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Cyprian and the Bible

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Cyprian and the Bible:
a Study in Third-Century Exegesis

by

MICHAEL ANDREW FAHEY, S. J.



1971

J. C. B. MOHR (PAUL SIEBECK) TÜBINGEN



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PREFACE

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR CYPRIAN'S WORKS

(Listed according to Hartel's order)

Don	Ad Donatum
(Idola	Quod idola dii non sunt)
Test I, II, III	Ad Quirinum (Testimoniorum libri tres)
Vir	De habitu uirginum
Un	De ecclesiae catholicae unitate
Lap	De lapsis
Dom	De dominica oratione
Mort	De mortalitate
Fort	Ad Fortunatum (De exhortatione martyrii)
Dem	Ad Demetrianum
Op	De opere et eleemosynis
Pat	De bono patientiae
Zel	De zelo et liuore
(Sent	Sententiae episcoporum de haereticis baptizandis)
Ep(p)	Epistula(e)

The references, e.g., Dom 4; 269.8 and Ep 63,14; 712.26, should be read as follows:

- Dom 4; 269.8 = The citation is taken from De dominica oratione, section 4 (the heavy-set numbers in the margin of Hartel's edition), located on page 269, beginning line 8.
- Ep 63,14; 712.26 = The quotation is found in Epistula 63, section 14, located on page 712, beginning line 26.

Note: In Chapter 3, the references are usually given to the line at which the Scripture text begins; in Chapter 4, and elsewhere, the line reference is to the beginning of the quotation.

CHAPTER I: Cyprian's Life and Works;

Principal Studies on Cyprian since 1868

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1. CYPRIAN'S LIFE

Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus was born either at the close of the second century or at the very beginning of the third century. The date of his birth, often estimated between A.D. 200 and 210, is no more than a well-educated guess, based on the fact that apparently he was a person already well-established in his career and in Carthaginian society at the time of his conversion.¹⁾ Although not historically certain, it is highly probable also that Cyprian was born in Carthage itself, of well-to-do pagan parents, which may be concluded from the extent of his property and wealth, much of which, according to Pontius, was disposed of at his conversion or later confiscated during his first exile. As a pagan Cyprian was a professional teacher of rhetoric, or a practitioner of the art of eloquence, not, as is often asserted, a lawyer.²⁾ Because he was a noted citizen, perhaps even of senatorial rank, his conversion to Christianity caused some notoriety in Carthage. The extent to which Cyprian understood the Greek language remains unclear. Chapman³⁾ claims that Cyprian probably did not understand Greek; Bayard⁴⁾ states, on the basis of meager documentation, that he did know Greek. At any rate, as will become clear in the course of this study, Cyprian never mentions the fact that the Sacred Scriptures in their Latin form were based on a Greek text. Every indication is that, unlike Tertullian, he never consulted the original text of the LXX or of the NT. He employed a fixed Latin translation already available to him in Carthage.

Cyprian's initiation into Christianity came through a Carthaginian priest, Caecilianus, as he is called by his biographer, the deacon Pontius (*Vita Cypriani*, 4),⁵⁾ or Caecilius, as Jerome identifies him. Under his direction he began, even before his baptism, a study of the Christian Bible⁶⁾ and probably also the writings of Tertullian. Cyprian was baptized probably about 245 or 246, a date merely deduced

from the fact that at the time of his episcopal consecration he was still considered a neophyte (adhuc neophytus; nouellus, Vita, 5); an articulate group of clerics in Carthage opposed Cyprian's appointment as bishop because he had been a Christian for such a short time. Shortly after his conversion he was ordained a priest, and either in 248 or early 249 was made bishop of Carthage, a position he held until his death in 258. As bishop of Carthage he played the leading role in North African ecclesiastical life, since his position corresponded to what would later be known as a "metropolitan". Soon after becoming bishop, the persecution of Christians under Decius broke out in 250, ending a long period of some thirty-eight years of peace, during which time the religious fervor of many Christians apparently had waned. At the outbreak of the Decian persecution in Carthage⁷⁾, Cyprian went into exile, convinced that he could better attend to the needs of the Church by temporary absence than by premature martyrdom. He justified his fleeing on the basis of Christ's teaching in the NT (cf., Apoc 18:4b and Mt 10:23a), but his decision met with criticism both in Carthage and Rome. After some fifteen months of exile in an unknown location, Cyprian returned to Carthage in the spring of 251, complaining that "certain priests" had prevented his return somewhat earlier before Easter Day that year (Ep 43,1). A council of African bishops was convened after Easter to decide the future of the lapsed Christians. About this time Cyprian delivered his treatise De lapsis to his congregation in Carthage. Relative calm ensued for several years, except for a plague in Carthage during the year 252, and the threat of a new persecution in 253 under Gallus, which actually never materialized.

With the outbreak of the Valerian persecution in 257 Cyprian was forced in August to go into exile to the nearby coastal city of Curubis. Here he remained until August or early September of the following year, when he returned to Carthage and was beheaded on September 14, 258, just outside the city limits.⁸⁾

2. CYPRIAN'S WRITINGS

Cyprian's brief corpus of writings which occupies only two short volumes in its modern edition, has made it possible in this study to analyze every Biblical text cited in his writings. For, from the period of 247 until his death in 258, Cyprian wrote only twelve treatises (libelli), for the most part sermons, parenetic exhortations, or testimonial collections of Scripture texts. The second volume of Hartel's edition of Cyprian's works contains 81 epistulae, but of these letters only 65 were written by Cyprian.⁹⁾ Six of these 65 letters were written as summaries of the proceedings of various local councils over which Cyprian presided (Epp 57, 61, 64, 67, 70, 72). However, even here, his style and personal stamp are so obvious that there can be no doubt that he also composed these letters. In Hartel's edition of Cyprian's letters the following 16 letters were not written by Cyprian, but by clerics in Carthage and Rome, some even by the Bishop of Rome: Epp 8, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30, 31, 36, 42, 49, 50, 53, 75, 77, 78, 79. In this present study these letters of Cyprian's correspondents are not analyzed except occasionally when their use of Scripture sheds particular light on our understanding of Cyprian's exegesis. Among these letter, Ep 75 was written in Greek by Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. It is sometimes claimed that Cyprian translated this letter into Latin himself, but this is unlikely.

Brief Chronology of Cyprian's Writings

The question regarding the chronology of Cyprian's writings is not crucial to this present investigation of his Scripture citations. In the short period of ten years no notable shift in his use of the same Scriptural texts is observable. Exceptions, especially texts such as Mt 12:32 and Mk 3:28-29, relating to the possibility of the Church's forgiving sins, are given separate consideration. The chronology proposed here is provided merely for a general appreciation of Cyprian's literary career. Dates are given on the basis of modern research; if later investigation necessitates slight adjustment of dates, no significant adjustment to our conclusions seems warranted.

Pontius' Vita Cypriani (chap. 7) enumerates ten treatises of Cyprian, in a rhetorical and descriptive fashion, apparently in the following order: Vir, Lap, Un, Dom, Dem, Mort, Op, Pat, Zel, Fort. Pontius' list was not intended to be a chronological listing, but it has often been uncritically appealed to in support for dating the treatises.¹⁰⁾ A more likely chronological order of Cyprian's works would seem to be (including two more works not mentioned by Pontius): (Don), (Test), Vir, Op, Dom, Lap, Un, Zel, Mort, Dem, Fort, Pat. The treatise Idola dii non sunt is now widely regarded as spurious, although some scholars still opt for its genuineness.¹¹⁾ This treatise, at most Cyprian's personal jottings from his readings of Minucius Felix and Tertullian, is not included in this study. Furthermore, because of its total lack of Scriptural texts, it contributes nothing to our knowledge of Cyprian's use of the Bible.

The following description seems to mirror accurately when Cyprian composed his treatises and letters. From the time of his conversion to the outbreak of the Decian persecution (A.D. 247-249), Cyprian wrote: Don, Test (I, II, III), Vir, Op and Epp 1, 2, 3, 4. Ad Donatum, a rhetorical apologia for his conversion, written in a turgid style which Cyprian subsequently abandoned in favor of more direct and unaffected discourse, dates from the earliest period of his life as a Christian. Scripture plays an almost negligible role in this work. The first two books of his collection of Scriptural texts, Ad Quirinum, or as they came to be called later Testimonia,¹²⁾ or incorrectly Testimoniorum libri aduersus Iudaeos, have a common preface and should be dated in the early years about 248. These collections reflect the fruit of Cyprian's Scripture studies under the initial direction of Caecilianus (Vita, 4). The third book of the Testimonia, a longer supplementary collection of Scripture texts devoted to norms of Christian conduct, was written separately and is provided with a distinct preface. It was composed however only a very short time after Test I-II. In Test III Cyprian's attitude toward sinners (cf. Test III,28) argues for its composition before the apostasies of the Decian persecution, that is, about the year 249. Von Campenhausen's assertion

that the three books of testimonies were written while Cyprian was still a layman is merely a guess;¹³⁾ the testimonies more likely date from the early years of his priesthood and episcopacy. Wohleb¹⁴⁾ attempted without success to reverse the order of Test I-II and Test III by an analysis of the two prefaces. Koch¹⁵⁾ has resoundingly refuted this hypothesis. Another treatise written before the Decian persecution is De habitu uirginum, a sermon addressed to consecrated virgins. The tone is already that of a bishop, but none of the turmoil characteristic of the Decian persecution is reflected in this work.¹⁶⁾ The treatise shows similarities with Test III.¹⁷⁾ The treatise De opere et eleemosynis should be dated in this same period prior to the Decian persecution, circa 249. Various dates for Op have been previously suggested, ranging from 250 to 256, but the arguments of Rebenack for placing it in the year 249, based on internal analysis of the writing, seem more likely.¹⁸⁾ From this same period prior to the Decian persecution should be dated the Epistulae 1, 2, 3, 4.

In Cyprian's exile during the Decian persecution (January 250 to Easter 251) he composed 39 letters (Epp 5--43)¹⁹⁾ and probably his commentary on the Lord's Prayer. The decree of Decius may have been published in Carthage on January 3; shortly afterwards Cyprian disappeared from the city. From internal evidence, it is clear that Epp 5--20 were written in the spring of that year. Réveillaud²⁰⁾ has argued convincingly for dating De dominica oratione at the same time as the composition of Ep 11. According to him, the commentary was written between January and April in 250, and was concerned with the problems of unity occasioned, not by the Novatian schism (and therefore before 251), but with the local schism of Felicissimus. The small number of defections from the Christian faith in these early months would account for the absence of any preoccupation with the lapsi. Later in the same year Cyprian composed Epp 25-29, 32-35, 37-40, three of which (38, 39, 40) are similar to panegyric orations. Before Easter, in the spring of 251, while still in exile, Cyprian wrote Epp 41 and 43.

The treatise De lapsis and De ecclesiae catholicae unitate, written only months apart, reflect the situation of the first months of Cyprian's return from exile.²¹⁾ De lapsis, probably the earlier work of the two, was read at the Council held in Carthage after Easter in 251. In that same year Cyprian composed the first letters written since his return to Carthage, Epp 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 51, 52, 54. Koch's arguments for placing the treatise De zelo et liuore in the year 251 seem convincing.²²⁾ He argued that the difficulties of Church harmony treated in the work are not those of the later controversy over heretical baptism, but fit more conveniently into the brief period of peace before the outbreak of the great plague. He argued then that Zel was written after Epp 45-47 but before Ep 57. Also it appears that Ep 55 was composed at the end of the year 251. Bayard²³⁾ placed Ep 64 and 65 in the year 251 in connection with the Fifth Council of Carthage, but the view of Monceaux²⁴⁾ and others who date them in 253 is preferred here.

Ep 56 was written in 252 sometime before Easter. After Easter Cyprian wrote Epp 57 (a synodal letter), 58 and 59. From the autumn of that same year comes Ep 60. In connection with the plague in 252 Cyprian composed two companion pieces, one, a work of consolation addressed to Christians, De mortalitate; the second, Ad Demetrianum, a defense against the pagans' charges that the Christians were to blame for the plague. Koch has argued that Mort was written shortly before Dem.²⁵⁾

In 253 a new persecution under Gallus seemed imminent. Probably in this year Cyprian composed his second collection of proof-texts on martyrdom, Ad Fortunatum, later called De exhortatione martyrii. Already Cyprian's attitude toward lapsed sinners is different from his testimonies written before the Decian persecution. Koch dates Fort in the spring of 253 at the time when Gallus' persecution seemed likely.²⁶⁾ Weber's new critical edition will opt for a later date, 257, at the eve of the Valerian persecution. Although this is a distinct possibility, it seems more likely to attach Fort to the crisis of 253; Cyprian's literary output declined sharply in the last years of his life and Fort fits more easily into

the year 253. Toward the close of that same year Cyprian probably composed Epp 61, 62, 63, 64, 65.

In the last four years of his life Cyprian composed only Epp 66--81 and his treatise on patience. Epp 67--74 are easily dated by cross reference to the dates of Stephen's years as Bishop of Rome (254-257), with whom Cyprian argued against the validity of heretical baptism. Specifically, Epp 66, 67, 68 would seem to have been written in 254; Epp 69, 70, 71 in 255. In the spring of 256 he composed Epp 72 and 73. Cyprian mentions in Ep 73,26 (798.19) that he has just drawn up a treatise on patience. This is obviously the work De bono patientiae occasioned by the baptismal controversy and published in 256.²⁷⁾ Cyprian wrote E 74 in the autumn of 256; the proceedings of the Seventh Council of Carthage, the Sententiae Episcoporum, a work not of Cyprian but merely a protocol of the views of African bishops on heretical baptism, also dates from 256.

In July, 257, the Valerian persecution began and on August 2, Pope Stephen was martyred. Cyprian went into exile to Curubis on August 30 from where he composed Ep 76 in 257. In the following year, 258, while still in exile, Cyprian wrote Epp 80 and 81. He returned to Carthage shortly before his trial and execution on Sept 14, 258.

3. HARTEL'S CRITICAL EDITION OF CYPRIAN'S WORKS; DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 1868

The turning point in scientific textual studies on Cyprian's works is the appearance between 1868 and 1871 of W. Hartel's edition, one of the first publications of the Vienna Corpus.²⁸⁾ Since the time of the publication, however, there has been general dissatisfaction with the edition. Hartel's text leaves much to be desired, especially his text of the biblical collections: Test and Fort. For example, in collating Test, Hartel relied on only six MSS. Undecided about which MSS presented the truest text of Cyprian's Biblical citations, he ultimately opted for the oldest, the eight-century MS Sessorianus (A). This mistake has been repeatedly indicated, perhaps most notably illustrated in the case of the Psalm

citations. However, because Hartel listed most of the variants of the Codex Laureshamensis (the Lorsch codex, 'L'), now known to be one of the finest MSS of the Testimonia, scholars have been able to correct Hartel's readings, in large measure, by reading the 'L' variants in the critical apparatus. As we shall see shortly, however, the work of R. Weber has now rendered this rather haphazard method obsolete. Hartel's edition of Fort is likewise not above reproach, for here also he relied on too few MSS, four or five. The resultant text, however, is not as corrupt as the Test.

Besides the faults of Hartel's text, his edition was hampered by a very imperfect Scriptural Index, which has led more than one scholar astray. He inadvertently omitted all the Scriptural references from pp. 273-304 (Dom 10--Mort 12); there are numerous misprints in the Index and no attempt is made to list Cyprian's frequent allusions to Scriptural texts. Citations occurring in letters written by Cyprian's correspondents are listed in the Index as Cyprianic. For this reason, one of the objects of this present study is to provide in an appendix a totally revised Scriptural Index to accompany Hartel's edition.

A new edition of Test and Fort was projected since 1905. In a series of prolegomena articles in the Journal of Theological Studies C.H. Turner periodically published from 1905 until 1930 the results of his investigations.²⁹⁾ Turner offered in particular valuable correctives to Cyprian's formulae of quotations from the OT and NT, the orthography of proper names, and the numbering of the Psalms as given in Hartel's edition. In 1928 Turner offered a revised Scriptural Index, unfortunately only for the historical books of the OT. Work on the proposed new edition was interrupted by the death of its principal collaborators: W. Sanday (d. 1920); H.L. Ramsay (d. 1929); C.H. Turner (d. 1930); A. Souter (d. 1949); and Cardinal Mercati (d. 1957). Fortunately for Cyprianic research the work of these scholars has been concluded by Dom Robert Weber, O.S.B., of the Abbey of Saint Maurice and Saint Maur in Clervaux, Luxembourg. In his new edition of Test and Fort which will shortly be published by the Corpus Christianorum Weber used all the previous

investigations of these scholars and broadened the MSS basis. Weber uses 17 MSS for Test and 14 MSS for Fort, together with numerous fragments. The present writer is deeply indebted to Dom Weber's gracious assistance in making available to him this new collation of Test and Fort, as yet unpublished. In this study of Cyprian's exegesis, all the Scripture citations occurring in Test and Fort are cited according to Weber's new text. For Test and Fort the reader has before him the most accurate text of Cyprian's Latin Scriptural citations available by modern paleography. All other citations (with the exception of Un, which follows Bévenot's text) are cited from Hartel's edition. The present writer, as a general principle, has not altered the orthography of Scripture texts occurring in the other treatises and letters of Cyprian. Thus, words as Israhel and elemosyna occurring in Test and Fort, appear as Israel and eleemosyna when cited from Hartel's text of other writings. This admittedly results in a slight inconsistency of orthography, but it would have been beyond the competence of the present writer and an unwarranted anticipation of future critical editions to alter Hartel's readings.

Since Hartel's first critical edition, other works, besides Test and Fort, have been re-edited. A slightly better text of Cyprian's letters is now available. Hartel's edition of the letters, though marred by occasional errors of judgment and a confusion regarding the MSS families, is not seriously defective. But certain correctives have been subsequently contributed by von Soden's study of the Cyprianic collection.³⁰⁾ Bayard, himself an expert on Cyprian's Latin, published a new Latin-French edition of the letters. While not strictly a critical edition and not eliminating the need for an eventual new edition, Bayard does correct Hartel's classification of the MSS families and provides some 200 corrections.³¹⁾ Bayard's text of the letters has been used in this present work as a check against Hartel's text.

A new edition of the De lapsis by J. Martin³²⁾ appeared in 1930. Martin collates only one additional MS, 'M', the

Munich Codex, 4597 (9th century) to Hartel's edition. Here again the need for a new critical edition is evident.

Once such new edition has been published for the De ecclesiae catholicae unitate by Maurice Bévenot, whose numerous publications have enhanced his reputation as one of the world's leading Cyprian authorities. Bévenot began his studies of Cyprian's MSS in an earlier study of the double edition of Chap. 4 in Un.³³⁾ In 1961, as part of his study on the history of the transmission of Cyprian's treatises, he provided a totally new edition for the entire treatise Un.³⁴⁾ This edition which retains the same pagination as the Hartel edition is the one cited consistently in this present study.

The proposed new edition of Cyprian's works for the Corpus Christianorum series will be the result of joint collaboration. M. Simonetti of the University of Cagliari, Sardinia, has been entrusted with most of the treatises. As of 1969 his research is unfinished. The new edition will also contain Weber's Test and Fort, and Bévenot's Un plus his new collation of Lap. A new edition of the letters will offer particular challenges.

In addition to the Cyprianic research of these scholars, the present writer has been able to profit from the work of the Vetus Latina Institute in Beuron, West Germany. Under the direction of B. Fischer, O.S.B., some 27 volumes are projected in this reconstruction of the pre-Vulgate Latin Scripture texts and all the Scriptural citations of the Latin Fathers. This series then is a modern continuation of the work of P. Sabatier (1682-1742), and the so-called 'Itala' text of the Gospels produced by A. Jülicher, W. Matzkow and K. Aland. The method for collecting the Patristic Bible texts draws its inspiration from the work of J. Denk (1848-1927). To date the complete volumes of the Vetus Latina text have been published for Genesis (1951-1954); Ephesians (1962-1964); the Catholic Epistles (1956-1968); and part of the volume on Philippians and Colossians, namely, Phil 1:1--4:7 (1966-1968). The present writer has been able to consult the valuable indexes in the published volumes to Cyprian, as well as consulting the files of the Institute