



lived in a rather diverse and flexible environment, in which ideas were floating from all sides and religious communities were competing with one another for adherents. It would have been useful to include more of the diversity of the late-antique and early Christian environment and less of the 1800 years that followed.

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*Un solo battesimo, una sola chiesa: Il concilio di Cartagine del settembre 256.* By Paolo Bernardini. [Testi e ricerche di scienze religiose, Nuova serie 43.] (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino. 2009. Pp. 524. €34,00 paperback. ISBN 978-8-815-12072-4.)

The last of the episcopal synods over which St. Cyprian of Carthage presided in the middle of the third century in Roman North Africa was held in September 256. Unlike for his other synods, where evidence about them is preserved in letters sent from the synod or in brief references in other letters, the *sententiae*, or interventions, of the eighty-five bishops present (plus two proxy statements) are preserved from this synod. The topic was the one that had dominated Cyprian's synods for a couple of years and was creating serious rifts within the early Church, particularly with the church of Rome: what was the status of those who had been baptized in schism? Led by Cyprian, the North African bishops stated one after the other that those who had experienced some ritual of initiation in a schismatic community had not received valid initiation and that, if they wished to be Christian, they needed to be initiated (and these bishops rejected calling this a demand for "reinitiation" or "rebaptism" as they denied any validity to the first ritual) in an authentic church.

Following the appearance of a new critical edition of the *sententiae* in 2004 in the *Corpus Christianorum series Latina*, Paolo Bernardini has produced this detailed examination of the synod and its transcript of proceedings. His interest is not so much with the doctrinal issue of the conditions for the validity of the sacraments of initiation, but about what this text reveals about Cyprian's processes of consultation and decision-making with regard to his fellow bishops and other Christians.

The work begins with a detailed and very handy survey of scholarship on Cyprian and the African synods (pp. 30-61), which finishes with a consideration of my publications on Cyprian. The theological issues are canvassed in the subsequent chapter through an examination of the historical context of the complex series of events and theological positions expressed with regard to the phenomenon of people "initiated" into schismatic Christian communities (pp. 65-125). Next comes a chapter that places this synod, its participants, and procedures in the context of other synods in the early Church (pp. 127-222). This is a particularly helpful contribution to scholarship. The

longest chapter (pp. 223-373) is a painstaking commentary of each *sententia*, together with Latin text and Italian translation. Some of it is repetitive, but that comes from the nature of the *sententiae* themselves, and occasionally more descriptive than analytical, but the wealth of information provided and the reference to scholarship will make this the standard account of this synod for many years to come. The final chapter is an examination of events after the synod and its reception into later tradition (pp. 375-431). Again, this is a most welcome contribution. The indices and bibliography are superb.

This book is invaluable and essential reading for all interested in the life and times of Cyprian of Carthage. Yet its relevance, like that of Cyprian himself, does not end there. While the theological issue of the status of the minister as a condition for the validity of the administration of a sacrament is one that has been settled, the question of how the Church reaches decisions like that is one that admits of ongoing discussion and suggestion. This book will help people realize that there has been a variety of ways in which authority has been exercised in the Church over the centuries and that the episcopal collegiality of the kind exemplified by Cyprian and the *sententiae* of his fellow North African bishops has both advantages and pitfalls to offer to the contemporary Church.

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*Per la storia del foro privilegiato dei deboli nell'esperienza giuridica alto-medioevale dal tardo antico a Carlo Magno.* By Cecilia Natalini. [Archivio per la storia del diritto medioevale e moderno, Studi e Testi, Vol. 14.] (Bologna: Monduzzi Editore. 2008. Pp. xii, 213. ISBN 978-8-832-36142-1.)

The belief that all decent people are morally obliged to protect disadvantaged persons—widows, orphans, strangers, the poor, and the helpless—from oppression by the rich and powerful runs deep into the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition as Exodus 22:21-25, for example, plainly shows. In this book, based on her doctoral thesis at the University of Trent, Cecilia Natalini examines the ways in which ecclesiastical and civil authorities from Constantine I to Charlemagne attempted, with variable success, to enforce this obligation.

The process, as Natalini tells it, began with the imperial constitution *Si contra pupillos* promulgated by Constantine in 334. In this constitution the emperor commanded imperial judges to protect widows, young persons, those disabled by long illness, and "others made wretched by the wrongs of fortune" from oppression by opponents who sought to take advantage of their disabilities. Should judges fail to do so, the emperor ordered provincial authorities to compel culprits to appear in person before him to answer for their misdeeds. This constitution was subsequently incorporated into official collections of Roman law, including the *Theodosian Code* and the *Code of*