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PREFACE

Angelo DI BERARDINO

When a student who specializes in Christian antiquity wants to do research on Cyprian of Carthage († 258) I am always somewhat perplexed. For one may ask oneself: can anything new be said about Cyprian and his context? The bibliography is immense. In the West, Cyprian has been read extensively, and his work has been used polemically in controversies: in the fourth century between Catholics and Donatists; from 1500 on between Catholics and Protestants, especially in relation to ecclesiological issues. Cyprian's ecclesiology has been discussed in various ways and interpreted in different directions, dependent on the confessional horizons against which interpretation took place. Also the Byzantine Church knew Cyprian. In one of his famous letters, Letter 70, he speaks about the validity of baptism administered by heretics and schismatics. Until this day, this letter is part of its canon law¹. In Greece, even today, this text serves to justify the baptism of Christians, especially Catholics, who become Orthodox. This letter, probably written in the spring of 255, is the answer of 32 bishops to the questions of 18 colleagues regarding the issue of whether one should baptize those who came over from a 'heretical' group. They, that is, Cyprian, wrote that they wanted to adhere to the teaching of their predecessors (Agrippinus). This implied that sins could not be forgiven in a baptism that had been administered by a 'heretical' sinner.

This was one of the issues that were hotly debated in Cyprian's time, with threats of excommunication and all. Many other themes had a deep impact on his episcopacy. The splendid first chapter of this book, published by Dutch scholars and entitled *Cyprian of Carthage: Studies in His Life, Language and Thought*, is an excellent introduction into all the questions that have been a subject of research during the past one hundred years, including a rich bibliography. Several contributions deal with various aspects of the biography of the bishop and martyr, there are philological studies and studies into the life of the Christian community at the

1. P.P. Joannou, *Fonti, Fascicolo IX, Discipline Générale antique (IV-IX s)*, vol 3 (Rome, 1962), pp. 304-313