he had lost his episcopal office and that the most he could hope for was readmission to communion as a lay person.<sup>59</sup> Yet, in the case of Maximus, the Roman presbyter and confessor (to be distinguished from Maximus, the Novatianist bishop in Carthage), even though he had supported Novatian and had joined in his schism,<sup>60</sup> he was welcomed back into communion by Cornelius and readmitted to his former position as presbyter.<sup>61</sup> The letter from Cornelius to Cyprian indicates that the Roman bishop accepted that clerics who left the church lost their status. In this instance he believed that extenuating circumstances justified his unusual action, for which he was quick to write Cyprian a detailed explanation. In his response (*Epistula* 51) Cyprian carefully avoided making any reference to this particular action, mentioning Maximus's clerical position in only the most cursory of ways, for even though Cyprian would have disagreed strongly with what Cornelius had done, he recognized other bishops' rights to administer their own churches as they saw fit.

In *Epistula* 72 there is further clarification of the policy for the African churches. Those considered in the previous paragraph were all apostates

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justification for extending the policy beyond the suggested limits. This seems to be the thrust of Cyprian's comments to bishop Antonianus, who had raised the question.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 64.1.1 (CCL 3C.418). See Dunn, "Cyprian and His *collegae*" 5.

<sup>57</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 65.1.1 (CCL 3C.426).

<sup>58</sup> Cyprian and his synod in 251 confirmed the decision of nine other African bishops to excommunicate two *sacrificati* bishops, Iovinus and Maximus (*Epistula* 59.10.2 [CCL 3C.353–54]). They too had not been readmitted as lay people because, at this stage, no *sacrificati* were being readmitted to communion.

<sup>59</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 67.6.2 (CCL 3C.456).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 46.1.2 (CCL 3B. 212). One should note that, in writing to this Maximus, Cyprian avoided any mention of his (former) clerical status (49.1.4 [CCL 3B.235]).

<sup>61</sup> [Cyprian], *Epistula* 49.2.5 (CCL 3B.236): "Quapropter Maximum presbyterum locum suum agnoscere iussimus."

(except Maximus the presbyter).<sup>62</sup> What about clergy who had not only lapsed but had joined a breakaway community or who had not lapsed but who had broken away from the church because of its attitude towards the reconciliation of the lapsed and joined a breakaway community and who now wanted to rejoin a mainstream church? This latter situation would apply particularly to the Novatianists. Cyprian had expressed his opinion already about the validity of the schismatic episcopal ordinations of Novatian, Fortunatus, and Maximus and about the clerical status of the former bishop Evaristus, all of whom were schismatic. However, none of these individuals had sought readmission to true ecclesial communion; they remained in sin. Could those who repented of their sin of heresy and schism (and this distinguished them from someone like Maximus the presbyter) resume their ministerial status and responsibilities when they were reconciled? It would seem, therefore, that the African bishops in spring 256 were discussing not the clerical status of all heretical and schismatic clergy, but only the particular status of those who wished to recant their schismatic rupture with the church and rejoin ecclesial communion.

For the Africans, this group too, because of their sin, lost their clerical position. It was not as though their ordination was declared to have been invalid (unless they were lay people ordained clerics or clerics ordained as bishops while in schism) but that their schism meant that their clerical status expired. It was consistent with what they had said earlier and was not really an extension of their policy but a spelling out of exactly who else was affected by it. What is new in the 256 decision was that it related to rebellious clergy who were not apostates but schismatics and heretics and who wanted to return. Cyprian saw no real difference in terms of the damage either apostates or schismatics caused to the church and in what the only solution could be, as we can tell through a comparison of the theological arguments in *Epistulae* 65 and 72. The policy had simply been spelled out in detail to cover a new situation.

If the Africans did not usually write to Rome after their episcopal synods, why was this an exception? I suspect it was because of the fact that Rome had not fully supported this policy in the past. I have already noted the way Cornelius dealt with Maximus, the Roman presbyter and confessor, and how Stephen had responded to the former Spanish bishops, Basilides and Martialis. While Cornelius agreed with the policy but made an exception, Stephen's position is less clear. Did he too consider the case of the former Spanish bishops an exception, or was he less committed to this policy? One needs also to take into account Stephen's reaction to the appeals from Faustinus, bishop of Lyons, to support him in his efforts to

<sup>62</sup> Basilides and Martialis became schismatic when they formed alternative Christian communities alongside their former churches.

depose Marcianus, bishop of Arles, who was a Novatianist sympathizer. While Cyprian had been prepared to give that support, Stephen had remained silent. Although Cyprian claimed that Marcianus had separated himself from communion, a careful reading of the letter would suggest that the bishop of Arles had not joined in schism, but had continued to endorse a rigorist policy with regard to the *lapsi* at a time when most other bishops had softened their initial positions.<sup>63</sup>

Surprisingly, given Cyprian's frequent statements that individual bishops were free in their own churches to follow their own policies,<sup>64</sup> here it seems that he supported Marcianus's being removed from office because of his refusal to follow the policy adopted by so many other churches.<sup>65</sup> If it were true that Marcianus was not schismatic, then we cannot take this as a clear-cut further example of Stephen or the Roman Church being lenient with former clergy. Yet, perhaps this is the way it appeared to the Africans who were taking a hard-line stance on Marcianus. Thus, when it came to the synod of spring 256, perhaps the African bishops felt that the bishop of Rome needed reminding in the gentlest of terms that Rome's softer policy with regard to dissident clerics was out of step with where the Africans were.

At the spring 256 synod, the Africans put forward several arguments to support their decision: First of all, it is a sin to bring disunity to the church.<sup>66</sup> Anyone who rebels against Christ commits this sin. Anyone who, because of their position, influences others to join them in deserting the church commits sin, particularly if any of those who follow them into a heretical or schismatic sect die unreconciled.<sup>67</sup> For Cyprian, those who were to act in a mainstream church as clergy in offering sacrifice upon the altar needed to be without blemish.<sup>68</sup> Thus, even though the sin of dividing the church could be forgiven, there was an enduring consequence. There was a two-tier membership system within Cyprian's ecclesiology: It was tolerable to be a lay person with a sinful past, but it was not acceptable to be a cleric with a sinful past, particularly when that sin related to the exercise of one's pastoral duties and the unity of the church. Cyprian attempted to justify his view, claiming: "What do we leave for the good and the innocent who never abandon the Church, if we give honours to those

<sup>63</sup> Had Marcianus recognized Novatian as the legitimate bishop of Rome, Stephen's reluctance to support the deposition of Marcianus becomes impossible to understand. Indeed, Marcianus could claim never to have been excommunicated (*Epistula* 68.2.1 [CCL 3C.464]).

<sup>64</sup> See Maurice Bévenot, "A Bishop Is Responsible to God Alone (St. Cyprian)," *Recherches de science religieuse* 39 (1951–52) 397–415.

<sup>65</sup> Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* 154.

<sup>66</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula* 72.2.2 (CCL 3C.526–27).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 72.2.3 (CCL 3C.527).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 72.2.2 (CCL 3C.526).

who abandoned us and rebelled against the Church?"<sup>69</sup> If apostasy was a sin that caused such a blemish, even more so was schism. Schismatics were not only traitors but rebels as well.<sup>70</sup>

The extant record does not give nearly as much of the synodal background discussion that informed the African bishops' decision about the validity of ordination in a breakaway sect as it does about the validity of baptism in such sects. If the numbers receiving baptism in a sect (compared with the number of validly baptized who joined sects) was small, the number of those being ordained in sects must have been even smaller. One could imagine that an argument about the invalidity of heretical or schismatic ordination could be made similar to the one about the invalidity of heretical or schismatic baptism. That an argument was not made must be due to the fact that the issue was too insignificant compared with the problem of the number of those who were clergy (deacons, presbyters, or bishops) when they left the church. We are told that those who receive ordination in a sect "have then attempted to offer up false and sacrilegious sacrifices."<sup>71</sup> The sacrifices were false because those offering them had no right to do so, and sacrifices were sacrilegious because they could not be offered to the true God. Those who believed in God would belong to the church, and since these people had left the church they could not believe in God. The God in whom they believed was not the same one in whom true Christians believed.<sup>72</sup> Therefore their sacrifices must be idolatrous. Despite what Burns argues about the charge of sacrilege being more applicable to the laxist bishops rather than the Novatianists,<sup>73</sup> it was the fact that these individuals were schismatics that made their actions polluted (both baptizing and offering sacrifice upon the altar), and such a charge applied equally to laxists and Novatianists.<sup>74</sup> As with the question of baptism, this argument followed logically from Cyprian's narrow ecclesiology: The church is an enclosed garden or a sealed fountain,<sup>75</sup> and the Spirit does not operate in the activity of "ministers" outside the confines of the

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 72.2.3 (CCL 3C.527): "Nam quid bonis et innocentibus atque ab ecclesia non recedentibus reseruamus, si eos qui a nobis recesserint et contra ecclesiam steterint honoramus?"

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 72.2.1 (CCL 3C.525).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 72.2.1 (CCL 3C.526): "sacrificia foris falsa ac sacrilega offerre conati sint."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 69.8.1 (CCL 3C.480–81). <sup>73</sup> Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* 108.

<sup>74</sup> Cyprian, *Epp.* 69.1.4 (CCL 3C.471); 70.1.3 (CCL 3C.505); 70.2.3 (CCL 3C.509); 71.1.3 (CCL 3C.517); 72.1.1 (CCL 3C.524); 73.2.3 (CCL 3C.532); 73.6.1 (CCL 3C.536); 73.8.2 (CCL 3C.538); 74.2.3 (CCL 3C.566); 75.5.2 (CCL 3C.586); 75.23.1 (CCL 3C.600). One must remember that Cyprian did not have such a clear-cut distinction between heresy and schism as that which operates today.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 69.2.1 (CCL 3C.472); 70.2.3 (CCL 3C.509); 73.10.3 (CCL 3C.540–41); 74.11.2 (CCL 3C.578); 75.15.1 (CCL 3C.595).

church.<sup>76</sup> However, while Cyprian, in a number of letters, spelled out his reasoning regarding the invalidity of baptism performed in breakaway communities, he did not contextualize his thoughts about the invalidity of ordination performed in breakaway communities (or the lapsing of clerical status for clergy who joined breakaway communities) in terms of restricting the Spirit's activity to the sphere of the church.<sup>77</sup> Those no longer in communion with the true college of bishops had nothing at all Christian about their communities. The notion promoted at the Second Vatican Council about other churches not in full communion with the Church of Rome still being churches to some extent, albeit imperfectly, was one that Cyprian could not have accepted.<sup>78</sup> For him there could be no such thing as imperfect communion; there was either communion or not.

The question of the status of schismatic and heretical clergy is important to the question of the validity of schismatic or heretical baptism. If those clergy who joined a sect were automatically deprived of their status, was their ritual initiation of members into a sect invalid? Cyprian's extracts from Leviticus and Exodus in *Epistula 72* would point to an affirmative answer.<sup>79</sup> All those in schism had heretical faith and so those baptized with their baptism could receive only aberrant faith.<sup>80</sup> In his letter to Iubaianus Cyprian confirmed that those outside the church did not possess the power to baptize.<sup>81</sup> His position was devastatingly simple: "Our view is that without exception all heretics and schismatics are without any powers or rights whatsoever."<sup>82</sup> Augustine would later demonstrate that even this attitude

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 69.10.2–69.11.3 (CCL 3C.484–86); 70.1.3 (CCL 3C.505); 70.3.1 (CCL 3C.511); 73.6.2 (CCL 3C.536); 73.12.1 (CCL 3C.542); 73.21.3 (CCL 3C.555); 74.4.2 (CCL 3C.569); 74.5.4 (CCL 3C.570); 75.8.1 (CCL 3C.589); 75.13.2 (CCL 3C.594).

<sup>77</sup> In *Epistula 70.2.3* (CCL 3C.509), however, the basis for the invalidity of schismatic and heretical baptism is the fact that the ministers of that baptism do not have the capacity to baptize because they have lost the Spirit.

<sup>78</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen gentium* no. 8: "Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines" (Engl. trans. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1975] 15–16); *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 3: "Moreover, some, even very many, of the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church." The idea of imperfect communion can also be found in John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* nos. 11–12.

<sup>79</sup> Cyprian, *Epistula 72.2.2* (CCL 3C.526). Lev 21:17; Ex 19:22 and 28:43.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 73.5.3 (CCL 3C.535–36).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 73.7.2 (CCL 3C.537): "Vnde intellegimus non nisi in ecclesia praepositis et euangelica lege ac dominica ordinatione fundatis licere baptizare et remissam peccatorum dare, foris autem nec ligari aliquid posse nec solui, ubi non sit qui aut ligare possit aut soluere."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 69.1.1 (CCL 3C.470): "dicimus omnes omnino haereticos et schismaticos nihil habere potestatis ac iuris."

would change in the African churches, when he wrote that just as those truly baptized do not lose the sacrament of baptism if they join a break-away community, so too the ordained do not lose the sacrament of orders and the power to baptize if they join a breakaway community.<sup>83</sup> A few sentences later he would write that those ordained, if they return to the church from schism, either resume their former responsibilities or, even if they do not, still retain the sacramental character of ordination.<sup>84</sup> Augustine made the point that just as baptism imparted a character to the person baptized, such that they did not need to be rebaptized if, after having joined a breakaway community, they decided to rejoin a mainstream church, so too ordination imparted a permanent character, such that there was no need for “reordination” if a schismatic cleric sought readmission to a mainstream church. As we have seen, Cyprian would not have held this view (it was not something he actually considered) because he did not see ordination in terms of imparting a permanent character. For him one was a cleric for as long as one remained pure and in communion with the church. Augustine even agreed with Rome’s position that those ordained in schism should be recognized as ordained validly.<sup>85</sup> Augustine, of course, did not consider *Epistula* 72 to be relevant in his anti-Donatist writings.<sup>86</sup> This is not the place to provide the full account of Augustine’s reception of Cyprian. Yet it is important to see how Augustine could find some “wiggle room” in Cyprian’s recognition that those truly baptized before they joined a breakaway community and who wished later to rejoin the church were not rebaptized (only those whose only baptism had been in such a community were deemed by Cyprian as needing to be “rebaptized”), such that he could support the long-dead bishop of Carthage while rejecting or correcting some of his ideas adopted by the Donatists.

## CONCLUSION

Episcopal synods were a characteristic feature of Cyprian’s exercise of his pastoral responsibilities as bishop. The “rebaptism” controversy demonstrates that in a church that saw itself as a collection of communities and

<sup>83</sup> Augustine, *De bapt. con. Don.* 1.1.2 (NBA 15/1.268): “Sicut autem baptizatus, si ab unitate recesserit, Sacramentum Baptismi non admittit; sic etiam ordinatus, si ab unitate recesserit, Sacramentum dandi Baptismi non admittit.”

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*: “Nam sicut redeuntes, qui priusquam recederent baptizati sunt, non rebaptizantur: ita redeuntes, qui priusquam recederent ordinati sunt, non utique rursus ordinantur; sed aut administrant quod administrabant, si hoc Ecclesiae utilitas postulat; aut si non administrant, Sacramentum ordinationis suae tamen gerunt; et ideo eis manus inter laicos non imponitur.”

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *Epistulae* 43.5.16 (NBA 21/1.338–340); 185.10.47 (NBA 23.70).

<sup>86</sup> Augustine, *De bapt. con. Don.* 6.15.25 (NBA 15/1.516).

that lacked a centralized authority, uniformity of Christian life and practice was established by building consensus among bishops. Synods provided the ideal forum in which to achieve that. *Epistula 72*, written after the spring synod of 256, reveals Cyprian as a bishop relentlessly determined to see his policies of baptizing those who had been “baptized” in heresy or schism and of readmitting repentant clergy to communion as lay persons implemented throughout the churches not only of the African provinces but in Rome as well. The letter informs us that he was no authoritarian bishop, although he certainly was relentless and determined, but that he sought to be a persuasive one. When he was not arguing his case in person before an assembled group of bishops, he was engaged in letter writing, all of it in an attempt to convince others to agree with him. On the question of the validity of baptism and ordination, he alluded only to his theological arguments and did not seek to persuade on the basis of his social standing or the importance of the church of Carthage. No doubt, these factors operated in the minds of many of his African colleagues. In building his consensus, Cyprian walked a fine line. While he wanted consensus, he was prepared to grant those bishops who did agree with him their freedom of opinion and practice. By not hastily breaking off communion with anyone, he kept the channels of communication open for the possibility of later persuasion and maximized his potential for success. *Epistula 72* highlights not only Cyprian’s firm theological positions but his skill as a leader among bishops.

The question of what happens to the ordination status of those clergy who depart from the church or who are ordained in breakaway communities or, as it would be expressed today more sensitively, in communities not in full communion with the church of Rome is still an important one for Christianity today. Among Catholics, questions of the validity of Anglican orders and Leo XIII’s *Apostolicae curae* of 1896, Vatican II’s comments on imperfect communion, and the 1988 excommunication of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre for ordaining bishops for his Society of St. Pius X (although not identical with Cyprian’s situation) need to be understood as more recent examples of the ongoing issues of sacramentality and ecclesiology that so concerned Cyprian in the mid-third century.