

*THE UNITY
OF THE CHURCH*

Translated by

ROY J. DEFERRARI, Ph.D.
The Catholic University of America

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

THE CHIEF SOURCES for Cyprian's views on the subject of the unity of the Church are his Letter 43 and his treatise on the subject which is being presented here. As a matter of fact, the present treatise represents merely a feebler treatment of the subject than that contained in Letter 43. Thus the most accurate understanding of Cyprian's convictions on the unity of the Church is to be obtained by a careful reading of his own discussion of the matter, which follows.

A brief summary of Cyprian's views, however, may well be of profit here. His attitude on the baptism of heretics was closely bound up with his convictions about the unity of Church. He says (Letter 70.3): 'Baptism is one, just as the Holy Spirit is one, *just as the Church is one.*'¹

This famous pamphlet was read by Cyprian to the council which met in April, with a view to obtaining the support of the bishops against the schism which was started by Felicissimus and Novatus,² and which had a large following. The unity conceived by Cyprian is not so much the unity of the whole Church, the necessity of which he assumes, as the unity to be preserved in each diocese by the union with the bishop. The great problem of the day was unity with and loyalty to the individual bishops within their dioceses,

¹ Letter 70.3.

² Letter 53.

especially since so many responsibilities of doctrine as well of administration rested on them by reason of the lack of close and speedy contact with the bishop of Rome, caused by the existing modes of communication. The unity of the whole Church is maintained by the close union of the bishops who are 'glued to one another.' Thus whoever is not united with his bishop is cut off from the unity of the Church, and cannot be united with Christ. The type of the bishop, according to Cyprian, is St. Peter, the first bishop. St. Cyprian nowhere specifically declares the primacy of the see of Rome and complete obedience to it except in the fourth section of the present treatise, accepting the longer version of that section as alone authentic and written by Cyprian himself.

In general, Cyprian seems to feel that there is no serious need of focusing attention on this phase of the unity of the Church. Where the great danger to Church lay at this time was in rebellion against individual bishops and in the fragmentation of the diocese. What Cyprian wishes to stress is simply this, that Christ, using the metaphor of an edifice, founded His Church on a single foundation which shall manifest and insure its unity. And as Peter is the foundation, binding the whole Church together, so in each diocese is the bishop. With this one argument Cyprian claims to cut at the root of all heresies and schisms.

The fourth chapter of *The Unity of the Church* has come down to us in a twofold version, one of which contains 'additions' which stress the primacy of Peter. Long controversy has been waged on the question of their origin. Hartel, the editor of the works of St. Cyprian in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* vigorously denounced them as spurious, and his opinion was generally accepted until the turn of the century. Dom Chapman³ was the first to suggest

³ 'Les interpolations dans le traité de S. Cyprien sur l'unité de l'Eglise,' *Revue Bénédictine*, 19 (1902), 246-254, 357-373; 20 (1903), 20-51.

another theory. He attempted to prove that the variations were not due to a corruption of the text but to a revision of the text made by Cyprian himself. This belief seems to have been firmly established by later investigators, such as D. van den Eynde, O. Perler, and M. Bénévot. The latter, however, differ from Dom Chapman in one important respect. They insist that the version with the additions is the earlier, and the other the final form, revising the opinion of Dom Chapman in this matter. Dom Jean Le Moyne⁴ not only substantiates van den Eynde, Perler, and Bénévot but goes even further. On the basis of strong and convincing evidence he concludes that the version without the so-called interpolations is *not* by Cyprian; only the longer form including the 'additions' is the authentic version by Cyprian himself.

In our translation we have followed the text in Chapter 4 as established by Dom Le Moyne.

⁴ 'Saint Cyprien est-il bien l'auteur de la rédaction brève du "De unitate" chapitre 4?' *Revue Bénédictine*, 63 (1953), 70-115.

THE UNITY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Chapter 1

SINCE THE LORD warns us in these words: 'Ye are the salt of the earth,'¹ and since He bids us to be simple unto harmlessness, and yet to be prudent with our simplicity, what else, most beloved brethren, befits us than to have foresight and watching with an anxious heart alike to perceive the snares of the crafty enemy² and to beware lest we, who have put on Christ the wisdom of God the Father, seem to be less wise in guarding our salvation. For persecution alone is not to be feared, nor the advances which are made in open attack to overwhelm and cast down the servants of God. To be cautious is easier when the object of fear is manifest, and the soul is prepared for the contest beforehand, when the adversary declares himself. The enemy is more to be feared and guarded against when he creeps up secretly, when deceiving us under the appearance of peace he steals forward by hidden approaches, from which too he receives the name of serpent (creeper, crawler, stealer). This is always his cunning; this is his blind and dark deceit for circumventing men. Thus from the very beginning of the

¹ Matt. 5.13.

² St. Cyprian refers to the devil as *adversarius*, *diabolus*, even *serpens*, but never as *Satan* or *daemon*.

world did he deceive and, flattering with lying words, mislead the inexperienced soul with its reckless incredulity. Thus trying to tempt the Lord himself, as if he would creep up again and deceive, he approaches secretly. Yet he was understood and driven back and so cast down, because he was discovered and unmasked.

Chapter 2

In this an example has been given us to flee the way of the old man; to walk in the footsteps of the conquering Christ, that we may not heedlessly be turned back again unto the snare of death, but that, on guard against the danger, we may receive and possess immortality. But how can we possess immortality, unless we keep those commandments of Christ by which death is overcome and conquered, He Himself warning us in these words: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,'¹ and again: 'If you do what I command you, I no longer call you servant but friends.'² These, finally, He calls strong and steadfast, these grounded upon a rock of firm foundation, these firmly established against all the tempests and storms of the world with an unmoveable and unshaken firmness. 'He who hears my words,' He says, 'and does them, I shall liken him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock. The rain descended and the floods came, the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, for it was founded upon a rock.'³ Therefore, we ought to stand firm upon His words, and to learn and do whatever He taught and did. But how does he say that he believes in Christ who does not do what

¹ Matt. 19.17.

² John 15.14,15.

³ Matt. 7.24,25.

Christ ordered him to do? Or, whence shall he attain the reward of faith, who does not keep the faith of the commandment? He will necessarily waver and wander, and caught up by the breath of error will be blown as the dust which the wind stirs up, nor will he make any advance in his walk toward salvation, who does not hold to the truth of the saving way.

Chapter 3

But not only must we guard against things which are open and manifest but also against those which deceive with the subtlety of clever fraud. Now what is more clever, or what more subtle than that the enemy, detected and cast down by the coming of Christ, after light had come to the Gentiles, and the saving splendor had shone forth for the preservation of man, that the deaf might receive the hearing of spiritual grace, the blind open their eyes to the Lord, the weak grow strong with eternal health, the lame run to the church, the dumb supplicate with clear voices and prayers, seeing the idols abandoned and his shrines and temples deserted because of the great populace of believers, devise a new fraud, under the very title of Christian name to deceive¹ the incautious? He invented heresies and schisms with which to overthrow the faith, to corrupt the truth, to divide unity. Those whom he cannot hold in the blindness of the old way, he circumvents and deceives by the error of a new way. He snatches men from the Church itself, and, while they seem to themselves to have already approached the light and to have escaped the night of the

¹ Cyprian distinguishes between heresy and schism. Heresy is a voluntary choice of a false doctrine. Schism implies rather a split in the unity of the Church. Synonyms for the Latin *schisma* are *scissura*, *discidium*, *discordia*, and *dissensio*.

world, he again pours forth other shadows upon the unsuspecting, so that, although they do not stand with the Gospel of Christ and with the observation of Him and with the law, they call themselves Christians, and, although they walk in darkness, they think that they have light, while the adversary cajoles and deceives, who, as the Apostle says, transforms himself into an angel of light, and adorns his ministers as those of justice who offer night for day, death for salvation, despair under the offer of hope, perfidy² under the pretext of faith, antichrist under the name of Christ, so that while they tell plausible lies, they frustrate the truth by their subtlety. This happens, most beloved brethren, because there is no return to the source of truth, and the Head is not sought, and the doctrine of the heavenly Master is not kept.

Chapter 4

If anyone considers and examines these things, there is no need of a lengthy discussion and arguments. Proof for faith is easy in a brief statement of the truth. The Lord speaks to Peter: 'I say to thee,' He says, 'thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.'¹ Upon him, being one, He builds His Church, and although after His resurrection He bestows equal power upon all the Apostles, and says: 'As the Father has sent me, I also send you. Receive

² Latin *perfidia*, here translated 'perfidy,' is in Cyprian always the opposite of *fides*, 'faith'; hence, lack of faith.

¹ Matt. 16.18,19.

ye the Holy Spirit: if you forgive the sins of anyone, they will be forgiven him; if you retain the sins of anyone, they will be retained,'² yet that He might display unity, He established by His authority the origin of the same unity as beginning from one. Surely the rest of the Apostles also were that which Peter was, endowed with an equal partnership of office and of power, but the beginning proceeds from unity, that the Church of Christ may be shown to be one. This one Church, also, the Holy Spirit in the Canticle of Canticles³ designates in the person of the Lord and says: 'One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen one of her that bore her.' Does he who does not hold this unity think that he holds the faith? Does he who strives against the Church and resists her think that he is in the Church, when too the blessed Apostle Paul teaches this same thing and sets forth the sacrament of unity saying: 'One body and one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God'?⁴

Chapter 5

This unity we ought to hold firmly and defend, especially we bishops who watch over the Church, that we may prove that also the episcopate itself is one and undivided. Let no one deceive the brotherhood by lying; let no one corrupt the faith by a perfidious prevarication of the truth. The episcopate is one, the parts of which are held together by the individual bishops. The Church is one which with increasing fecundity extend far and wide into the multitude, just as the rays of the sun are many but the light is one,

² John 20.21,23.

³ Cant. 6.8.

⁴ Cf. Eph. 4.4-6.

and the branches of the tree are many but the strength is one founded in its tenacious root, and, when many streams flow from one source, although a multiplicity of waters seems to have been diffused from the abundance of the overflowing supply nevertheless unity is preserved in their origin. Take away a ray of light from the body of the sun, its unity does not take on any division of its light; break a branch from a tree, the branch thus broken will not be able to bud; cut off a stream from its source, the stream thus cut off dries up. Thus too the Church bathed in the light of the Lord projects its rays over the whole world, yet there is one light which is diffused everywhere, and the unity of the body is not separated. She extends her branches over the whole earth in fruitful abundance; she extends her richly flowing streams far and wide; yet her head is one, and her source is one, and she is the one mother copious in the results of her fruitfulness. By her womb we are born; by her milk we are nourished; by her spirit we are animated.

Chapter 6

The spouse of Christ cannot be defiled; she is uncorrupted and chaste. She knows one home, with chaste modesty she guards the sanctity of one couch. She keeps us for God; she assigns the children whom she has created to the kingdom. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined with an adulteress is separated from the promises of the Church, nor will he who has abandoned the Church arrive at the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He cannot have God as a father who does not have the Church as a mother. If whoever was outside the ark of Noe was able to escape, he too who is outside the Church escapes. The Lord warns, saying: 'He who is

not with me is against me, and who does not gather with me, scatters.¹ He who breaks the peace and concord of Christ acts against Christ; he who gathers somewhere outside the Church scatters the Church of Christ. The Lord says: 'I and the Father are one.'² And again of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit it is written: 'And these three are one.'³ Does anyone believe that this unity which comes from divine strength, which is closely connected with the divine sacraments, can be broken asunder in the Church and be separated by the divisions of colliding wills? He who does not hold this unity, does not hold the law of God, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, does not hold life and salvation.

Chapter 7

This sacrament of unity, this bond of concord inseparably connected is shown, when in the Gospel the tunic of the Lord Jesus Christ is not at all divided and is not torn, but by those who cast lots for the garment of Christ, who rather might have put on Christ, a sound garment is received, and an undamaged and undivided tunic is possessed. Divine Scripture speaks and says: 'Now of the tunic, since it was woven throughout from the upper part without seam, they said to one another: "Let us not tear it, but let us cast lots for it, whose it shall be."¹ He bore the unity that came down from the upper part, that is, that came down from heaven and the Father, which could not all be torn by him

¹ Matt. 12.30.

² John 10.30.

³ 1 John 5.7.

¹ John 19.23,24.

who received and possessed it, but he obtained it whole once for all and a firmness inseparably solid. He cannot possess the garment of Christ who tears and divides the Church of Christ. Then on the other hand when at the death of Solomon his kingdom and people were torn asunder, Ahias the prophet met King Jeroboam in the field and tore his garment into twelve pieces, saying: 'Take to thee ten pieces, for thus saith the Lord: "Behold I rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give thee ten sceptres, but two sceptres shall remain to him for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem the city which I have chosen, that I may place my name there."' ² When the twelve tribes of Israel were torn asunder, the prophet Ahias rent his garment. But because the people of Christ cannot be torn asunder, His tunic woven and united throughout was not divided by those who possessed it. Undivided, joined, connected it shows the coherent concord of us who have put on Christ. By the sacrament and sign of His garment, He has declared the unity of the Church.

Chapter 8

Who then is so profane and lacking in faith, who so insane by the fury of discord as either to believe that the unity of God, the garment of the Lord, the Church of Christ, can be torn asunder or to dare to do so? He Himself warns us in His Gospel, and teaches saying: 'And there shall be one flock and one shepherd.'¹ And does anyone think that there can be either many shepherds or many flocks in one place? Likewise the Apostle Paul insinuating

² Cf. 3 Kings 11.31,32,36.

¹ John 10.16.

this same unity upon us beseeches and urges us in these words: 'I beseech you, brethren,' he says, 'by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing, and that there be no dissensions among you: but that you be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same judgment.'² And again he says: 'Bearing with one another in love, careful to preserve the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.'³ Do you think that you can stand and live, withdrawing from the Church, and building for yourself other abodes and different dwellings, when it was said to Rhaab, in whom the Church was prefigured: 'You shall gather your father and your mother and your brethren and the entire house of your father to your own self in your house, and it will be that everyone who goes out of the door of your house shall be his own accuser';⁴ likewise, when the sacrament of the Passover contains nothing else in the law of the Exodus than that the lamb which is slain in the figure of Christ be eaten in one house? God speaks, saying: 'In one house it shall be eaten, you shall not carry the flesh outside of the house.'⁵ The flesh of Christ and the holy of the Lord cannot be carried outside, and there is no other house for believers except the one Church. This house, this hospice of unanimity the Holy Spirit designates and proclaims, when He says: 'God who makes those of one mind to dwell in his house.'⁶ In the house of God, in the Church of Christ, those of one mind dwell; they persevere in concord and simplicity.

² 1 Cor. 1.10.

³ Eph. 4.2.

⁴ Cf. Josue 2.18,19.

⁵ Exod. 12.46.

⁶ Cf. Ps. 67.7.

Chapter 9

So the Holy Spirit came in a dove. It is a simple and happy animal, not bitter with gall, not cruel with its bites, not violent with lacerating claws; it loves the hospitalities of men; when they give birth they bring forth their offspring together; when they go and come they cling together; they spend their lives in mutual intercourse; they recognize the concord of peace by the kiss of the beak; they fulfill the law of unanimity in all things. This is the simplicity which ought to be known in the Church; this the charity to be attained, that the love of the brethren imitate the doves, that their gentleness and tenderness equal that of the lambs and the sheep. What is the savagery of wolves doing in the breast of a Christian, and the madness of dogs and the lethal poison of snakes and the bloody cruelties of beasts? Congratulations are due, when such as these are separated from the Church, lest they prey upon the doves and sheep with their cruel and venomous contagion. Bitterness cannot cling and join with sweetness, darkness with light, rains with clear weather, fighting with peace, sterility with fecundity, drought with running waters, storm with calm. Let no one think that the good can depart from the Church; the wind does not ravage the wheat, nor does the storm overturn the tree strongly and solidly rooted; the light straws are tossed about by the tempest; the feeble trees are thrown down by the onrush of the whirlwind. The Apostle Paul execrates and strikes at these, when he says: 'They have gone forth from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.'¹

1 1 John 2.19.

Chapter 10

Hence heresies have both frequently arisen and are arising, while the perverse mind has no peace, while discordant perfidy does not maintain unity. Indeed the Lord permits and suffers these things to happen, while the choice of one's own liberty remains, so that, while the norm of truth examines our hearts and minds, the sound faith of those who are approved may become manifest in a clear light. Through the Apostle the Holy Spirit forewarns and says: 'For there must be factions, so that those who are approved among you may be made manifest.'¹ Thus the faithful are approved; thus the perfidious are disclosed; thus also before the day of judgment, already here too the souls of the just and the unjust are divided and the chaff is separated from the wheat. From these are those who of their own accord set themselves over daring strangers without divine appointment, who establish themselves as prelates without any law of ordination, who assume the name of bishop for themselves, although no one gives them the episcopacy; whom the Holy Spirit in the psalms designates as sitting in the chair of pestilence, the plague and disease of the faith, deceiving with a serpent's tongue and masters in corrupting truth, vomiting lethal poisons from their pestilential tongues, whose speech creeps about like cancer, whose discussions inject a deadly virus within the breast and heart of everyone.

¹ 1 Cor. 11.19.

Chapter 11

Against such people the Lord cries out; from these He restrains and recalls His wandering people saying: 'Hearken not to the words of false prophets, since the visions of their hearts frustrate them. They speak, but not from the mouth of the Lord. They say to them who reject the word of God: Peace shall be to you and to all who walk in their own desires. To everyone who walks in the errors of his own heart [they say]: 'Evil shall not come upon you.' I have not spoken to them, yet they have prophesied. If they had stood in my counsel and had heard my words, and if they had taught my people, I would have turned them from their evil thoughts.'¹ These same people does the Lord again designate and point out, when He says: 'They have abandoned me to the fountain of living water, and have dug for themselves broken cisterns which cannot hold water.'² Although there cannot be another baptism than the one, they think that they baptize; although the fountain of life has been deserted, they promise the grace of the life-giving and saving water. Their men are not washed but rather are made foul, nor are their sins purged but on the contrary piled high. That nativity generates sons not for God but for the devil. Being born through a lie they do not obtain the promises of truth; begotten of perfidy they lose the grace of faith. They cannot arrive at the reward of peace who have broken the peace of the Lord by the madness of discord.

¹ Cf. Jer. 23.16-17, 21-22.

² Jer. 2.13.

Chapter 12

Let not certain ones deceive themselves by an empty interpretation of what the Lord has said: 'Whenever two or three have gathered together in my name, I am with them.'¹ Corrupters and false interpreters of the Gospel quote the last words and pass over earlier ones, being mindful of part and craftily suppressing part. As they themselves have been cut off from the Church, so they cut off a sentence of one chapter. For when the Lord urged unanimity and peace upon His disciples, He said: 'I say to you that if two of you agree upon earth concerning anything whatsoever that you shall ask, it shall be granted you by my Father who is in heaven. For wherever two or three have gathered together in my name, I am with them,'² showing that the most is granted not to the multitude but to the unanimity of those that pray. 'If two of you,' He says, 'agree upon earth'; He placed unanimity first; He set the concord of peace first; He taught that we should agree faithfully and firmly. But how can he agree with anyone, who does not agree with the body of the Church herself and with the universal brotherhood? How can two or three be gathered in the name of Christ, who it is clear are separated from Christ and His gospel? For we did not withdraw from them, but they from us, and when thereafter heresies and schisms arose, while they were establishing diverse meeting places for themselves, they abandoned the source and origin of truth. The Lord, moreover, is speaking of His Church, and He is speaking to those who are in the Church, that if they are in agreement, if, according to what He has commanded and admonished, although two or three are gathered together, they pray with unanimity, although they are two or three, they can obtain

¹ Cf. Matt. 18.20.

² Cf. Matt. 18.19,20.

from the majesty of God, what they demand. 'Wherever two or three have gathered, I,' He said, 'am with them,' namely, with the simple and the peaceful, with those who fear God and keep the commandments of God. He said that He was with these although two or three, just as also He was with the three children in the fiery furnace, and, because they remained simple toward God and in unanimity among themselves, He animated them in the midst of flames with the breath of dew; just as he was present with the two apostles shut up in prison, because they were simple, because they were of one mind, He opened the doors of the prison and returned them again to the market-place that they might pass on the word to the multitude which they were faithfully preaching. When then He lays it down in His commandments and says: 'Where there are two or three, I am with them,' He who established and made the Church did not separate men from the Church, but rebuking the faithless for their discord and commanding peace to the faithful by His word, He shows that He is with two or three who pray with one mind rather than with a great many who are in disagreement, and that more can be obtained by the harmonious prayer of a few than by the discordant supplication of many.

Chapter 13

So too when He gave the law of prayer, He added, saying: 'And when you stand up to pray, forgive whatever you have against anyone, that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your offenses.'¹ And He calls back from the altar one who comes to the sacrifice with dissension, and He orders Him first to be reconciled with his brother and then return with peace and offer his gift to God, because

¹ Mark 11.25.

God did not look with favor upon the gifts of Cain; for he could not have God at peace with him, who through envious discord did not have peace with his brother. What peace then do the enemies of the brethren promise themselves? What sacrifices do the imitators of priests believe that they celebrate? Do they who are gathered together outside the Church of Christ think that Christ is with them when they have been gathered together?

Chapter 14

Even if such men are slain in confession of the Name that stain is not washed away by blood; the inextinguishable and serious fault of discord is purged not even by martyrdom. He cannot be a martyr who is not in the Church. He will not be able to arrive in the kingdom who deserted her who is to rule. Christ gave us peace; He ordered us to be in agreement and of one mind; He commanded us to keep the bonds of love and charity uncorrupted and inviolate. He cannot display himself a martyr who has not maintained fraternal charity. The Apostle Paul teaches and bears witness to this when he says: 'If I have faith so that I remove mountains, but not so that I have charity, I am nothing; and if I distribute all my goods for food, and if I hand over my body so that I am burned, but not so that I have charity, I accomplish nothing. Charity is noble, charity is kind, charity envieth not, is not puffed up, is not provoked; does not act perversely, thinks no evil, loves all things, believes all things, hopes all things, bears all things. Charity never will fall away.' 'Never,' he says, 'will charity fall away.'¹ For she will always be in the kingdom and will endure forever in the unity of the brotherhood clinging to it. Discord cannot

¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 13.2-5,7,8.

come to the kingdom of heaven; to the rewards of Christ who said: 'This is my commandment that you love one another, even as I have loved you.'² He will not be able to attain it who has violated the love of Christ by perfidious dissension. He who does not have charity does not have God. The words of the blessed Apostle John are: 'God,' he says, 'is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God abides in him.'³ They cannot abide with God who have been unwilling to be of one mind in God's Church. Although they burn when given over to flames and fire, or lay down their lives when thrown to the beasts, that crown of faith will not be theirs, but the punishment of perfidy, and no glorious ending of religious valor but the destruction of desperation. Such a man can be slain; he cannot be crowned. Thus he professes himself to be a Christian, just as the devil often falsely declares himself to be even Christ, although the Lord forewarned of this saying: 'Many will come in my name saying: "I am the Christ," and will deceive many.'⁴ Just as He is not Christ, although he deceives in His name, so he cannot seem a Christian who does not abide in His Gospel and in the true faith.

Chapter 15

For both to prophesy and to drive out demons, and to perform great miracles on earth is certainly a sublime and admirable thing, yet whoever is found in all this does not attain the kingdom of heaven unless he walk in the observance of the right and just way. The Lord gives warning and says: 'Many will say to me in that day: "Lord, Lord, have

² John 15.12.

³ 1 John 4.16.

⁴ Mark 13.6.

we not prophesied in Thy name and cast out devils in thy name and worked great miracles in thy name?" And then I will say to them: "I never knew you. Depart from me ye workers of iniquity."¹ There is need of righteousness that one may deserve well of God as judge; His precepts and admonitions must be obeyed that our merits may receive their reward. The Lord in the Gospel, when he was directing the way of our hope and faith, in a brief summary said: 'The Lord thy God is one Lord,' and 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole strength. This is the first, and the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets.'² He taught at the same time unity and love by the authority of His teaching; He included all the prophets and the law in two commandments. But what unity does he preserve, what love does he guard or consider, who mad with the fury of discord splits the Church, destroys the faith, disturbs the peace, dissipates charity, profanes the sacrament?

Chapter 16

This evil, most faithful brethren, began long ago, but now the dangerous destruction of the same evil has increased, and the venomous plague of heretical perversity and schisms has begun to rise and to spread more, because even so it was to be at the decline of the world, for the Holy Spirit proclaimed it to us and forewarned us through the Apostle: 'In the last days,' he says, 'dangerous times will come, men will be lovers of self, haughty, proud, covetous, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, impious, without affection,

¹ Matt. 7.22,23.

² Mark 12.29-31; Matt. 22.37-40.

without law, slanderers, incontinent, merciless, not loving the good, treacherous, stubborn, puffed up with pride, loving pleasure more than God, having a semblance of piety, but denying its power. Of such are they who make their way into houses and captivate silly women who are sin-laden and led away by various lusts; ever learning, yet never attaining knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Mambres resisted Moses, so these resist the truth. But they will make no further progress, for their folly will be obvious to all, as was that of those others.¹ Whatever things were foretold are being fulfilled and, as the end of the world now approaches, have come with the testing of men and the times alike. More and more, as the adversary raves, error deceives, stupidity raises its head, envy inflames, covetousness blinds, impiety depraves, pride puffs up, discord exasperates, anger rushes headlong.

Chapter 17

Yet let not the extreme and precipitous perfidy of many move or disturb us, but rather let it strengthen our faith by the truth of things foretold. As certain ones begin to be such, because these things were predicted beforehand, thus let other brethren beware of matters of a similar sort, because these also were predicted, as the Lord instructed us saying: 'Be on your guard therefore; behold I have told you all things beforehand.'¹ I beseech you, avoid men of this sort, and ward off from your side and from your hearing their pernicious conversation as the contagion of death, as it is written: 'Hedge in thy ears with thorns, and hear not a wicked tongue.'² And again: 'Evil communications corrupt good

¹ Cf. 2 Tim. 3.1-9.

¹ Mark 13.23.

² Eccli. 28.24.

manners.³ The Lord teaches and admonishes that we must withdraw from such. 'They are blind guides,' He says, 'of the blind. But if a blind man guide a blind man, both shall fall into a pit.'⁴ Such a one is to be turned away from, and whoever has separated himself from the Church is to be shunned. Such a man is perverted and sins and is condemned by his very self. Does he seem to himself to be with Christ, who acts contrary to the priests of Christ, who separates himself from association with His clergy and His people? That man bears arms against the Church; he fights against God's plan. An enemy of the altar, a rebel against the sacrifice of Christ, for the faith faithless, for religion sacrilegious, a disobedient servant, an impious son, a hostile brother, despising the bishops and abandoning the priests of God, he dares to set up another altar, to compose another prayer with unauthorized words, to profane the truth of the Lord's offering by false sacrifices, and not to know that he who struggles against God's plan on account of his rash daring is punished by divine censure.

Chapter 18

Thus Core, Dathan, and Abiron, who tried to assume for themselves in opposition to Moses and Aaron the freedom to sacrifice, immediately paid the penalty for their efforts. The earth, breaking its bonds, opened up into a deep chasm, and the opening of the receding ground swallowed up the standing and the living, and not only did the anger of the indignant God strike those who had been the authors [of the revolt], but fire that went out from the Lord in speedy revenge also consumed two hundred and fifty

³ 1 Cor. 15.33.

⁴ Matt. 15.14.

others, participants and sharers in the same madness, who had been joined together with them in the daring, clearly warning and showing that whatever the wicked attempt by human will to destroy God's plan is done against God.¹ Thus Ozias the king also, when, carrying the censer and violently assuming to himself the right to sacrifice contrary to the law of God, although Azarias, the priest, resisted him, he was unwilling to give way and obey, was confounded by the divine indignation and was polluted on his forehead by the spot of leprosy, being marked for his offense against the Lord where they are signed who merited well of the Lord.² And the sons of Aaron, who place a strange fire on the altar, which the Lord had not ordered, were immediately extinguished in the sight of the avenging Lord.

Chapter 19

These, certainly, they imitate and follow, who despise God's tradition and seek after strange doctrines and introduce teachings of human disposition. These the Lord rebukes and and reproves in His Gospel when He says: 'You reject the commandment of God that you may establish your own tradition.'¹ This crime is worse than that which the lapsed seem to have committed, who while established in penance for their crime beseech God with full satisfactions. Here the Church is sought and entreated, there the Church is resisted; here there can have been necessity, there the will is held in wickedness; here he who lapsed harmed only himself, there he who tried to cause a heresy or schism deceived many by

¹ Cf. Num. 16.25-35.

² Cf. 2 Par. 26.16-19.

¹ Cf. Mark 7.9.

dragging them with him; here there is the loss of one soul, there danger to a great many. Certainly this one knows that he has sinned and bewails and laments; that one swelling in his sin and taking pleasure in his very crimes separates children from their Mother, entices sheep from their shepherd, and disturbs the sacraments of God. And whereas the lapsed has sinned once, the former sins daily. Finally, the lapsed later, after achieving martyrdom, can receive the promises of the kingdom; the former, if he is killed outside the Church, cannot arrive at the rewards of the Church.

Chapter 20

Let no one marvel, most beloved brethren, that even certain of the confessors proceed to these lengths, that some also sin so wickedly and so grievously. For neither does confession [of Christ] make one immune from the snares of the devil, nor does it defend him who is still placed in the world, with a perpetual security against worldly temptations and dangers and onsets and attacks; otherwise never might we have seen afterwards among the confessors the deceptions and debaucheries and adulteries which now with groaning and sorrow we see among some. Whoever that confessor is, he is not greater or better or dearer to God than Solomon, who, however, as long as he walked in the ways of the Lord, so long retained the grace which he had received from the Lord; after he had abandoned the way of the Lord, he lost also the grace of the Lord. And so it is written: 'Hold what you have, lest another receive thy crown.'¹ Surely the Lord would not make this threat, that the crown of righteousness can be taken away, unless, when righteousness departs, the crown also must depart.

¹ Apoc. 3.11.

Chapter 21

Confession is the beginning of glory, not already the merit of the crown; nor does it achieve praise, but it initiates dignity, and, since it is written; 'He that shall persevere to end, he shall be saved,'¹ whatever has taken place before the end is a step by which the ascent is made to the summit of salvation, not the end by which the topmost point is held secure. He is a confessor, but after the confession the danger is greater, because the adversary is the more provoked. He is a confessor; for this reason he ought to stand with the Gospel of the Lord, for by the Gospel he has obtained glory from the Lord. 'To whom much is given, of him much is required';² and to whom the more dignity is allotted, from him the more service is demanded. Let no one perish through the example of a confessor, let no one learn injustice, no one insolence, no one perfidy from the habits of a confessor. He is a confessor; let him be humble and quiet, in his actions let him be modest with discipline, so that he who is called a confessor of Christ may imitate the Christ whom he confesses. For since he says: 'Everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, and everyone that humbles himself shall be exalted,'³ and since he himself has been exalted by the Father, because He, the Word and the Power and the Wisdom of God the Father humbled Himself on earth, how can He love pride who even by His law enjoined humility upon us and Himself received from the Father the highest name as the reward of humility? He is a confessor of Christ, but only if afterwards the majesty and dignity of Christ be not blasphemed by him. Let not the tongue which has confessed Christ be abusive nor boisterous; let it not be heard

1 Matt. 10.22.

2 Cf. Luke 12.48.

3 Luke 18.14.

resounding with insults and contentions; let it not after words of praise shoot forth a serpent's poisons against the brethren and priests of God. But if he later become blameworthy and abominable, if he dissipates his confession by evil conversation, if he pollutes his life with unseemly foulness, if, finally, abandoning the Church where he became a confessor and breaking the concord of its unity, he change his first faith for a later faithlessness, he cannot flatter himself by reason of his confession as if elected to the reward of glory, when by this very fact the merits of punishment have grown the more.

Chapter 22

For the Lord chose even Judas among the Apostles, and yet later Judas betrayed the Lord. Nevertheless, the firmness and faith of the Apostles did not on this account fall, because the traitor Judas defected from their fellowship. So also in this case the sanctity and dignity of the confessors was not immediately diminished, because the faith of some of them was broken. The blessed Apostle speaks in his letter saying: 'For what if some of them have fallen away from the faith? Has their infidelity made of no effect the faith of God? God forbid. For God is true, but every man a liar.'¹ The greater and better part of the confessors stand firm in the strength of their faith and in the truth of the Lord's law and teaching, neither do they depart from the peace of the Church, who remember that they have obtained grace in the Church from God's esteem, and by this very fact do they obtain greater praise for their faith, that they separated themselves from the perfidy of those who had been joined with them in the fellowship of confession, and withdrew from the contagion of their crime. Moreover, illumined by

¹ Cf. Rom. 3.3,4.

the light of the Gospel, shining with the pure white light of the Lord, they are as praiseworthy in preserving the peace of Christ as they were victorious in their encounter with the devil.

Chapter 23

Indeed, I desire, most beloved brethren, and I likewise advise and entreat, that, if it can be done, no one of the brethren perish, and that our rejoicing Mother enclose in her bosom one body of people in agreement. If, however, saving counsel cannot recall certain leaders of schisms and authors of dissensions who persist in their blind and obstinate madness to the way of salvation, yet the rest of you either taken by your simplicity, or induced by error, or deceived by some craftiness of misleading cunning, free yourselves from the snare of deceit, liberate your wandering steps from errors, recognize the right way of the heavenly road. The words of the Apostle giving testimony are: 'We charge you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that you withdraw from all brethren who walk disorderly and not according to the tradition which they received from us.'¹ And again he says: 'Let no one deceive you with vain words; for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be ye not, therefore, partakers with them.'² We must withdraw, rather flee from those who fall away, lest, while one is joined with them as they walk wickedly, and passes over the paths of error and crime, wandering apart from the way of the true road, he himself also be caught in a like crime. God is one and Christ one and His Church one and the faith one and the people one joined together by the tie of concord into a solid unity of

¹ 2 Thess. 3.6.

² Eph. 5.6,7.

body. The unity cannot be torn asunder, nor can the one body be separated by a division of its structure, nor torn into bits by the wrenching asunder of its entrails by laceration. Whatever departs from the parent-stem will not be able to breathe and live apart; it loses the substance of health.

Chapter 24

The Holy Spirit warns us, saying: 'Who is the man that desireth life; who loveth to see the best days? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace, and pursue it.'¹ The son of peace ought to seek and follow peace; he who knows and loves the bond of charity ought to restrain his tongue from the evil of dissension. Among his divine commands and salutary instructions the Lord now very near His passion added the following: 'Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.'² This inheritance He gave us, all the gifts and rewards of His promise He assured us in the conservation of peace. If we are heirs of Christ, let us remain in the peace of Christ; if we are sons of God, we ought to be peace-makers. 'Blessed,' He said, 'are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God.'³ The sons of God should be peace-makers, gentle in heart, simple in speech, harmonious in affection, clinging to one another faithfully in the bonds of unanimity.

¹ Cf. Ps. 33.13-15.

² John 14.27.

³ Matt. 5.9.

Chapter 25

This unanimity existed of old among the Apostles; thus the new assembly of believers, guarding the commandments of the Lord, maintained their charity. Scripture proves this in the following words: 'But the multitude of those who believed acted with one soul and one mind.'¹ And again, 'And all were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren.'² Thus they prayed with efficacious prayers; thus they were able with confidence to obtain whatever they asked of God's mercy.

Chapter 26

But with us unanimity has been so diminished that even the liberality of our good works has been lessened. Then they sold their homes and estates, and, laying up treasures for themselves in heaven, they offered to the Apostles the proceeds to be distributed for use among the poor. But now we do not even give a tenth of our patrimony, and, although the Lord orders us to sell, we rather buy and increase. So has the vigor of faith withered in us; so has the strength of believers languished. And therefore the Lord, looking upon our times, says in His Gospel: 'When the Son of man comes, do you think that He will find faith on the earth?'¹ We see that what he foretold is coming to pass. There is no faith in the fear of God, in the law of justice, in love, in works. No one considers fear of the future; no one thinks of the day of the Lord and the anger of God and the punishments

¹ Acts 4.32.

² Acts 1.14.

¹ Luke 18.8.

to come upon unbelievers and the eternal torments decreed for the faithless. Whatever our conscience would fear, if it believed, because it does not believe, it does not fear at all. But if it did believe, it would also be on guard; if it were on guard, it would also escape.

Chapter 27

Let us rouse ourselves in so far as we can, most beloved brethren, and, breaking the sleep of old inertia let us awake to the observing and keeping of the Lord's precepts. Let us be such as He Himself ordered us to be when He said: 'Let your loins be girt, and your lamps brightly burning, and you yourself like to men waiting for their Lord, when He shall come from the wedding, that when He comes and knocks, they may open to Him. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He comes, shall find watching.'¹ We ought to be girt, lest, when the day of departure come, it finds us burdened and entangled. Let our light shine forth in good works and glow, so that it may lead us from the night of this world to the light of eternal brightness. Let us always with solicitude and caution await the sudden coming of the Lord, so that, when He knocks, our faith may be vigilant, ready to receive from the Lord the reward of its vigilance. If these mandates are kept, if these warnings and precepts are maintained, we cannot be overtaken while sleeping by the deceit of the devil; we will reign as vigilant servants with Christ as our Lord.

¹ Luke 12.35-37.

