

Epistle 63 to Caecilius (on the cup of the Lord)

Cyprian of Carthage

Early Church (pre-Nicene) · Ante-Nicene · Letter

STROMATA 272

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INTRODUCTION

This letter answers those who celebrated the eucharist with water alone by insisting that the cup must be wine mixed with water, as the Lord himself gave it. Cyprian reads the mixed cup as an image of Christ united with his people, and argues that the Church departs from truth whenever it departs from what was handed down. It is one of the earliest sustained meditations on the eucharistic elements and their meaning. The reading is typological and liturgical, drawing doctrine steadily out of a single point of practice.

Epistle 62

Caecilius, on the Sacrament of the Cup of the Lord.

Argument.— Cyprian Teaches, in Opposition to Those Who Used Water in the Lord's Supper, that Not Water Alone, But Wine Mixed with Water, Was to Be Offered; That by Water Was Designated in Scripture, Baptism, But Certainly Not the Eucharist. By Types Drawn from the Old Testament, the Use of Wine in the Sacrament of the Lord's Body is Illustrated; And It is Declared that by the Symbol of Water is Understood the Christian Congregation._

1\ Cyprian to Caecilius his brother, greeting. Although I know, dearest brother, that very many of the bishops who are set over the churches of the Lord by divine condescension, throughout the whole world, maintain the plan of evangelical truth, and of the tradition of the Lord, and do not by human and novel institution depart from that which Christ our Master both prescribed and did; yet since some, either by ignorance or simplicity in sanctifying the cup of the Lord, and in ministering to the people, do not do that which Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, the founder and teacher of this sacrifice, did and taught, I have thought it as well a religious as a necessary thing to write to you this letter, that, if any one is still kept in this error, he may behold the light of truth, and return to the root and origin of the tradition of the Lord. Nor must you think, dearest brother, that I am writing my own thoughts or man's; or that I am boldly assuming this to myself of my own voluntary will, since I always hold my mediocrity with lowly and modest moderation. But when anything is prescribed by the inspiration and command of God, it is necessary that a faithful servant should obey the Lord, acquitted by all of assuming anything

arrogantly to himself, seeing that he is constrained to fear offending the Lord unless he does what he is commanded.

2\ Know then that I have been admonished that, in offering the cup, the tradition of the Lord must be observed, and that nothing must be done by us but what the Lord first did on our behalf, as that the cup which is offered in remembrance of Him should be offered mingled with wine. For when Christ says, I am the true vine. John 15:1 the blood of Christ is assuredly not water, but wine; neither can His blood by which we are redeemed and quickened appear to be in the cup, when in the cup there is no wine whereby the blood of Christ is shown forth, which is declared by the sacrament and testimony of all the Scriptures.

3\ For we find in Genesis also, in respect of the sacrament in Noe, this same thing was to them a precursor and figure of the Lord's passion; that he drank wine; that he was drunken; that he was made naked in his household; that he was lying down with his thighs naked and exposed; that the nakedness of the father was observed by his second son, and was told abroad, but was covered by two, the eldest and the youngest; and other matters which it is not necessary to follow out, since this is enough for us to embrace alone, that Noe, setting forth a type of the future truth, did not drink water, but wine, and thus expressed the figure of the passion of the Lord.

4\ Also in the priest Melchizedek we see prefigured the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Lord, according to what divine Scripture testifies, and says, And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine. Genesis 14:18 Now he was a priest of the most high God, and blessed Abraham. And that Melchizedek bore a type of Christ, the Holy Spirit declares in the Psalms, saying from the person of the Father to the Son: Before the morning star I begot You; You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek; which order is assuredly this coming from that sacrifice and thence descending; that Melchizedek was a priest of the most high God; that he offered wine and bread; that he blessed Abraham. For who is more a priest of the most high God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God the Father, and offered that very same thing which Melchizedek had offered, that is, bread and wine, to wit, His body and blood? And with respect to Abraham, that blessing going before belonged to our people. For if Abraham believed in God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, assuredly whosoever believes in God and lives in faith is found righteous, and already is blessed in faithful Abraham, and is set forth as justified; as the blessed Apostle Paul proves, when he says, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. You know, then, that they which are of faith, these are the children of Abraham. But the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, pronounced before to Abraham that all nations should be blessed in him; therefore they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. Galatians 3:6-9 Whence in the Gospel we find that children of Abraham are raised from stones, that is, are gathered from the Gentiles. Matthew 3:9 And when the Lord praised Zacchaeus, He answered and said This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. Luke 19:9 In Genesis, therefore, that the benediction, in respect of Abraham by Melchizedek the priest, might be duly celebrated, the figure of Christ's sacrifice precedes, namely, as ordained in bread and wine; which thing the Lord, completing and fulfilling, offered bread and the cup mixed with wine, and so He who is the fullness of truth fulfilled the truth of the image prefigured.

5\ Moreover the Holy Spirit by Solomon shows before the type of the Lord's sacrifice, making mention of the immolated victim, and of the bread and wine, and, moreover, of the altar and of the apostles, and says, Wisdom has built her house, she has underlaid her seven pillars; she has killed her victims; she has mingled her wine in the chalice; she has also furnished her table: and she has sent forth her servants, calling together with a lofty announcement to her cup, saying, Whoever is simple, let him turn to me; and to those that want understanding she has said, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled for you. He declares the wine mingled, that is, he foretells with prophetic voice the cup of the Lord mingled with water and wine, that it may appear that that was done in our Lord's passion which had been before predicted.

6\ In the blessing of Judah also this same thing is signified, where there also is expressed a figure of Christ, that He should have praise and worship from his brethren; that He should press down the back of His enemies yielding and fleeing, with the hands with which He bore the cross and conquered death; and that He Himself is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and should couch sleeping in His passion, and should rise up, and should Himself be the hope of the Gentiles. To which things divine Scripture adds, and says, He shall wash His garment in wine, and His clothing in the blood of the grape. Genesis 49:11

But when the blood of the grape is mentioned, what else is set forth than the wine of the cup of the blood of the Lord?

7\ In Isaiah also the Holy Spirit testifies this same thing concerning the Lord's passion, saying, Wherefore are Your garments red, and Your apparel as from the treading of the wine-press full and well trodden? Isaiah 63:2 Can water make garments red? Or is it water in the wine-press which is trodden by the feet, or pressed out by the press? Assuredly, therefore, mention is made of wine, that the Lord's blood may be understood, and that which was afterwards manifested in the cup of the Lord might be foretold by the prophets who announced it. The treading also, and pressure of the wine-press, is repeatedly dwelt on; because just as the drinking of wine cannot be attained to unless the bunch of grapes be first trodden and pressed, so neither could we drink the blood of Christ unless Christ had first been trampled upon and pressed, and had first drunk the cup of which He should also give believers to drink.

8\ But as often as water is named alone in the Holy Scriptures, baptism is referred to, as we see intimated in Isaiah: Remember not, says he, the former things, and consider not the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, which shall now spring forth; and you shall know it. I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the dry place, to give drink to my elected people, my people whom I have purchased, that they might show forth my praise. Isaiah 43:18-21 There God foretold by the prophet, that among the nations, in places which previously had been dry, rivers should afterwards flow plenteously, and should provide water for the elected people of God, that is, for those who were made sons of God by the generation of baptism. Moreover, it is again predicted and foretold before, that the Jews, if they should thirst and seek after Christ, should drink with us, that is, should attain the grace of baptism. If they shall thirst, he says, He shall lead them through the deserts, shall bring forth water for them out of the rock; the rock shall be cloven, and the water shall flow, and my people shall drink; Isaiah 48:21 which is fulfilled in the Gospel, when Christ, who is the Rock, is cloven by a stroke of the spear in His passion; who also, admonishing what was before announced by the prophet, cries and says, If any man thirst, let him come and drink. He that believes in me, as the Scripture says, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And that it might be more evident that the Lord is speaking there, not of the cup, but of baptism, the Scripture adds, saying, But this spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believe in Him should receive. For by baptism the Holy Spirit is received; and thus by those who are baptized, and have attained to the Holy Spirit, is attained the drinking of the Lord's cup. And let it disturb no one, that when the divine Scripture speaks of baptism, it says that we thirst and drink, since the Lord also in the Gospel says, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; Matthew 5:6 because what is received with a greedy and thirsting desire is drunk more fully and plentifully. As also, in another place, the Lord speaks to the Samaritan woman, saying, Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall not thirst forever. John 4:13-14 By which is also signified the very baptism of saving water, which indeed is once received, and is not again repeated. But the cup of the Lord is always both thirsted for and drunk in the Church.

9\ Nor is there need of very many arguments, dearest brother, to prove that baptism is always indicated by the appellation of water, and that thus we ought to understand it, since the Lord, when He came, manifested the truth of baptism and the cup in commanding that that faithful water, the water of life eternal, should be given to believers in baptism, but, teaching by the example of His own authority, that the cup should be mingled with a union of wine and water. For, taking the cup on the eve of His passion, He blessed it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, Drink all of this; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many, for the remission of sins. I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day in which I shall drink new wine with you in the kingdom of my Father. Matthew 26:28-29 In which portion we find that the cup which the Lord offered was mixed, and that that was wine which He called His blood. Whence it appears that the blood of Christ is not offered if there be no wine in the cup, nor the Lord's sacrifice celebrated with a legitimate consecration unless our oblation and sacrifice respond to His passion. But how shall we drink the new wine of the fruit of the vine with Christ in the kingdom of His Father, if in the sacrifice of God the Father and of Christ we do not offer wine, nor mix the cup of the Lord by the Lord's own tradition?

10\ Moreover, the blessed Apostle Paul, chosen and sent by the Lord, and appointed a preacher of the Gospel truth, lays down these very things in his epistle, saying, The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, This is my body, which shall be given for you: do this in remembrance of me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do, as oft as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you shall show forth the Lord's death until He come. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 But if it is both enjoined by the Lord, and the same thing is confirmed and delivered by His apostle, that as often as we drink, we do in remembrance of the Lord the same thing which the Lord also did, we find that what was commanded is not observed by us, unless we also do what the Lord did; and that mixing the Lord's cup in like manner we do not depart from the divine teaching; but that we must not at all depart from the evangelical precepts, and that disciples ought also to observe and to do the same things which the Master both taught and did. The blessed apostle in another place more earnestly and strongly teaches, saying, I wonder that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into grace, unto another gospel, which is not another; but there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any otherwise than that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be anathema. Galatians 1:6-9

11\ Since, then, neither the apostle himself nor an angel from heaven can preach or teach any otherwise than Christ has once taught and His apostles have announced, I wonder very much whence has originated this practice, that, contrary to evangelical and apostolic discipline, water is offered in some places in the Lord's cup, which water by itself cannot express the blood of Christ. The Holy Spirit also is not silent in the Psalms on the sacrament of this thing, when He makes mention of the Lord's cup, and says, Your inebriating cup, how excellent it is! Now the cup which inebriates is assuredly mingled with wine, for water cannot inebriate anybody. And the cup of the Lord in such wise inebriates, as Noe also was intoxicated drinking wine, in Genesis. But because the intoxication of the Lord's cup and

blood is not such as is the intoxication of the world's wine, since the Holy Spirit said in the Psalm, Your inebriating cup, He added, how excellent it is, because doubtless the Lord's cup so inebriates them that drink, that it makes them sober; that it restores their minds to spiritual wisdom; that each one recovers from that flavour of the world to the understanding of God; and in the same way, that by that common wine the mind is dissolved, and the soul relaxed, and all sadness is laid aside, so, when the blood of the Lord and the cup of salvation have been drunk, the memory of the old man is laid aside, and there arises an oblivion of the former worldly conversation, and the sorrowful and sad breast which before was oppressed by tormenting sins is eased by the joy of the divine mercy; because that only is able to rejoice him who drinks in the Church which, when it is drunk, retains the Lord's truth. .

12\ But how perverse and how contrary it is, that although the Lord at the marriage made wine of water, we should make water of wine, when even the sacrament of that thing ought to admonish and instruct us rather to offer wine in the sacrifices of the Lord. For because among the Jews there was a want of spiritual grace, wine also was wanting. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts was the house of Israel; but Christ, when teaching and showing that the people of the Gentiles should succeed them, and that by the merit of faith we should subsequently attain to the place which the Jews had lost, of water made wine; that is, He showed that at the marriage of Christ and the Church, as the Jews failed, the people of the nations should rather flow together and assemble: for the divine Scripture in the Apocalypse declares that the waters signify the people, saying, The waters which you saw, upon which the whore sits, are peoples and multitudes, and nations of the Gentiles, and tongues, Revelation 17:15 which we evidently see to be contained also in the sacrament of the cup.

13\ For because Christ bore us all, in that He also bore our sins, we see that in the water is understood the people, but in the wine is showed the blood of Christ. But when the water is mingled in the cup with wine, the people is made one with Christ, and the assembly of believers is associated and conjoined with Him on whom it believes; which association and conjunction of water and wine is so mingled in the Lord's cup, that that mixture cannot any more be separated. Whence, moreover, nothing can separate the Church— that is, the people established in the Church, faithfully and firmly persevering in that which they have believed— from Christ, in such a way as to prevent their undivided love from always abiding and adhering. Thus, therefore, in consecrating the cup of the Lord, water alone cannot be offered, even as wine alone cannot be offered. For if any one offer wine only, the blood of Christ is dissociated from us; but if the water be alone, the people are dissociated from Christ; but when both are mingled, and are joined with one another by a close union, there is completed a spiritual and heavenly sacrament. Thus the cup of the Lord is not indeed water alone, nor wine alone, unless each be mingled with the other; just as, on the other hand, the body of the Lord cannot be flour alone or water alone, unless both should be united and joined together and compacted in the mass of one bread; in which very sacrament our people are shown to be made one, so that in like manner as many grains, collected, and ground, and mixed together into one mass, make one bread; so in Christ, who is the heavenly bread, we may know that there is one body, with which our number is joined and united.

14\ There is then no reason, dearest brother, for any one to think that the custom of certain persons is to be followed, who have thought in you past that water alone should be offered in the cup of the Lord. For we must inquire whom they themselves have followed. For if in the sacrifice which Christ offered

none is to be followed but Christ, assuredly it behooves us to obey and do that which Christ did, and what He commanded to be done, since He Himself says in the Gospel, If you do whatsoever I command you, henceforth I call you not servants, but friends. John 15:14-15 And that Christ alone ought to be heard, the Father also testifies from heaven, saying, This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear Him. Matthew 17:5 Wherefore, if Christ alone must be heard, we ought not to give heed to what another before us may have I thought was to be done, but what Christ, who is before all, first did. Neither is it becoming to follow the practice of man, but the truth of God; since God speaks by Isaiah the prophet, and says, In vain do they worship me, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men. Isaiah 29:13 And again the Lord in the Gospel repeals this same saying, and says, You reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition. Mark 7:13 Moreover, in another place He establishes it, saying, Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:19 But if we may not break even the least of the Lord's commandments, how much rather is it forbidden to infringe such important ones, so great, so pertaining to the very sacrament of our Lord's passion and our own redemption, or to change it by human tradition into anything else than what was divinely appointed! For if Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, is Himself the chief priest of God the Father, and has first offered Himself a sacrifice to the Father, and has commanded this to be done in commemoration of Himself, certainly that priest truly discharges the office of Christ, who imitates that which Christ did; and he then offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father, when he proceeds to offer it according to what he sees Christ Himself to have offered.

15. But the discipline of all religion and truth is overturned, unless what is spiritually prescribed be faithfully observed; unless indeed any one should fear in the morning sacrifices, lest by the taste of wine he should be redolent of the blood of Christ. Therefore thus the brotherhood is beginning even to be kept back from the passion of Christ in persecutions, by learning in the offerings to be disturbed concerning His blood and His blood-shedding. Moreover, however, the Lord says in the Gospel, Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed. And the apostle also speaks, saying, If I pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10 But how can we shed our blood for Christ, who blush to drink the blood of Christ?

16\.. Does any one perchance flatter himself with this notion, that although in the morning, water alone is seen to be offered, yet when we come to supper we offer the mingled cup? But when we sup, we cannot call the people together to our banquet, so as to celebrate the truth of the sacrament in the presence of all the brotherhood. But still it was not in the morning, but after supper, that the Lord offered the mingled cup. Ought we then to celebrate the Lord's cup after supper, that so by continual repetition of the Lord's supper we may offer the mingled cup? It behooved Christ to offer about the evening of the day, that the very hour of sacrifice might show the setting and the evening of the world; as it is written in Exodus, And all the people of the synagogue of the children of Israel shall kill it in the evening. Exodus 12:6 And again in the Psalms, Let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice. But we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord in the morning.

17\ And because we make mention of His passion in all sacrifices (for the Lord's passion is the sacrifice which we offer), we ought to do nothing else than what He did. For Scripture says, For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show forth the Lord's death till He come. 1 Corinthians 11:26 As often, therefore, as we offer the cup in commemoration of the Lord and of His passion, let us do what it is known the Lord did. And let this conclusion be reached, dearest brother: if from among our predecessors any have either by ignorance or simplicity not observed and kept this which the Lord by His example and teaching has instructed us to do, he may, by the mercy of the Lord, have pardon granted to his simplicity. But we cannot be pardoned who are now admonished and instructed by the Lord to offer the cup of the Lord mingled with wine according to what the Lord offered, and to direct letters to our colleagues also about this, so that the evangelical law and the Lord's tradition may be everywhere kept, and there be no departure from what Christ both taught and did.

18\ To neglect these things any further, and to persevere in the former error, what is it else than to fall under the Lord's rebuke, who in the 1 psalm reproves, and says, What have you to do to declare my statutes, or that you should take my covenant into your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast my words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. For to declare the righteousness and the covenant of the Lord, and not to do the same that the Lord did, what else is it than to cast away His words and to despise the Lord's instruction, to commit not earthly, but spiritual thefts and adulteries? While any one is stealing from evangelical truth the words and doings of our Lord, he is corrupting and adulterating the divine precepts, as it is written in Jeremiah. He says, What is the chaff to the wheat? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words every one from his neighbour, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness. Also in the same prophet, in another place, He says, She committed adultery with stocks and stones, and yet for all this she turned not unto me. That this theft and adultery may not fall unto us also, we ought to be anxiously careful, and fearfully and religiously to watch. For if we are priests of God and of Christ, I do not know any one whom we ought rather to follow than God and Christ, since He Himself emphatically says in the Gospel, I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. John 8:12 Lest therefore we should walk in darkness, we ought to follow Christ, and to observe his precepts, because He Himself told His apostles in another place, as He sent them forth, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Matthew 28:18-20 Wherefore, if we wish to walk in the light of Christ, let us not depart from His precepts and monitions, giving thanks that, while He instructs for the future what we ought to do, He pardons for the past wherein we in our simplicity have erred. And because already His second coming draws near to us, His benign and liberal condescension is more and more illuminating our hearts with the light of truth.

19\ Therefore it befits our religion, and our fear, and the place itself, and the office of our priesthood, dearest brother, in mixing and offering the cup of the Lord, to keep the truth of the Lord's tradition, and, on the warning of the Lord, to correct that which seems with some to have been erroneous; so that when He shall begin to come in His brightness and heavenly majesty, He may find that we keep what

He admonished us; that we observe what He taught; that we do what He did. I bid you, dearest brother, ever heartily farewell.

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