

0257-0257 – Concilia Carthaginensia – Documenta Omnia

The Council Of Carthage Held Under Cyprian

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THE COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE HELD UNDER CYPRIAN. A.D. 257.

Elenchus.

Introductory Note.

The remains of the Acts.

Notes, with St. Cyprian's Epistle to Januarius, et al.



Introductory Note.

It is commonly supposed by the commentators that what follows is the "Canon of St. Cyprian" referred to in the Second canon of the Synod in Trullo. Johnson⁵⁰⁰ thinks that that canon comes down to us as Canon XXXIX. of the Apostolic Canons. Baronius⁵⁰¹ agrees with Asseman⁵⁰² in thinking that from hatred to Rome the Greeks adopted the theory of the non-validity of heretical baptism. "But," as Hefele⁵⁰³ well remarks, "in that case they would have contradicted themselves."

Zonaras remarks: "This is the most ancient of all the synods. For that which was held at Antioch in Syria concerning Paul of Samosata was more ancient than the others, being holden in the time of the Roman Emperor Aurelius, but this one is still earlier. For the great Cyprian finished his martyr course in the time of the Emperor Decius: but there was a long interval between Aurelian and Decius. For many emperors reigned after the death of Decius, to whom at last Aurelian succeeded on the throne. Therefore this is by far the most ancient of all synods. In it moreover above eighty-four bishops were gathered together, and considered the question as to what was to be done about the baptism of those who came to the Church after abandoning their heresies, and of schismatics who returned to the Church."

500 Johnson. *Clergyman's Vade Mecum*. Notes *in loc.*

501 Baronius. *Annal. ad ann.*, 692.

502 Asseman. *Bib. Jur. Orient.* Tom. I., p. 414.

503 Hefele. *Hist. Councils*, Vol. V., p. 224, note 2.



The Synod held at Carthage over which presided the Great and Holy Martyr Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

A.D. 257.

(*Found in Beveridge, Synodicon, Tom. I., p. 365, and in Labbe and Cossart, Concilia, Tom. I., col. 786.*)

WHEN very many bishops were met together at Carthage on the Calends of September from the province of Africa, Numidia and Mauritania, with the presbyters and deacons (the greater part of the people being likewise present) and when the holy letters of Jubaianus to Cyprian had been read, and Cyprian's answers to Jubaianus, concerning heretical baptisms, as well as what the same Jubaianus afterwards wrote to Cyprian,

Cyprian said: Ye have heard, my dearly beloved colleagues, what our fellow bishop Jubaianus has written to me, taking counsel of my littleness concerning the illicit and profane baptisms of heretics, and the answer which I made him; being of the same opinion as we have been on former occasions, that heretics coming to the Church should be baptized and sanctified with the Church's baptism. Moreover there has been read to you also the other letter of Jubaianus, in which answering for his sincere and pious devotion to our letter, not only he agrees therewith but offered thanks that he has been so instructed by it. It only remains therefore that we, each one of us, one by one, say what our mind is in this matter, without condemning any one or removing any one from the right of communion who does not agree with us.

For no one [of us⁵⁰⁴] has set himself up [to be] bishop [of bishops],⁵⁰⁵ or attempted with tyrannical dread to force his colleagues to obedience to him, since every bishop has, for the license of liberty and power, his own will, and as he cannot be judged by another, so neither can he judge another. But we await the judgment of our universal Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, who one and alone hath the power, both of advancing us in the governance of his Church, and of judging of our actions [in that position].

[*The bishops then one by one declared against heretical baptism.*⁵⁰⁶ *Last of all (col. 796):*]

Cyprian, the Confessor and Martyr of Carthage, said: The letter which was written to Jubaianus, my colleague, most fully set forth my opinion, that heretics who, according to the evangelical and apostolic witness, are called adversaries of Christ's and anti-Christ's, when they come to the Church,

⁵⁰⁴ These words are omitted in Zonaras's Greek! The very gist of the matter for the Easterns.

⁵⁰⁵ These words are omitted in Zonaras's Greek! The very gist of the matter for the Easterns.

⁵⁰⁶ These will be found translated in full in the Oxford "Library of the Fathers," Vol. 17. "St. Cyprian's Epistles," p. 286; also in the American reprint of the "Ante-Nicene Fathers," Vol. V. "Hippolitus, Cyprian, etc.," p. 565.

should be baptized with the one (*unico*) baptism of the Church, that they may become instead of adversaries friends, and Christians instead of Antichrists.

Notes.

ZONARAS.

These are the opinions therefore of the fathers, which assembled in council with the great Cyprian: but they do not apply to all heretics nor to all schismatics. For the Second Ecumenical Council, as we have just said [i.e. in the Preface he has placed to the acts of the synod. *Vide L. and C., Conc.*, Tom. i., col. 801] makes an exception of some heretics, and give its sanction to their reception without baptism, only requiring their anointing with the holy chrism, and then anathematizing at the same time their own and all heresies.

Balsamon does not print the acts of the Council at all but only the letter of St. Cyprian (Labbe and Cossart, *Concilia*, Tom. I., col. 799.) I have not thought it worth while to place here the remarks of the eighty-six bishops, ὡς μὴ ἀναγκαῖαι, οἷα μὴδε ἐνεργοῦσαι, to quote Zonaras's words.

BINIUS.

The allusion here is to the decree of Stephen, who was wont, according to the custom of his elders, to be styled "Bishop of bishops," and because he had acrimoniously threatened excommunication to all not agreeing with him.



On the disputed historical fact as to whether St. Cyprian died in or out of the communion of the See of Rome the reader will do well to consult Puller, *The Primitive Saints and the See of Rome*.

I place here St. Cyprian's Seventieth Epistle in the Oxford Translation (*Epistle of St. Cyprian*, pp. 232 *et seqq.*). This letter is addressed to Januarius, Satterminus, etc., and is headed in Beveridge's *Synodicon* "Canon I."

Epistle LXX.

Cyprian, Liberalis, Caldonius, etc., to their brethren Januarius, etc. Greeting.

WHEN we were together in council, dearest brethren, we read the letter which you addressed to us respecting those who are thought to be baptized by heretics and schismatics, whether, when they come to the one true Catholic Church, they ought to be baptized. Wherein, although ye yourselves also hold the Catholic rule in its truth and fixedness, yet since, out of our mutual affection, ye have thought good to consult us, we deliver not our sentence as though new but, by a kindred harmony, we unite with you in that long since settled by our predecessors, and observed by us; thinking,

namely, and holding for certain, that no one can be baptized without the Church, in that there is one Baptism appointed in the holy Church, and it is written, the Lord himself speaking, "They have forsaken me, the Fountain of living water, and hewed them out broken cisterns that can hold no water." Again, holy Scripture admonishes us, and says, "Keep thee from the strange water, and drink not from a fountain of strange water." The water then must first be cleansed and sanctified by the priest, that it may be able, by Baptism therein, to wash away the sins of the baptized, for the Lord says by the prophet Ezekiel, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be cleansed from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." But how can he cleanse and sanctify the water, who is himself unclean, and with whom the Spirit is not? whereas the Lord says in Numbers, "And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean." Or how can he that baptizeth give remission of sins to another, who cannot himself free himself from his own sins, out of the Church?

Moreover, the very interrogatory which is put in Baptism, is a witness of the truth. For when we say, "Dost thou believe in eternal life, and remission of sins through the holy Church?" we mean, that remission of sins is not given, except in the Church; but that, with heretics, where the Church is not, sins cannot be remitted. They, therefore, who claim that heretics can baptize, let them either change the interrogatory, or maintain the truth; unless indeed they ascribe a Church also to those who they contend have Baptism.

Anointed also must he of necessity be, who is baptized, that having received the chrisem—that is, unction, he may be the anointed of God, and have within him the grace of Christ. Moreover, it is the Eucharist through which the baptized are anointed, the oil sanctified on the altar. But he cannot sanctify the creature of oil, who has neither altar nor church. Whence neither can the spiritual unction be with heretics, since it is acknowledged that the oil cannot be sanctified nor the Eucharist celebrated among them. But we ought to know and remember that it is written, "Let not the oil of a sinner anoint my head;" which the Holy Ghost forewarned in the Psalms, lest any, quitting the track, and wandering out of the path of truth, be anointed by heretics and adversaries of Christ. Moreover, when baptized, what kind of prayer can a profane priest and a sinner offer? in that it is written, "God heareth not a sinner; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."

But who can give what himself hath not? or how can he perform spiritual acts, who hath himself lost the Holy Spirit? Wherefore he is to be baptized and received, who comes uninitiated to the Church, that within he may be hallowed through the holy; for it is written, "Be ye holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord." So that he who has been seduced into error and washed without should, in the true Baptism of the Church, put off this very thing also; that he, a man coming to God, while seeking for a priest, fell, through the deceit of error, upon one profane. But to acknowledge any case where they have baptized, is to approve the baptism of heretics and schismatics.

For neither can part of what they do be void and part avail. If he could baptize, he could also give the Holy Ghost. But if he cannot give the Holy Ghost because, being set without, he is not with the Holy Ghost, neither can he baptize any that cometh: for that there is both one Baptism,

and one Holy Ghost, and one Church, founded by Christ the Lord upon Peter, through an original and principle of unity; so it results, that since all among them is void and false, nothing that they have done ought to be approved by us. For what can be ratified and confirmed by God, which they do whom the Lord calls his enemies and adversaries, propounding in his Gospel, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." And the blessed Apostle John also, keeping the commandments and precepts of the Lord, has written in his Epistle, "Ye have heard that Antichrist shall come; even now are there many Antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." Whence we, too, ought to infer and consider, whether they who are the adversaries of the Lord, and are called Antichrists, can give the grace of Christ. Wherefore we who are with the Lord, and who hold the unity of the Lord, and according to this vouchsafement administer his priesthood in the Church, ought to repudiate and reject and account as profane, whatever his adversaries and Antichrists do; and to those who, coming from error and wickedness, acknowledge the true faith of the one Church, we should impart the reality of unity and faith by all the sacraments of Divine grace.

We bid you, dearest brethren, ever heartily farewell.