When Eucharists Attack: Discerning the Body in Cyprian's *On the Lapsed*

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Abstract

Cyprian of Carthage's *On the Lapsed*, written in the aftermath of the third-century Decian persecution, contains several stories of the eucharist attacking apostate Christians. These Christians claimed they had been admitted to the eucharist by local, highly esteemed martyrs and confessors. Cyprian, who had fled during the persecution and been unpopular since the day of his election, could not afford to confront this group directly. Instead, he crafted a text that conjured up an autonomous eucharist that policed itself against unworthy intruders. Moreover, he used the graphic language of bodily suffering and dismemberment to scramble the boundaries between lapsed Christian, bishop, and martyr, essentially reconfiguring himself as a martyr.

Keywords

Cyprian, eucharist, martyrdom, persecution, apostasy, sacrifice, bishops, USCCB

Introduction

In response to Joe Biden's election as the President of the United States, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released a document in January 2022 entitled *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church.* It rehashed contemporary Catholic teaching on the eucharist, warning that if a person "in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to reject the

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defined doctrines of the Church, or knowingly and obstinately to repudiate her definitive teaching on moral issues," then they ought to "refrain" from and "not be admitted" to eucharistic communion.[1] The "definitive teaching" implied was the prohibition on abortion, a topic that has preoccupied the USCCB more than any other political issue in recent years.[2] Those who reject the teaching, the bishops wrote, do "not receive the grace the sacrament conveys" but commit sacrilege, for

> St. Paul warns us that *whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself* (1 Cor 11:27–29).[3]

The quote ended there, omitting the next verse: "That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying" (1 Cor 11:30). That the eucharist might physically harm and kill its recipients was not part of the bishops' argument.

It was, however, central to the argument of one of their predecessors, Cyprian of Carthage, a Latin bishop writing in the aftermath of the third-century Decian persecution. Many Christians had "lapsed," or fallen, by participating in the sacrifices ordered by the new emperor, and Cyprian warned that any attempts by the lapsed to receive the eucharist were futile, for the eucharistic elements would themselves prevent it. According to him, it had already been happening: the eucharist had variously turned itself to ash, choked a recipient, caused another to vomit, and ignited a brief fire. Cyprian narrates these disasters in his 251 treatise *On the Lapsed*, written for a local synod of bishops that Spring.[4] *On the Lapsed* is remarkable for

[1] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2022) 47–49, https://www.usccb.org/resources/mystery-eucharist-life-church. The document, widely understood as a direct rebuke of President Biden and the Democratic party, was passed by a vote of 168 to 55 on 18 June 2021, after considerable disagreement between conservative and liberal bishops. See coverage in Michelle Boorstein, "Catholic Bishops Back Document that Could Lead to Limits of Communion for Biden," *Washington Post* (18 June 2021), https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/06/18/biden-catholic-president-bishops-abortion-communion/.

[2] The USCCB's voting guide, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007) viii, identifies abortion as the bishops' "pre-eminent priority." The bishops reissued the guide in 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023, in advance of the presidential elections.

[3] USCCB, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, 47 (italics in original).

[4] I rely throughout on the excellent overviews of Cyprian's life and writings by Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); idem, *On the Church: Select Treatises; St. Cyprian of Carthage* (Popular Patristics 32; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2006) 11–44; *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage* (trans. and annot. Graeme W. Clarke; 4 vols.; Ancient Christian Writers 43, 44, 46, 47; New York and Ramsey: Newman, 1984–1989) 1:12–44; Graeme W. Clarke, "Cyprian: A Brief Biography," "Chronology of the Letters," and "Chronological Table," in *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Epistularium: Prolegomena* (ed. G. F. Diercks and G. W. Clarke; CCSL; Turnhout: Brepols, 1999) 3D:679–709; J. Patout Burns, Jr., *Cyprian the Bishop* (Routledge Early Church Monographs; New York: Routledge, 2002); and Christian Hornung, *Cyprian von Karthago* (Fontes Christiani 98; Freiburg: Herder, 2023) 7–78.

its construction of the eucharist as a rival to non-Christian sacrifice, its portrayal of a self-policing eucharist, and its graphic descriptions of dismembered, wounded bodies. Cyprian combined these features to reconfigure his role in the conflict over the lapsed, a tricky situation involving opponents of considerable authority. To appreciate this rhetorical effect, we must first situate the text in the third century.

The Decian Persecution and its Aftermath

In 250, the emperor Decius ordered that sacrifice be offered by all citizens of the empire. Forty-four papyri attesting to the decree survive.[5] A typical certificate, or *libellus*, includes the name of the petitioner(s), witness(es), a date between 12 June and 14 July 250, and attestation that the petitioner(s) poured a libation of wine, offered sacrifice, and ate some of the sacrifice.[6] Because Decius's decree was issued after Caracalla's 212 *Constitutio Antoniniana*[7] granting citizenship to all free persons within the empire, an unprecedented number of Christians was affected, making the Decian decree the first universal, as opposed to local or sporadic, persecution.[8]

As in all persecutions, Christians responded variously. Some offered the required sacrifice and became known as the lapsed. Others bribed their way out of the requirement, obtained fraudulent *libelli*, or had stand-ins appear for them. Some, like Cyprian—in a decision that did lasting damage to his reputation—abandoned their homes and went into hiding (*Lapsed* 3). Christians who refused to sacrifice were imprisoned, tortured, and, if they still refused, executed. Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria at the time, described the results of the decree in his town:

> Everyone, in effect, was cringing with fear. And immediately, among the more eminent people, some came forward because they were afraid, others who held public offices were forced by their duties, while others were dragged by their associates. They were called by name, and approached the impure and unholy sacrifices, some pale and trembling, not as though they were not going to sacrifice but as if they were going to become sacrifices and victims for the idols. . . . But others ran readily to the base of the altars, stoutly affirming in their audacity that they had never been Christians; about them the Lord made the truest prediction, that they will hardly be saved. Of the rest, some followed these two groups, but others fled. Others were caught, and of these some went on to be bound and imprisoned, and some of them after being locked up for many days and before even coming to the place of

[5] James B. Rives counts 44 surviving papyri; Rives, "The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire," *JRS* 89 (1999) 135–54, at 135. Decades earlier, John R. Knipfing had counted 41; Knipfing, "The Libelli of the Decian Persecution," *HTR* 16:4 (1923) 345–90, at 386–87.

[6] Knipfing, "The Libelli," 347.

[7] Ulpian, *Digest* 1.5.17. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 78.9.

[8] This point was first made by W. C. H. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) 232. See Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, 205–23. P. Keresztes notes that it was probably due to the *Constitutio Antoniniana* that nearly all those named in the papyri carry Caracalla's *nomen gentilicium* Aurelius (or Aurelia for women); Keresztes, "The Decian *Libelli* and Contemporary Literature," *Latomus* 34:3 (1975) 761–81, at 762.

> judgment swore that they would refuse [to sacrifice], while others persevered for a while under torture, but at the end failed. But the solid and blessed pillars of the Lord, strengthened by him and receiving power and strength corresponding to and worthy of the strong faith within them, became wondrous martyrs of his kingdom. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.41.11–14)[9]

Several groups, then, resulted from the implementation of the decree: 1) martyrs who had been killed; 2) those who had been incarcerated or tortured for their refusal; 3) those who avoided confrontation by bribery, fraud, or, as in Cyprian's case, flight; and 4) the lapsed, who had obeyed the decree.[10] All, it seems, agreed that the martyrs were in heaven and the faithful (imprisoned or not) were securely within the ritual bounds of the community. But the position of the latter two groups was less straightforward. *On the Lapsed* is in large part an attempt to put them into place: to put Cyprian inside the community and to put the lapsed outside of it.

Cyprian felt this matter was urgent, for while in hiding, he learned that his flock had developed their own process for regulating community bounds. The lapsed were approaching imprisoned Christians to receive the forgiveness required for readmission to the eucharist. In one example, a certain Lucianus received a petition on behalf of two lapsed women named Numeria and Candida. The petitioner asked Lucianus to "pardon them completely" (*Ep.* 21.3.2), saying that he did "indeed believe that Christ will now pardon them if you, his martyrs, ask him" (*Ep.* 21.2.2).[11] Lucianus cheerfully replied:

> When the blessed martyr Paulus was still in the body, he summoned me and said to me: "Lucianus, before Christ I say to you that should anyone seek peace from you after I have been called away, grant it in my name." . . . And so, my very dear brother, send our greetings to Numeria and Candida. [We grant them peace] in accordance with the command of Paulus and of the other martyrs whose names I add: Bassus (died in the mines), Mappalicus (under interrogation), Fortunio (in prison), Paulus (after interrogation), Fortunata, Victorinus, Victor, Herennius, Credula, Hereda, Donatus, Firmus, Venustus, Fructus, Iulia, Martialis, and Ariston—all by God's will starved to death in prison. You hear that we too will be joining their company within a matter of days. . . . And this is not only for these sisters but for all those sisters who you know are dear to us. (*Ep.* 22.2.1–2)[12]

[9] Jeremy Schott, *Eusebius: The History of the Church; A New Translation* (Oakland: University of California, 2019) 323.

[10] Roy J. Deferrari thinks "the majority of the Christians at Carthage apostatized"; *St. Cyprian: Treatises* (trans. Deferrari, et al.; Fathers of the Church 36; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1958) vii.

[11] *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:104–105. Translations of Cyprian's epistles are all from *Letters* (trans. Clarke). The Latin can be found in CCSL 3B (ed. G. F. Diercks; 1994) and CCSL 3C (ed. G. F. Diercks; 1996).

[12] *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:107.

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Cyprian found Lucianus's practice intolerable, accusing him of "distributing certificates *en bloc* to large numbers in the name of Paulus but written in his [= Lucianus's] own hand" (*Ep.* 27.1.1)[13]:

> This is an action completely without precedent among the martyrs—and its effect will be that such vague and indefinite certificates will heap odium upon me in the future. For the words "So-and-So along with his household" fling the door wide open: there can present themselves to us twenty and thirty and more at a time who claim to be the relations, in-laws, freedmen or domestics of the person who received the certificate. (*Ep.* 15.4)[14]

Cyprian claimed that clergy had even been "attacked and mobbed" and "compelled to put into execution on the spot that peace which the martyrs and confessors, so they kept clamouring, had granted once and for all to everyone" (*Ep.* 27.3.1).[15]

A brief terminological clarification is in order here. Cyprian speaks of both "martyrs" (*martyres*) and "confessors" (*confessores*). The later distinction, in which martyrs have been killed but confessors have not, should not be read back into writings from this period, for Cyprian referred to both dead and living Christians as martyrs.[16] His interlocutors did as well: the petitioner cited above addressed his request to "you, his martyrs," which would seem to include the living recipient of the petition, Lucianus (*Ep.* 21.2.2). Edelhard Hummel has argued that for Cyprian, torture qualified one as a martyr, while simple arrest or exile qualified one as a confessor.[17] We will see in a moment that other early Christian texts apply the term "martyr" to more than just the dead. I will follow the usage in the Cyprianic corpus, using "martyr" when the texts do, and "confessor" when the texts do.

Returning to the question at hand: How did Cyprian respond to the system of sacramental reintegration that the confessors and martyrs were using? At first, he was conciliatory, thanking the writers for "submitting" their "petitions" to him for review and deflecting responsibility for the conflict onto unnamed persons. Some clergy, he wrote to Lucianus, "acting contrary to your own respectful petition, before penance has been done, before confession of the most serious and grievous of sins has been made, before there has been the imposition of hands by the bishop and

[13] Ibid., 1:112.

[14] Ibid., 1:92.

[15] Ibid., 1:113.

[16] Compare E. Day, "Confessor," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (ed. William J. McDonald et al.; 18 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) 4:141–42 and Everett Ferguson, "Confessor," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (ed. idem; 2nd edition; New York: Garland, 1998) 274–75. Clarke sees as proleptic the application of the term martyr to the still-living. Though alive, they are "martyrs-to-be." *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:228–29 and 1:272–73.

[17] Edelhard Hummel, *The Concept of Martyrdom According to St. Cyprian of Carthage* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1946) 4–18. Maurice Bévenot largely concurs, writing that "a *martyr* is, strictly speaking, one who has been put to death for witnessing to Christ. A *confessor* is one who has witnessed to his faith; he may, however, be also called a 'martyr' if he has been tortured, or is awaiting the end in prison"; Bévenot, *Cyprian: De Lapsis and De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate* (Oxford Early Christian Texts; Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 7.

clergy in token of reconciliation, . . . have the audacity" to admit lapsed Christians to the eucharist before any episcopal approval has been granted (*Ep.* 15.1.2).[18] But the confessors, who had never sought any episcopal approval, issued a curt reply:

> All the confessors send greetings to pope[19] Cyprian. This is to inform you that all of us have together granted peace to those whose conduct since their fault you shall find, upon examination, to be satisfactory. It is our wish that you should make this resolution known to the other bishops also, and it is our desire that you should be at peace with the holy martyrs. Written by Lucianus, in the presence of an exorcist and a lector from the clergy. (*Ep.* 23)[20]

There thus arose a direct conflict between Cyprian, on the one hand, and the martyrs and confessors, on the other. By readmitting lapsed Christians to the eucharist, the martyrs and confessors were exercising an authority which Cyprian considered his alone. To make matters worse, there was the undeniable fact that Cyprian himself had fled rather than face arrest and torture as the martyrs and confessors had.[21] Cyprian needed to get his flock under control, but as Allen Brent notes, he "dared not confront the martyrs and their group head-on: their prestige was too high." Instead, his tactic "was to praise the martyrs, but to deprive them collectively of any sacramental authority, and to undermine others in his community that would appeal to such authority against his claims for the hierarchy."[22]

The Power and Authority of Martyrs

What was this sacramental authority that Cyprian tried to suppress? What did people believe martyrs could do?[23] Several texts shed light on this question. The earliest, the Acts of Thecla, portrays Thecla interceding for a dead girl so that she might "come to the place of the just" (Thecla 28) and "live in eternity" (Thecla 29, 39).[24] A century later,[25] Perpetua would do the same, praying her dead brother Dinocrates

[18] *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:90–91. Cyprian had on his side the recent decision of the church in Rome not to admit lapsed Christians to the eucharist (*Ep.* 55).

[19] *Papa* is a standard honorific at this time. See *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:207, who notes that both Roman clergy and Carthaginian clergy addressed Cyprian as *papa*.

[20] Ibid., 1:108–9.

[21] The Roman clergy wrote: "We have learnt . . . that the blessed pope Cyprian has gone into retirement and that it is maintained that he is certainly right to have done so for the special reason that he is a person of prominence" (*Ep.* 8.1.1). They criticize "neglectful leaders" for failing to emulate the Good Shepherd (*Ep.* 8.1.2). Fabian, the bishop of Rome, had himself been killed in the persecution (*Ep.* 9); *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:67–68 and 1:70–71.

[22] Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, 253.

[23] On Cyprian's understanding of martyrs' powers, see Hummel, *The Concept of Martyrdom*, 156–61 and J. Patout Burns and Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman North Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014) 324–26 and 368.

[24] J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 364–74. Tertullian is generally thought to reference the Acts of Thecla in *On Baptism* 17, which Timothy D. Barnes dates to 198–203 CE; Barnes, *Tertullian: A Literary and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 55.

[25] Ellen Muehlberger has recently argued for a late fourth-century dating of the *Martyrdom of*

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out of his miserable state and into a happier condition (Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas 7–8).[26] Martyrs aided the living, as well. Tertullian mentions Christians who sought peace (*pacem*) from the martyrs in prison (*To the Martyrs* 1), and he complains that "just as soon as anyone is put in bonds . . . at once adulterers solicit him, at once fornicators approach him. Petitions echo round and pools of tears are shed by every *débauché*. There are none more eager to buy their entrance into prison than those who have lost their right of entrance into church" (*On Modesty* 22).[27] In another third century text, a certain Apollonius mocks a man who associated with a prophetess and "called himself a martyr" despite being arrested for theft rather than faith.[28] "Which one of them can forgive the other's sins?" Apollonius asks. "Does the prophetess forgive the sins of the thief, or the martyr the greed of the prophetess" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.18.6–8)?[29] (Note that the man, still alive, is called a martyr.) In third-century North Africa, martyrs were well known enough for remitting sin that this practice could be the basis of a joke.[30]

Not all were comfortable with the martyrs' exalted status. The Martyrdom of Polycarp reassures its audience that Christians "could never abandon Christ . . . nor could we worship anyone else. For him we reverence as the Son of God, whereas

Perpetua and Felicitas; Muehlberger, "Perpetual Adjustment: The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity and the Entailments of Authenticity," *JECS* 30:3 (2022) 313–42, at 322–27. Candida R. Moss is likewise skeptical of a third-century date and further cautions that the text was an expanding legend in antiquity through the middle ages, making a single date of composition a chimera; Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library; New Haven: Yale, 2012) 130–32. In defense of a third-century date, see Jan N. Bremmer and Marco Formisano, "Perpetua's Passions: A Brief Introduction," *Perpetua's Passions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (ed. idem; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 1–7.

[26] David Wilhite argues that Dinocrates is not transferred to heaven but from the bad part of Hades to the pleasant part; Wilhite, "Tertullian on the Afterlife: 'Only Martyrs are in Heaven' and Other Misunderstandings," *ZAC* 24:3 (2020) 490–508, at 507–8.

[27] William P. Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and on Purity* (Ancient Christian Writers 28; New York and Ramsey: Newman, 1958) 122; see especially his discussion on 290–92. See likewise William Tabbernee, "To Pardon or not to Pardon? North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins," *SP* 36 (1999) 375–86, and Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 295–361.

[28] William Tabbernee dates this text to the first decade of the third century; Tabbernee, "Portals of the Montanist New Jerusalem: The Discovery of Pepouza and Tymion," *JECS* 11:1 (2003) 87–93, at 87.

[29] Schott, *Eusebius*, 258.

[30] Allen Brent, "Cyprian and the Question of *Ordinatio per Confessionem*," *SP* 36 (2001) 323–37, argues that martyrs, by their sufferings, were believed to have received "*ordinatio per confessionem*" and thus "could offer the Eucharistic sacrifice"; reconciliation, then, consisted not of a separate form of penance, but of actually giving the eucharist to the person in question (336). With Karl Shuve, I am less persuaded by this argument than by the rest of Brent's careful work on Cyprian; Shuve, review of *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, by Allen Brent, *Ancient History Bulletin Online Reviews* 1 (2011) 50–52, at 51, https://ancienthistorybulletin.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/AHBReviews201115.ShuveOnBrent.pdf. *Epistle* 5.2.1 mentions Carthaginian clergy visiting the martyrs and confessors in prison specifically to administer the eucharist to them, which would seem to indicate that the imprisoned confessors and martyrs did not consider themselves "ordained."

we love the martyrs as the disciples and imitators of the Lord" (Polycarp 17).[31] The concern surfaces in the Martyrdom of Perpetua, too, with Perpetua expressing dismay that a bishop and presbyter prostrate themselves at the feet of the martyrs (Perpetua 13). These texts attest to the high regard in which martyrs were held during Cyprian's time. Not only could they forgive the living and assist the dead, but their status was exalted enough that it competed with the status of bishops, presbyters, and Christ himself. It is within this context that we should read Cyprian's opposition to martyrs and confessors readmitting lapsed Christians to the eucharist.

Cyprian's Indirect Confrontation with the Martyrs

Cyprian was in quite a bind, given the lapsed Christians' powerful heavenly advocates. He had been unpopular with his fellow clergy since the day of his election, and fleeing the persecution compounded the problem.[32] The dead martyrs, on the other hand, were not just socially untouchable; they were *literally* untouchable. Seated near God, they had declared God's forgiveness to the lapsed. Cyprian could berate his clergy in angry letters and exhort his rivals to be faithful executors of the martyrs' true wishes, but he could not confront the dead martyrs directly and ask them to reconsider. As Patout Burns puts it, "their exalted, heavenly status insulated them and their agents from the face-to-face pressures which could channel or even block the exercise of their power."[33] Fortunately, Cyprian didn't have to confront them, because there was another power in heaven who could: the body of Christ, which conveniently returned to earth at every eucharist. The graphic stories of eucharistic disaster in *On the Lapsed* enabled Cyprian to confront his intangible, celestial opponents on his own turf with the palpable, powerful body and blood of the Lord himself. We now turn to these stories of eucharistic violence.

The first incident, at which Cyprian himself was "present as a witness," involved an infant girl carried forward by her parents to receive communion. Her nurse, unbeknownst to her parents, had previously taken her to the magistrates, where she was given some of the "bread dipped in wine" because she was too young to eat the sacrificed meat. When her parents returned after the persecution and brought her to the eucharist, she began to "shake violently with weeping, thrown about with a frenzied tossing of the mind." Though "she shut her mouth with lips pressed

[31] Herbert Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 15. Candida R. Moss dates *Martyrdom of Polycarp* to the early third century; Moss, "On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* in the History of Christianity," *EC* 1 (2010) 539–74.

[32] Cyprian's *Ep.* 43.1.2, addressed to "the whole people," mentions that "the spite and treachery of certain presbyters has made it impossible for me to reach you before Easter-day. They have not forgotten the plots they laid, they have not lost all their old venom against my episcopate, or rather against the votes you cast and the judgment of God. Accordingly, they are renewing their former attacks upon us, they are starting up afresh with all their habitual craftiness their sacrilegious schemings"; *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 2:61–62.

[33] J. Patout Burns, "The Role of Social Structures in Cyprian's Response to the Decian Persecution," *SP* 31 (1997) 260–67, at 262.

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tightly together and refused the chalice," the deacon forced some of the consecrated food into her mouth, which she promptly expelled with "sobbing and vomiting" (*Lapsed* 25).[34] The second incident happened when an older girl tried to swallow the bread and wine. As if drinking poison, Cyprian claimed, "she quickly began to choke, tormented" and "fell to the ground writhing and trembling" (*Lapsed* 26).[35] The third disaster involved a woman who tried to open a locket containing a piece of consecrated bread. She "was prevented by fire that surged up" (*Lapsed* 26).[36] The fourth and final scene occurred when a would-be communicant was "unable to eat or to handle the holy thing of God: when he opened his hands, he found that he was holding only ashes" (*Lapsed* 26).[37]

These stories are not mere rhetorical showmanship, nor, as Arthur Cleveland Coxe cheekily put it, "exaggerated stories" born of popular "credulity."[38] They are a carefully crafted centerpiece of the treatise, and their effect is to obscure Cyprian's own agency in the conflict, making it seem as if communal boundary maintenance is done by God alone and not by any human authority, whether bishop or martyr. Three features of the treatise as a whole advance this effect. First, Cyprian's eucharist is straightforwardly a sacrifice, analogous to and exclusive of non-Christian sacrifice. Second, the treatise's "hyper-realist" theology of the eucharist emphasizes divine presence over human agency. Third, the text is shot through with vivid, grotesque imagery of bodily dismemberment that allows Cyprian to style himself a martyr of sorts. I will treat each of these aspects in turn.

Eucharistic Sacrifice Versus Decian Sacrifice

The treatise's four stories of eucharistic disaster are filled with the language of sacrifice. The infant girl, Cyprian says, was carried into the sanctuary by her mother "while we were sacrificing" (*ut sacrificantibus nobis eam secum mater inferret* [*Lapsed* 25]). The older girl had "crept in secretly while we were sacrificing" (*sacrificantibus nobis latenter obrepsit* [*Lapsed* 26]). The man who ended up with a handful of ashes had received his just desserts since he had "dared to receive secretly with the rest [of the congregation] a part of the sacrifice celebrated by the bishop" (*sacrificio a sacerdote celebrato, partem cum ceteris ausus et latenter*

[34] "Praesente ac teste me ipso accipite quid evenerit. . . . Sed enim puella . . . nunc ploratu concuti, nunc mentis aestu fluctuabunda iactari . . . os labiis obdurantibus premere, calicem recusare. . . . Tunc sequitur singultus et vomitus" (*Lapsed* 25). The text and translation of *De Lapsis* is from Maurice Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 2–55, with some of my own emendations. See also the translations by Brent, *On the Church*, 99–143 and *Treatises* (trans. Deferrari), 57–88.

[35] "Angi et anima exaestuante concludi postmodum coepit et . . . palpitans et tremens concidit" (*Lapsed* 26); Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 38.

[36] "Igne inde surgente deterrita est ne auderet adtingere" (*Lapsed* 26); Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 40.

[37] "Cinerem ferre se apertis manibus invenit" (*Lapsed* 26); Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 40.

[38] *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; 10 vols; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899) 5:444 n2.

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accipere [*Lapsed* 26]).[39] Though R. P. C. Hanson argued that Cyprian was the first to unequivocally call the eucharist an "offering of Christ by the celebrant," recent work by Andrew McGowan has clarified that the language of sacrifice, since the time of the Septuagint, included not just blood offerings, but unbloody offerings of grain and wine, as well as the meal (and its attendant activities) that accompanied most offerings.[40] Since sacrifice was not only about slaughter, but also about eating, it is therefore "better to ask 'how' particular formal meals in the ancient Mediterranean are related to sacrifice, rather than 'whether' they are."[41] Pre-Cyprianic sources, including the Didache (14), Ignatius (*Romans* 2.2; 4.2), Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 41), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4.17.5) and Tertullian (*On Prayer* 18–19; *On the Dress of Women* 2.11.12), all refer to the eucharist with the vocabulary of sacrifice.[42] Cyprian's mere employment of sacrificial language for the eucharist is not an innovation.

Cyprian is, however, distinct in how matter-of-factly he speaks of the eucharist as a sacrifice akin to Roman, not just Jewish, sacrifices.[43] Though much of his eucharistic thought is concentrated in *Epistle* 63, where he argues for the use of wine rather than just water on the grounds that the ritual must imitate what its founder did, this investigation is interested in other texts.[44] In *Epistle* 16, Cyprian chastises his clergy for admitting the lapsed to communion: "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons," he insists, quoting 1 Cor 10:21 (*Ep.* 16.2.2).[45] *On the Lapsed* opens with elaborate praise of those who refused to eat of a non-Christian sacrifice because they had already eaten a Christian one:

[39] By *sacerdote*, Cyprian likely refers to a bishop, not merely a presbyter. Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 41, renders it as "bishop," but Brent, *On the Church*, 132, renders it as "priest." See further John D. Laurance, *'Priest' as Type of Christ: The Leader of the Eucharist in Salvation History according to Cyprian of Carthage* (American University Studies 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1984) xx and 195–222, and n. 56, below.

[40] R. P. C. Hanson, "Eucharistic Offering in the Pre-Nicene Fathers," in *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (ed. idem; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985) 83–112, at 102. In response to Hanson, see Rowan Williams, *Eucharistic Sacrifice: The Roots of a Metaphor* (Nottinghamshire: Grove, 1982).

[41] Andrew B. McGowan, "Eucharist and Sacrifice: Cultic Tradition and Transformation in Early Christian Ritual Meals," in *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum – Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity* (ed. Matthias Klinghardt and Hal Taussig; Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 56; Tübingen: Francke, 2012) 191–206, at 193. The earliest New Testament texts, such as 1 Cor 10:16–21, refer to the eucharist as a continuation of Jewish sacrifices.

[42] See the careful discussion of these texts in McGowan, "Eucharist and Sacrifice," 197–206. As Daniel Ullucci argues, most early Christians claim to possess the right interpretation of sacrifice, but they do not claim to refrain from sacrifice altogether; Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 3–14 and 65–118.

[43] Andrew B. McGowan, "Rehashing the Leftovers of Idols: Cyprian and Early Christian Constructions of Sacrifice," in *Religious Competition in the Third Century CE: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Jordan D. Rosenblum, Lily C. Vuong, and Nathaniel P. DesRosiers; Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2014) 69–77, at 72.

[44] See John D. Penniman, "'The Health-Giving Cup': Cyprian's *Ep.* 63 and the Medicinal Power of Eucharistic Wine," *JECS* 23:2 (2015) 189–211 and the studies he lists on 190.

[45] *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:94.

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> Your lips spoke your devotion to Christ, confessing that you had pledged Him your faith once and for all; your hands, which none but sacred works had occupied, were kept unsullied by any sacrilegious sacrifice; your lips, sanctified by the food of heaven, would not admit, after the Lord's body and blood, the contamination of idolatrous sacrifices; your heads retained their freedom from the shameful heathen veil which enslaved the heads of the sacrificers in its folds; your brows, hallowed by God's seal, could not support the wreath of Satan, but reserved themselves for the crown which the Lord would give. (*Lapsed* 2)[46]

The language is as indebted to the imagery of Roman triumph as it is opposed to Roman cult.[47] It employs the language of sacrifice to construct the Christian cult as the mirror image and polar opposite of non-Christian cult. In a conflict sparked by an imperial decree demanding sacrifice, Cyprian turns the eucharist into a direct rival of that sacrifice.[48] It is this logic of mutually exclusive sacrifices, borrowed from Paul but reworked for Decian Carthage, that patrols the boundaries of the Christian assembly. Cyprian gives the impression that he himself has little to do with the exclusion of the lapsed; it is just the nature of these two sacrifices to exclude each other.

Independent Eucharistic Agency

Cyprian's sacrificial eucharist is not only conceptually self-policing but actively so, exerting its own agency and needing no help from him to regulate its affairs. As the baby girl found out, the consecrated bread and wine themselves refused to remain in a stomach contaminated by non-Christian sacrifice. It did not matter that she had not knowingly consented to eating this sacrifice, only that she in fact had eaten it. Intention played no role; the violent reaction between the two sacrifices was automatic: "The Eucharist could not remain (*permanere non potuit*) in a body or a mouth that was defiled; the drink which had been sanctified by the Lord's blood returned from the polluted stomach" (*Lapsed* 25).[49] The fire, too, that repelled the polluted hands of the lapsed women when she opened the container holding the eucharist had not been called down by a priest; it had ignited on its own (*Lapsed* 26). The same was true of the man who took the eucharist in his hands only to find that it had dissolved into ash and of the woman who found herself choked by the eucharist when she tried to consume it (*Lapsed* 26). Despite his many letters attempting to corral his flock, Cyprian claimed he didn't have to prevent the lapsed from participating in the liturgy; the eucharist did it for him. His agency in the conflict over the lapsed is thus erased in the performance of the text. As the body

[46] Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 4–5.

[47] See the discussion in McGowan, "Rehashing the Leftovers of Idols," 73.

[48] Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 291, note that "competition with Roman religion that was forced by the Decian and Diocletian persecutions contributed to the development" of sacrificial understandings of the eucharist.

[49] Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 39.

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and blood of Christ take center stage and begin their dramatic offensive against apostate Christians, Cyprian can recede into the background, becoming a mere spectator. The conflict of "Cyprian versus the martyrs" is quietly transformed into one of "Christ versus the lapsed"—Christ, since the eucharist was his body, after all.

Where did Cyprian get the idea that eucharists could attack? He invokes Paul's admonition in 1 Cor 10:21 about not partaking of the table of the Lord and the table of demons, yet *On the Lapsed* never quotes Paul's warning in 1 Cor 11:30 that illness and death may come for those who fail to "discern the body." Cyprian's self-policing eucharist first appears in his *To Quirinus*, a compendium of scriptural proofs:

> That the Eucharist is to be received with fear and honour: In Leviticus: "But whatever soul shall eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of salvation, which is the Lord's, and his uncleanness is still upon him, that soul shall perish from his people" [Lev 7:20]. Also in the first to the Corinthians: "Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" [1 Cor 11:27]. (*Quirinus* 3.94)[50]

Cyprian illustrated these verses graphically in *On the Lapsed*, and he returned to them in his last treatise, *To Fortunatus*, an exhortation to martyrdom.[51] Like *Quirinus*, *Fortunatus* is a compendium of scriptural citations under thirteen headings, the first five of which deal with idolatry: that idols are not gods, that God alone should be worshiped, that God threatens and "does not easily pardon" those who sacrifice to idols, and "that God is so angry with idolatry that he has even ordered those to be killed who have persuaded to sacrifice and serve idols" (*Fortunatus* 5).[52] For this last claim, Cyprian cites texts such as Deut 13:6–10 (the command to kill someone who entices another to idolatry),[53] 1 Macc 2:24 (where Mattathias kills a Jew who approached a gentile altar to sacrifice), and Matt 10:32–33 (Christ will deny those who deny him) (*Fortunatus* 5).[54] If idolatry makes God angry enough to kill people in scripture, Cyprian intimates, it is no surprise that he did just that when approached by idolaters in Carthage.

[50] *ANF* (ed. Roberts, et al.), 5:554. For the Latin, see CCSL (ed. R. Weber), 3:167. "Sacrifice of salvation" is "sacrificii salutaris," an Old Latin rendering of the LXX's θυσίας τοῦ σωτηρίου. Jerome's Vulgate has "hostiae pacificorum" which is closer to the Hebrew MT's מזבח השלמים.

[51] The treatise was clearly penned after a persecution, either that of Decius (250–251) or Valerian (257), for Cyprian had *libelli* (certificates) in mind. He holds up the elderly Eleazar "lest anyone, when the occasion has been presented to him of a certificate (*libelli*) or something else," try to simulate participation in a sacrifice (*Fortunatus* 11); *Treatises* (trans. Deferrari), 339, and CCSL (ed. Weber), 3:209.

[52] *Treatises* (trans. Deferrari), 316–17.

[53] Incidentally, about this time in Palestine the rabbis discussed this command. The Mishnah decrees death by stoning for the person who entices another to idolatry (m. Sanhedrin 7.4, 7.6, and 7.10). Characteristically, the rabbis' standards for proof are so high that execution of a suspect would be near impossible; see Beth A. Berkowitz, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[54] CCSL (ed. Weber), 3:191–93; *Treatises* (trans. Deferrari), 322–24.

Besides *On the Lapsed*, the only other third-century story of the eucharist directly harming a recipient that I am aware of is in the Acts of Thomas.[55] A young man murders a woman, and "when he approached and took the eucharist to his mouth," the Acts say, "his two hands shriveled up, so that they were no longer able to reach his mouth" (Thomas 51).[56] Thomas explains, "The eucharist of the Lord has indicted you; for when this gift comes to most people, especially those who approach it in faith and love, it heals them; but it has caused you to shrivel up" (51:1–5). Well past Cyprian's time, there is also Pseudo-Martyrius's fifth-century story about the empress Eudoxia receiving the eucharist despite her unworthiness. Swallowing it caused her to "quickly vomit out her soul along with the communion."[57] Cyprian's text, then, is one of only a few early Christian texts attesting to eucharistic attacks.[58]

Whether the attacks ever happened is irrelevant to the effectiveness of Cyprian's rhetoric (not to mention closed to historical investigation). He makes the threat of eucharistic violence real, personal, and imaginable by tying it to a physical act of ingestion with which his audience was already familiar. Within that tangible arena, Cyprian's emphasis on divine agency and presence becomes physically real. This is not, by any means, the sort of presence encoded by the much later Catholic doctrines of "real presence" such as transubstantiation. Rather, it is the presence of an independent divine agent who is not Cyprian, and who ranks above any of the parties involved. Rather than oppose the martyrs and their group directly, Cyprian narrates a situation in which God himself, in the eucharist, opposes them.

Body Language

Cyprian's self-policing, sacrificial eucharist is autonomous, but not impersonal. In the middle of his treatise, Cyprian says that lapsed Christians who consume the eucharist "make an assault upon [Christ's] body and blood, and their hands and mouth sin more grievously now against their Lord than when with their lips they denied him" (*Lapsed* 16).[59] Speech is one thing, but attacking the Lord's body with hands and teeth is another. The vomiting, choking, fire, and ash are not so much divine punishment as divine self-defense techniques. Lapsed Christians should avoid the eucharist lest it kill them, but they should also avoid it lest they do violence to their own Lord. If they attack him, he will attack back, in ways that mirror the original offense: lapsed tongues will be bitten out, polluted stomachs will vomit

[55] I thank Naomi Koltun-Fromm for this reference. Harold W. Attridge dates the text to the first half of the third century; Attridge, *The Acts of Thomas* (Salem: Polebridge, 2010) 14.

[56] Attridge, *Acts of Thomas*, 54.

[57] Jennifer Barry, "Diagnosing Heresy: Pseudo-Martyrius's *Funerary Speech for John Chrysostom*," *JECS* 24:3 (2016) 395–418, at 411.

[58] See, however, the stories from the sixth and seventh centuries discussed in Derek Krueger, "The Unbounded Body in the Age of Liturgical Reproduction," *JECS* 17:2 (2009) 267–79.

[59] "Spretis his omnibus adque contemptis, vis infertur corpori eius et sanguini, et plus modo in Dominum manibus adque ore delinquunt quam cum Dominum negaverunt" (*Lapsed* 16); Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 24.

up their contents, hands that set fire to sacrifices will themselves be confounded by fire. Cyprian mentions one man who was struck dumb after renouncing Christ in front of the local magistrates: "His punishment fell where his crime had begun; now he could not even pray, as he had no words with which to beg for mercy" (*Lapsed* 24).[60]

Yet the treatise's body language functions in more than one way. If it can turn the ritual of the eucharist into a moment of hand-to-hand combat between Christ and his attackers, it can also render the bodies of the lapsed, the "bodies" of sacrificial victims, and the bodies of the martyrs visually indistinguishable.[61] Strange as that sounds, consider Cyprian's language. He says that the infant who began thrashing and wailing as it neared the chalice "was indicating (*fatebatur*), as if under torture (*velut tortore cogente*), in every way it could its consciousness of the misdeed" of those who brought it to a non-Christian sacrifice (*Lapsed* 25). As for the young girl, "it was not so much food that she took as a sword (*gladium sibi sumens*) against herself" (*Lapsed* 26), and elsewhere, in the story of a woman who bit out her own tongue at the baths after tasting a sacrifice, Cyprian muses that her mouth became a "weapon (*armata*) for her own destruction" and that she was "made her own executioner (*carnifex*)" (*Lapsed* 24). Finally, Cyprian rails against a hypothetical apostate ascending the steps to offer a sacrifice: "Did not his step falter, his eyes cloud, did not his bowels quake, his arms go limp? Surely his blood ran cold, his tongue clove to its palate" (*labavit gressus, caligavit aspectus, tremuerunt viscera, brachia conciderunt? Non sensus obstipuit, lingua haesit* [*Lapsed* 8])? The bodies of apostates disintegrate before our eyes. Cyprian describes them as if they were sacrificial victims—not to God, but to demons: "Poor fellow, why bring any other offering or victim to the place there while you pray? You yourself are the offering and the victim come to the altar; there you have slain your hope of salvation, there in those fatal fires you have reduced your faith to ashes" (*Lapsed* 8).

Yet he applies the same vivid body language to the confessors, so that visually, lapsed and faithful look similar: "Your hands (*manus*) . . . were kept unsullied by any sacrilegious sacrifice; your mouth (*ore*), sanctified by the food of heaven, would not admit, after the Lord's body and blood, the contamination of idolatrous sacrifices; your heads (*capita*) received their freedom . . . your brows (*frons*), hallowed by God's seal" (*Lapsed* 2). These faithful called on God "not with tears but with wounds (*vulnerum*), not with a sorrowful voice but with the laceration and pain of the body (*laceratione corporis et dolore*); in place of tears it was their blood that flowed (*manabat pro fletibus sanguinis*), in place of weeping the blood streamed from their deep-seared bowels (*cruor semiustilatis visceribus defluebat*)" (*Lapsed* 13). Their bodies are undone before our eyes, each mangled limb testifying either to its owner's faith or faithlessness. Graphic body language is something like

[60] Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 37.

[61] I put "bodies" in quotations since not only animals were sacrificed but also grain and wine.

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a center of gravity in the treatise, sucking into its violent orbit all those affected by the persecution, whether apostate or faithful.

Cyprian's own body is affected, as well. He is well aware that he had fled rather than face the magistrates as the courageous martyrs and confessors had done. His treatise is thus as much an apology as a position paper on the administrative problem of the lapsed.[62] Cyprian's defense is to construct two types of confession, public and private. Those who refused to sacrifice had made a public confession of their faith and enjoyed the highest honor, while those who fled had simply made a private confession, intending, no doubt, to confess the faith publicly if caught (*Lapsed* 3). Having set out this distinction, Cyprian muddies it immediately in the next section, describing the lapsed as a portion of his own body that had been torn away by the persecutors: "the enemy has torn away a part of our own bowels (*nostrorum viscerum*)" (*Lapsed* 4).[63] He says that he needs "tears rather than words to express the sorrow with which the wound of our body (*corporis nostri*) should be bewailed." The "our" refers to the corporate body of Christ—to the "once numerous people" (*populi aliquando numerosi*) in Carthage made up of individual Christians. Who wouldn't weep seeing "the varied ruins and sorrowful remains (*multiformes ruinas et lugubres . . . reliquias*) of his friends?" Cyprian asks. "I mourn, brothers, I mourn with you . . . for it is the shepherd that is chiefly wounded in the wound of his flock (*plus pastor in gregis sui vulnere vulneretur*). My limbs are at the same time stricken with those darts of the raging enemy; their cruel swords have pierced through my bowels" (*Iaculis illis grassantis inimici mea simul membra percussa sunt, saevientes gladii per mea viscera transierunt*). Cyprian has subtly transitioned from first-person plural to first-person singular, from "our bowels" (*nostrorum viscerum*) to "my bowels" (*mea viscera*). He has so identified the church with his own body that brokenness in it is brokenness in him. By the end of *On the Lapsed* 4, he stands with his battered flesh among the remains of both the martyrs and the lapsed, at once the head and embodiment of the corporate *corpus Christi*.

Cyprian's conflation of bodies through overpowering descriptions of wounded limbs and viscera is central to his strategy in the conflict with the martyrs and the

[62] Hornung, *Cyprian von Karthago*, 31.

[63] I quote the full passage for its powerful rhetoric: "quod avulsam nostrorum viscerum partem violentus inimicus populationis suae strage deiecit. Quid hoc loco faciam, dilectissimi fratres, fluctuans vario mentis aestu quid aut quomodo dicam? Lacrimis magis quam verbis opus est ad exprimendum dolorem quo corporis nostri plaga deflenda est, quo populi aliquando numerosi multiplex lamentanda iactura est. Quis enim sic durus ac ferreus, quis sic fraternae caritatis oblitus qui, inter suorum multiformes ruinas et lugubres ac multo squalore deformes reliquias constitutus, siccos oculos tenere praevaleat, nec erumpente statim fletu prius gemitus suos lacrimis quam voce depromat? Doleo, fratres, doleo vobiscum, nec mihi ad leniendos dolores meos integritas propria et sanitas privata blanditur, quando plus pastor in gregis sui vulnere vulneretur. Cum singulis pectus meum copulo, maeroris et funeris pondera luctuosa participio. Cum plangentibus plango, cum deflentibus defleo, cum iacentibus iacere me credo. Iaculis illis grassantis inimici mea simul membra percussa sunt, saevientes gladii per mea viscera transierunt. Inmunis et liber a persecutionis incursu fuisse non potest animus, in prostratis fratribus et me prostravit adfectus" (*Lapsed* 4); Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 6.

lapsed. The root of this move is found in Paul, and Cyprian had tried it out in a letter written only months before our treatise:

> I too, like you, am pained and distressed for each one of them, and I am suffering and feeling what the blessed Apostle describes: *Who is weak and am I not weak? Who is made to stumble and do I not burn with indignation* [2 Cor 11:29]*?* And again he has claimed in his epistle: *If one member suffers, the other members also share in the suffering; and if one member rejoices, the other members share in the rejoicing* [1 Cor. 12:26]. I share in the suffering, I share in the pain of our brothers; as they fell, laid low before the fury of the persecution, they tore away part of our own vitals with them [*nostrorum viscerum*], and by their wounds [*vulneribus*] they inflicted a like pain on us. These are wounds which can indeed be healed by the power of the merciful God. (*Ep.* 17.1.1–2; italics in original)[64]

As the authoritative embodiment of the body of Christ, Cyprian styles himself on the side of everyone who is part of that body. He opposes no one but only suffers with them, whether they are lapsed or languishing in prison. Whereas the stories of eucharistic violence served to obscure Cyprian's agency in confronting the martyrs, the common language of mangled bodies allows him to play down the fact that he had endured no literal torture during the persecution. He suffers just as much (more?) than the martyrs. As the shepherd of the flock, the owner of "our body" which has undergone such torment, Cyprian deserves as much deference as those who lost life and limb in defense of the faith. By predicating of himself all the suffering of the corporate body, Cyprian is chipping away at the uniqueness of the martyrs. If the bishop has suffered everything the martyrs have and more, then the martyrs are not more authoritative than the bishop.

Panoptic Pressure at the Liturgy

A sacrificial eucharist, a self-policing eucharist, and body parts strewn about. Is *On the Lapsed* essentially scare tactics? Yes, but not reductively so. Cyprian's speech attacks from different angles the problem of policing his community's ritual boundaries. Cyprian claims that some lapsed Christians were showing up to the eucharist, waving their certificates and demanding to participate (*Ep.* 27.3.1). Others, we may presume, were not so easy to spot. Cyprian says that the baby, the girl, the woman, and the man who were attacked had all "slipped in secretly while we were sacrificing" (*sacrificantibus nobis latenter obrepsit* [*Lapsed* 26]), implying the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of distinguishing between a lapsed and a non-lapsed Christian. They look the same, which is why they could "slip in" in the first place. The kind of surveillance Cyprian desired was not possible, so his answer was to summon rhetorically the one watchdog who could see everything: the Lord's own body, which defended itself, as any body would. *On the Lapsed* ties

[64] *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:96 and CCSL (ed. Diercks), 3B:96; I have changed "u" to "v" for consistency. *Letters* (trans. Clarke), 1:292 dates this epistle to 250.

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together the three meanings of "the body of Christ"—the community, the eucharist, and Christ's own glorified body—to add an element of panoptic pressure to the ritual act of ingesting bread and wine. As Cyprian cautions after recounting the eucharistic disasters, "Under God's light the hidden corners of darkness are laid bare; even secret crimes do not escape the priest of God" (*Lapsed* 25). The "priest" (*sacerdotum*) here refers not to any *presbyteros* but to the bishop, namely Cyprian himself.[65] He is conflating God's powers of surveillance with his own.

These stories of ritual infiltration and frustration instill a vigilance, and even a vigilantism, in Cyprian's audience. *Who around me looks suspicious? Did I just see him choke? Why does that woman still have all of her property? That baby seems upset; maybe it knows something we don't.* The treatise's urgent language invites individual Christians to monitor themselves as well as their peers.[66] A Carthaginian Christian hearing these stories of self-policing eucharists will have to think before they swallow: *Will I be choked? Will fire flare up and mark me as an apostate in front of all?* Cyprian has constructed more than a bounded body of Christ. He has constructed the very category of the lapsed in the space of the liturgy and ensured its maintenance.

Managing Presence

"This is the Church's problem with real presence: controlling access to it," writes historian of American Catholicism Robert Orsi:

> Such control is one of the surest grounds of ecclesiastical and political power, not only over the laity but over the rulers of nations, too. Yet presence continually exceeds the Church's efforts to contain it . . . [for] ordinary humans refused to be banned from approaching what they knew to be a powerful source of solace, hope, and companionship or to ban others from it.[67]

Orsi is describing modern Roman Catholicism, not third-century North African Christianity. Modern Catholic theologies of eucharistic presence are certainly not equivalent to what we find in *On the Lapsed.* At the same time, Orsi's is an argument about the construction of modernity and the role that the disciplinary management of divine presences plays in that construction.[68] From Paul to the USCCB, ecclesiastical authorities have always struggled to regulate access to such presences. The conflict over the lapsed, as narrated in Cyprian's writings,

[65] Bévenot, *Cyprian*, 39 and Hornung, *Cyprian von Karthago*, 123. As John D. Laurance demonstrates, Cyprian uses *sacerdos* almost exclusively of the bishop; Laurance, *"Priest" as Type of Christ: The Leader of the Eucharist in Salvation History according to Cyprian of Carthage* (American University Studies 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1984) xx and 195–222.

[66] On interpersonal surveillance in a monastic setting, see Tudor Sala, *Dismantling Surveillance in Late Antique Corporate Monasticism* (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2011).

[67] Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016) 2.

[68] See especially *History and Presence*, 1–47. See also Sonja Anderson, review of *History and Presence*, *Reading Religion*, by Robert A. Orsi (2016), https://readingreligion.org/9780674047891/history-and-presence/.

is a bishop's attempt at conjuring and managing divine presence against those who sought it. Against the lapsed Christians whom he charged with violating the collective body, Cyprian summoned the specter of a self-policing eucharist, imbued with a divine presence that functioned independently. Christ's eucharistic body, provoked by lapsed bodies that attempt to lay hands on it, takes charge of the situation and excludes the lapsed in precisely the way Cyprian could not. Cyprian's achievement was to lend cosmic scope to the complex social conflict that arose in the aftermath of the Decian persecution while at the same time collapsing it onto the site of the individual Christian's body.

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