

III.3.c
ShepherdsThe Shepherds

These are the persons whom we think of chiefly for their pastoral skills and congregation-oriented hearts given to the health and growth of the flock. Remember that our distinctions are not iron clad and anyone who is one of these will have some ministry overlapping the other fields as well. But the general distinction will hold for our class and not purposes

Cyprian of Carthage (258)

He was, without doubt, the most important of the North African fathers of his time and a man whose influence was felt for centuries..even in the time of the Reformation. He was a person of culture, wealth, learning, and skilled in administration. Conversion came about 245 and he was subsequently baptised. He owes a good bit of his understanding to readings in Tertullian but with his natural gifts and education, he quickly distinguished himself as a master of the biblical disciplines. He became bishop of Carthage in 247 and during the following persecutions of Decius Trajan, he first took himself to the desert and tried to encourage Christians with his pen but later he returned to Carthage and was martyred during the trials in the latter part of the Valerian persecution. Note the short span of his Christian life and marvel at the output and usefulness of his efforts.

He was caught in the schismatic problem initiated in Rome in the Novatian matter. He was a "hard liner" on the lapse issue and practiced the strict policies in Carthage that Novatian desired to have used in Rome. However Cyprian's respect for the office of bishop was such that he thought order and obedience were of supreme importance and his word to Novatian was that he should submit to his bishop even though the bishop might be wrong. All bishops were equal in his view and this is known as the "parity of bishops"...under it you show respect and support for your bishop and do not try to seek acceptance under the umbrella of another bishop. Ultimately this view would considerably strengthen the hand of the bishop although he earnestly maintained that no one bishop had precedence or authority over another. In his more direct teaching we see the following: