

I wish that you, my most beloved and cherished brothers, may ever fare well in the Lord and be mindful of us. Farewell.

LETTER 17

*Cyprian sends greetings to his brothers among the laity.*¹

1.1 There is no need for me to be told, my dearest brothers, that you are pained and distressed over the downfall of our brethren. 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 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.*³

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, and by their wounds they inflicted a like pain on us. These are wounds which can indeed be healed by the power of our merciful God.⁴

1.2 All the same, my view is that we ought not to be hasty or do anything incautiously or hurriedly; otherwise there is the risk that if we usurp peace rashly, we may rouse God's displeasure and wrath all the more severely.⁵

The blessed martyrs have sent us a letter about certain people, asking that their requests should be examined.⁶ After the Lord has first restored peace to us all and, as soon as we have returned to the Church, these requests will be examined individually, in your presence and with the help of your judgment.⁷

2.1 In spite of this, I am told that there are certain of the presbyters who are neither mindful of the gospel nor do they heed what the martyrs have written to us: they do not preserve for their bishop the respect due to his sacred office and to his throne,⁸ but they have already begun to join in communion with the fallen, offering the sacrifice on their behalf and giving

them the Eucharist, whereas they ought to go through the proper stages to reach this end. For in the case of less serious sins, not committed directly against God,⁹ a man does penance for an appropriate period; the penitent then must make public confession after his life has been examined; and nobody can be admitted to communion without first having had hands laid on him by the bishop and clergy. It follows that in the case of these most serious and grievous of sins we must comply with every observance, with all the greater reserve and restraint, in conformity with the discipline of the Lord.

2.2 This is indeed the counsel which the presbyters and deacons ought to have given to our people,¹⁰ thereby cherishing the flock entrusted to their care and directing them, by means of the teaching of God, on to the way whereby they might beg for the recovery of their salvation. I know personally the peace-loving as well as the God-fearing disposition of our people;¹¹ I know that they would be keeping watch, making amends to God and beseeching His pardon, had they not been led astray by certain of the presbyters who wanted to win their favour.¹²

3.1 Accordingly, you at least must guide the fallen individually and your restraining counsel must temper their attitudes to conform with God's precepts. No-one should pick sour fruit, before the proper season. No-one, when his ship has been buffeted and holed by the waves, should entrust it again to the deep, before he has had it carefully repaired.¹³ No-one should be in a hurry to take up and put on a torn tunic, before he has seen that it has been mended by a skilled craftsman and has got it back after treatment by the fuller.

3.2 I beg them to pay patient heed to our advice: wait for our return. Then, when, through God's mercy, we have come to you and the bishops have been called together,¹⁴ a large number of us will be able to examine the letter of the blessed martyrs and their requests, acting in conformity with the discipline of the Lord and in the presence of the confessors,¹⁵ and in accordance, also, with your judgment.

On this matter I have written both to the clergy and to the martyrs and confessors, both of which letters I have instructed should be read to you.

I wish that you, my most dear and cherished brothers, may ever fare well in the Lord and be mindful of us. Farewell.

LETTER 18

*Cyprian sends greetings to the presbyters and deacons, his brothers.*¹

1.1 I am astonished, my dear brothers, that you have made no reply in answer to the numerous letters of mine which I have sent to you on many occasions.² And yet the welfare and needs of our community would best be regulated if we could give accurate counsel on the management of affairs after receiving information from you.

1.2 However, I see that there is as yet no opportunity for me to come to you and summer has already begun, a season which plagues with constant and serious illnesses.³ It is my view, therefore, that we must bring some relief to our brothers.⁴

In the case of those who have received certificates from the martyrs and can, consequently, be helped by those martyrs' privileged position before God,⁵ should they be seized by some sickness or dangerous illness, they need not wait for our presence,⁶ but they may make confession of their sin before any presbyter in person, or if a presbyter cannot be found and their end is coming fast, even before a deacon.⁷ In this way, after hands have been laid upon them in forgiveness,⁸ they may come to the Lord with that peace which, in their letter to us,⁹ the martyrs requested should be granted to them.

2.1 The remainder of our people who have fallen you must comfort and cherish by your presence¹⁰ and your compassion lest they forsake their faith in the Lord and His mercy. For they will not be left deprived of the Lord's aid and assistance, if, with meekness and humility, they genuinely do penance and persevere in honourable reputation;¹¹ they, too, will be cared for by the remedy God provides.

2.2 Over the catechumens¹² as well you must keep unfailing

watch in the case of any of them who is overtaken by serious illness and is close to death. The mercy of God should not be denied those who call upon the grace of God.¹³

I wish that you, my dear brothers, may ever fare well and be mindful of us. Send greetings on my behalf to all of our brothers and bid them be mindful of us. Farewell.

LETTER 19

*Cyprian sends greetings to the presbyters and deacons, his brothers.*¹

1. I have read your letter,² my dearest brothers, in which you write that you are not failing to give our brethren your saving counsel,³ bidding them lay aside all rash haste and show towards God truly religious patience. In this way, when by God's mercy we have come together, we will be able to discuss every aspect of the problem in conformity with the discipline of the Church.⁴ For it should especially be borne in mind that it is written: *Remember whence you have fallen and do penance.*⁵ Now he does penance who being mindful of this precept of God is meek, and patient, and obedient to the bishops of God,⁶ and he thereby earns the Lord's favour by his acts of submission and his just works.

2.1 However, you indicate that there are certain people who cannot be restrained; they are importunately pressing for prompt reception into communion. And you ask that I give you a ruling on this matter. I think I wrote to you at sufficient length on this subject in my last letter to you.⁷ I said that in the case of those who have received a certificate from the martyrs and who can accordingly receive from them aid and assistance before God over their sins, if it happens that they are beset by some dangerous illness, they should make their confession and you should lay hands on them in forgiveness, and thus they may be sent on to the Lord possessing that peace which the martyrs had promised to them.⁸

But as for the others who have not received any certificate from the martyrs and are stirring up resentment,⁹ they must wait until, thanks to the Lord's protection, there is first general peace for the Church herself, since this is a question which does not affect just a few or one church only or one province but it concerns the entire world.¹⁰

2.2 For it befits the modesty, discipline and the very way of life we should all live¹¹ that we leaders¹² should assemble in company with the clergy, and in the presence as well of the laity who stand steadfast—to them also honour is due for their faith and their fear of the Lord¹³—and thus we may be able jointly to settle all matters by taking sacred counsel together.¹⁴

2.3 On the other hand, is it not contrary to all that is sacred and is it not fraught with peril precisely for those who are in such haste that whereas those who have been exiled and driven from their native land and stripped of all their possessions have not yet returned to their Church,¹⁵ yet some of the fallen should want to press forward so as to precede even the confessors and to enter the Church ahead of them?¹⁶ If they are in such excessive haste, they have what they are demanding within their own power—in fact present circumstances generously provide them with more than they demand. The battle is still being fought; each day the contest is being staged. If they are genuinely and resolutely repentant of their fault and if the fervour of their faith is overpoweringly strong, he who cannot be deferred can be crowned.¹⁷

I wish that you, my dearest brothers, may ever fare well and be mindful of us. Send greetings on my behalf to all the community and bid them be mindful of us. Farewell.

LETTER 20

*Cyprian sends greetings to his brothers, the presbyters and deacons dwelling in Rome.*¹

1.1 I have discovered, beloved brethren, that the reports being made to you on our actions both past and present are not completely candid and accurate.² I have therefore considered it necessary to write to you this letter in order that I might render to you an account of our conduct, our maintenance of Church discipline, and our zeal.³

1.2 Right at the very first onset of the troubles, when the populace clamoured for me violently and repeatedly,⁴ I followed the directives and instructions of the Lord⁵ and withdrew for the time being.⁶ I was thinking not so much of my own safety as the general peace of our brethren; I was concerned that if I brazenly continued to show myself in Carthage I might aggravate even further the disturbance that had begun.⁷ And yet, though absent in body, I have not faltered in spirit,⁸ action, or the advice I have given, endeavouring to look after the interests of our brothers in conformity with the Lord's precepts in so far as my meagre abilities have allowed.

2.1 As for what I have done, the letters which I sent as occasion required—thirteen in all—will tell you. Of these I am enclosing copies. Cyprian's copies of letters

In these letters you will find from me counsel for the clergy,⁹ exhortation for the confessors,¹⁰ rebuke when required for the exiled,¹¹ and an urgent appeal to the entire community that they should beseech the mercy of God.¹² Under the Lord's inspiration¹³ we have striven to the utmost of our meagre talents, in accordance with the law of faith and the fear of God.

2.2 But after the advent of tortures¹⁴ our words reached as far as the prisons in order to bring strength and solace to our brothers who either had already been tortured or were still imprisoned waiting to be tortured.¹⁵ Furthermore, I discovered that those who had stained their hands and lips with sacrilegious contagion or had none the less contaminated their consciences with impious certificates¹⁶ were everywhere soliciting the mar-

tyrs, and they were endeavouring to corrupt the confessors, as well, flattering and importuning them with their entreaties.¹⁷ The result was that with no distinctions drawn, with no inquiry made into each case separately, thousands of certificates were being issued every day, contrary to the law of the gospel.¹⁸

In view of this, I composed a letter in which, so far as I could, I tried by my counsel to call the martyrs and confessors back to the Lord's precepts.¹⁹

2.3 Likewise, in the case of the presbyters and deacons, I did not fail to act with the full vigour of my episcopal authority in order to check, by our intervention, certain individuals among them; too little mindful of the Church's discipline, they were acting with a rash and impetuous haste and had already begun to join in communion with the fallen.²⁰ The laity, too, we reassured to the best of our endeavour²¹ and we gave them instruction so that the Church's discipline might be maintained.

3.1 Subsequently certain of the fallen, whether of their own accord or incited by someone else, began to make wild demands and charged forth striving to extort for themselves, by means of violent attack, the peace which had been promised to them by the martyrs and confessors. On this question I actually wrote two letters to the clergy and I gave orders that my letters should be read to them.²² In order in some way to mitigate for the time being their violence,²³ I said that in the case of any who were in receipt of a certificate from the martyrs and were about to depart from this life, they should make their confession and after hands had been laid on them in forgiveness they should be sent on to the Lord in possession of that peace promised to them by the martyrs.²⁴ On this matter I neither laid down a law nor rashly set myself up as an authority.²⁵

3.2 But I did think that respect should be shown to the martyrs whereas those who were striving so violently to create total chaos should be restrained. And furthermore I have read your message which you recently²⁶ sent to our clergy by the hands of the subdeacon Crementius.²⁷ You counselled that comfort should be given to those who fell ill after their lapse and, being penitent, were anxious to be admitted to communion.²⁸ I have, therefore, decided that I too should take my stand along-

side your opinion, thereby avoiding that our actions, which ought to be united and in harmony on every issue, might differ in any respect.²⁹

3.3 Besides, as regards the remainder, I have given instructions that even though they may have received a certificate from the martyrs they should be deferred until we are personally present. Then, when peace has been restored to us by the Lord, we church leaders can meet together in a large gathering,³⁰ and after exchanging views with you also, we will be able to arrange or amend all the various issues.³¹

I wish that you, beloved brothers, may ever fare well.

LETTER 21

*Celerinus to Lucianus.*¹

1.1 As I write to you, my honoured brother,² I am both happy and sad.

I am happy, for I have heard that you have been apprehended for the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour³ and that His name you have confessed before the magistrates of this world.⁴ But I am also sad, for I have failed to receive any letters at all from you ever since the time I saw you off.⁵ Indeed, I am at this moment weighed down by a twofold sadness; this is because though you were aware that Montanus, our common brother, was going to come to me from the prison where you are,⁶ you still sent no word to me about how you are and what is happening to you.

But this is something which often happens in the case of the servants of God, especially those who are in the process of confessing Christ.⁷

1.2 I know that all such people cease to give a thought to the affairs of this world, for their hopes are set on a heavenly crown; as I have myself remarked, it may possibly have slipped your mind to write to me. It may also be true that you might actually term me, even given my very lowly position, your own broth-

of days. For it is now eight days—up to the time I write to you—since we have been shut up again. And for the five days previous to that²¹ we received but a small amount of bread and a ration of water.²²

And so, my brother, my petition is just as I put it now,²³ that as soon as the Lord has granted peace to the Church herself, they may receive peace in accordance with the command of Paulus and, as we have decided, after their case has been laid before the bishop and they have made their confession. And this is not only for these sisters but for all those sisters who you know are dear to us.²⁴

3.1 All of my colleagues send greetings to you. Send our greetings to the confessors of the Lord who are there with you and whose names you have indicated, amongst whom are Saturninus and his companions—he is a colleague of mine also²⁵—and Maris, Collecta and Emerita,²⁶ Calpurnius and Maria, Sabina, Spesina and the sisters Januaria, Dativa, and Donata.²⁷ We send greetings to Saturus and his family, to Bassianus and to all of the clergy,²⁸ to Uranius, Alexius, Quintianus, Colonica—to everyone, please, whose names I have not written, for I am so weary; so they ought to pardon me. I hope that you fare well, and Alexius and Getulicus and the brothers Argentarius and their sisters.²⁹ My sisters Januaria and Sophia, whom I commend to you, send their greetings to you.³⁰

LETTER 23

*All the confessors send greetings to pope Cyprian.*¹

This is to inform you that all of us have together² granted peace to those whose conduct since their fault you shall find, upon examination, to be satisfactory.³ It is our wish that you should make this resolution known to other bishops also,⁴ and it is our desire that you should be at peace with the holy martyrs.⁵ Written by Lucianus, in the presence of an exorcist and a lector from the clergy.⁶

LETTER 24

*Caldonius sends greetings to Cyprian and his fellow presbyters at Carthage.*¹

1.1 Our present grave circumstances demand that we do not lightly grant reconciliation. And, therefore, I considered I ought to write to you about the case of those individuals who first sacrificed but then when they were tested a second time, were sent into exile.² In my view they have washed away their former fault in that they forsake homes and possessions and, repenting, follow Christ.³

This is the case with Felix who was an assistant to the presbyters in the time of Decimus.⁴ He was chained next to me (I, therefore, know this Felix particularly well)⁵ and along with Victoria his wife and Lucius they have been exiled for their loyal faith, abandoning their possessions which are now held by the treasury.⁶ Moreover, in the course of this same persecution,⁷ a woman by the name of Bona was dragged by her husband to offer sacrifice; she did not sully her conscience but they, by holding her hands, thus made the sacrifice themselves.⁸ She then started to cry out in protest herself: "I did not do it; you have done it." And so she, too, was exiled.

1.2 All of these have together been petitioning me for reconciliation.⁹ They urge: "We have recovered the faith which we had lost; in repentance we have publicly confessed Christ." Although it is my view that they deserve to receive reconciliation, I have deferred their case in order to consult you; I do not want to appear to act with any rash presumption. If, therefore, you have come to any decision in council together, write to me.¹⁰

Send our greetings to our brothers, as ours send theirs to you. I wish you a very happy farewell.

LETTER 27

Cyprian sends greetings to his brothers, the presbyters and deacons dwelling in Rome.

1.1 I wrote to you, my very dear brothers, a letter in which I gave a description of our conduct and rendered an account of our zeal and our maintenance of Church discipline, paltry though those efforts may be.¹ But now something else has occurred which should also not be left concealed from you.

Our brother Lucianus is himself one of the confessors; his faith, to be sure, is ardent, his courage stout, but being very ill-grounded in reading the Lord's Scriptures he has ventured upon some very foolish activities.² For some time he has been styling himself as leader,³ distributing certificates *en bloc* to large numbers in the name of Paulus⁴ but written in his own hand. Whereas the martyr Mappalicus,⁵ a prudent and restrained man, mindful of the law and Church discipline, composed no letters in opposition to the gospel, but he was moved only by familial piety to issue instructions that peace be granted to his own mother and sister⁶ who had fallen; Saturninus, too, whilst he was still in prison after he had been tortured, issued no letters of that sort.⁷

1.2 But Lucianus, not only whilst Paulus was still in prison, distributed to all and sundry certificates written in his own hand in the name of Paulus, but even after the latter's death he has continued to do these same things under the name of Paulus. His claim is that in this he is following the instructions given to him by Paulus⁸—he does not know that he ought to obey the Lord rather than a fellow servant!⁹ Many certificates have been issued in the name of Aurelius, also, a young man who has endured tortures;¹⁰ they have been written out in the hand of this same Lucianus, on the grounds that Aurelius is illiterate.¹¹

2.1 To try to put some brake on this activity, I wrote a letter to them which I sent to you attached to my previous letter.¹² In that letter I unceasingly urged and counselled them to be mindful of the law and gospel of the Lord.

After that letter, as if acting with greater moderation and

restraint, Lucianus wrote a letter in the name of all the confessors.¹³ By that letter he undermined well nigh every bond of faith, and fear of God, and command of the Lord, and the sanctity and stability of the gospel teachings. For he wrote in the name of everyone that they all granted peace together and that it was their wish that I should make known this resolution to other bishops. I am sending to you a copy of that letter.

2.2 To be sure they added the proviso "to those whose conduct since their fault shall be found, upon examination, to be satisfactory." But this procedure fans even greater animosity against us; when we start hearing and sifting cases one by one, we may be looked upon as denying to many what all are now boastfully claiming they have received from the martyrs and confessors.

3.1 As a direct consequence the beginnings of this rebellion have already started. In several towns in our province¹⁴ church leaders have been attacked and mobbed; and they have been compelled to put into execution¹⁵ on the spot that peace which the martyrs and confessors, so they kept clamouring, had granted once and for all¹⁶ to everyone. They have intimidated into submission their leaders who were without sufficient force of courage and strength of faith to resist them.

3.2 In our own case, too, certain rebels who in the past were only with difficulty kept by us in check and whose cases were to be deferred until we should be present, have become inflamed by this firebrand of a letter with even hotter ardour in their efforts to extort the peace so granted to them. I am sending you a copy of the letter I wrote to the clergy about them.¹⁷

Also I am sending for your perusal two letters, one which my colleague Caldonius wrote to me out of his characteristic integrity and faith, the other being my reply to him.¹⁸ I am sending to you also copies of a letter addressed to this same confessor Lucianus by Celerinus, an upright and stalwart confessor, together with Lucianus' reply to Celerinus.¹⁹ You will see that nothing escapes our watchful zeal and you will learn from the actual documents²⁰ of the restraint and prudence of Celerinus—he shows a modesty founded on the humility and awe proper to our religion.²¹ Lucianus, on the other hand, who is, as I have

mentioned, but poorly trained in an understanding of the Lord's Scriptures,²² shows no restraint in his readiness to bequeath a legacy of ill-will directed against our own modest person.²³

3.3 For the Lord has said that the nations are to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and that in baptism past sins are to be remitted.²⁴ Notwithstanding this, Lucianus, in his ignorance of this precept and of the law, issues instructions that peace is to be granted and sins remitted in the name of Paulus, and this, he claims, was an instruction given to him by Paulus, as you will observe from the letter of this same Lucianus to Celerinus. He has paid scant regard to the fact that it is not martyrs who make the gospel but that martyrs are made through the gospel.

As Paul the Apostle, whom the Lord called a vessel of His election,²⁵ put it in his epistle: *I am astonished that in this way you are so quickly turning away to another gospel from Him who has called you to grace. But there is in fact no other gospel; all that there is, are some people who are confusing you and whose aim is to pervert the gospel of Christ. But should we or should an angel from heaven preach a different message from what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. We have already declared it—and now I say it a second time: should anyone preach to you a different message from what you have received, let him be accursed.*²⁶

4. Your letter addressed to the clergy, which I have received, arrived most opportunely,²⁷ as did also the letter sent by the blessed confessors Moyses, Maximus, Nicostratus and the others to Saturninus and Aurelius and the others.²⁸ In them are to be found the full vigor of the gospel and the unshakeable discipline of the law of the Lord: your words have greatly assisted us as here we use every ounce of our spiritual strength in our struggle to resist this malevolent onslaught. By them our task has been, providentially, cut short and by them, even before our last letter to you actually reached you,²⁹ you have made known to us that your views and ours stand, in conformity with the law of the gospel, firmly and unitedly together.

I wish that you, my most dear and cherished brothers, may ever fare well.

NOTES

The typescript of this volume was submitted for publication in 1976 and I very much regret that it has not proved possible to make full note of material that has appeared in print, or which has come to my attention, since that date. An asterisk in the margin refers to one of the few additional notes.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA.SS.	Acta Sanctorum
AB	Analecta Bollandiana
AC	Antike und Christentum
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AE	L'année épigraphique
AJP	American Journal of Philology
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
BICS	Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CCL	Corpus christianorum, series latina
CIL	Corpus inscriptionum latinarum
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique
CP	Classical Philology
CR	Classical Review
CRAI	Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
DACL	Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie
DHGE	Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique
Fahey	M. A. Fahey, <i>Cyprian and the Bible: A Study in Third-Century Exegesis</i> (Tübingen 1971)

LETTER 55

*Cyprian sends greetings to Antonianus his brother.*¹

1.1 My dearly beloved brother, the first letter of yours which I received, unhesitatingly upheld the united opinion of the college of bishops, thereby declaring your own adherence to the catholic Church.² In it you indicated that you rejected communion with Novatian but rather that you followed our counsel³ and were, therefore, in full accord with our fellow bishop Cornelius.

1.2 You also wrote in your letter that I should convey a copy of that letter of yours to Cornelius, our mutual colleague, so that he might be relieved of any further concern and could rest assured that you are in communion with him, that is to say, in communion with the catholic Church.⁴

2.1 But there has reached me subsequently a second letter of yours delivered through the services of our fellow presbyter Quintus.⁵ In this letter I perceive your conviction has started to waver, swayed by letters from Novatian.⁶ For whereas previously you had declared your counsel and your accord with firm resolution,⁷ you now request in this second letter that I write back to you explaining what heresy it is which Novatian has introduced and how it is that Cornelius can be in communion with Trofimius and those who have offered incense.⁸

2.2 Now, if it is true that your worries derive from anxious concern for the faith, and if it is out of such concern that you are inquiring into the truth on a matter of which you have doubts, then there is no cause for reproach that you should now feel concern and indecision and hesitation when holy fear is your motive.⁹

3.1 But as it is, I do observe that it was after you had declared your verdict in your first letter that you were subsequently shaken by those letters from Novatian. Now, my dearly beloved brother, I must make one point clear at the very outset: men of gravity who have

been solidly established and firmly founded upon a rock¹⁰ are not shaken even by gale and hurricane, let alone by some trivial breeze. They would not have their convictions constantly tossed to and fro by squalls and gusts of wind, left swinging in doubt and uncertainty before the blasts of contrary opinion, nor would they shift from their resolution, once reached, laying themselves open to reproach for fickleness of purpose.

Lest this should happen in your case or in the case of anyone else¹¹ through the letters of Novatian, I shall briefly set out, as you request, my brother, an account of the matter.

3.2 And as my conduct also seems to have caused you to be troubled, I must start by clearing my own case and character in your eyes. I do not want it thought that it was out of any fickleness that I have retreated from my earlier position. Nor do I wish to give the appearance that, whereas at the beginning I originally upheld the full rigour of the gospel, I have subsequently slackened my attitude from my former strictness and zealousness, in that I have come to the view that conditions for reconciliation ought to be made less stringent for those who have stained their consciences by obtaining certificates of sacrifice as well as for those who have actually committed the heinous act of sacrifice. Neither of these positions I adopted without careful deliberation and lengthy consideration.¹²

4.1 At the time of the persecution, when men were still locked in combat and in the heat of the glorious battle, what was incumbent on us was to arouse with all our might the fighting strength of our soldiers, using every resource of exhortation. In particular, we had to instill fresh spirit into the hearts of the fallen, rallying them by the trumpet call of our words in order to get them to pursue the route to repentance, but not just through prayer and lamentation. Since the opportunity was still there to rejoin the fray and to recover their salvation, they needed to be spurred on by the goad of our rebukes, to be stimulated to ardour for confession and zeal for the glories of martyrdom.

4.2 In fact, when my presbyters and deacons wrote to me that there were lapsed who could not be restrained and in their impatience were demanding to be admitted to communion, in the reply which I wrote (in a letter which you can still see) I ended with these words: "If they are in such excessive haste, they have what they are de-

manding within their own power—in fact present circumstances generously provide them with more than what they demand. The battle is still being fought; each day the contest is being staged. If they are genuinely and resolutely repentant of their fault and if the fervour of their faith is overpoweringly strong, he who cannot be deferred can be crowned."¹³

4.3 But, as to what was to be determined about the case of the lapsed, I postponed any decision. My idea was that when peace and tranquillity had been restored and God in His goodness allowed the bishops to gather together, then that was the time for everyone to contribute and exchange their views together and to deliberate upon them, and it was after that that we should determine what ought to be done. But should anyone have the presumption to admit the lapsed to communion without waiting for our deliberations and the ruling determined on the basis of that general deliberation, then he was himself to be excluded from communion.¹⁴

5. Moreover, I also wrote to this effect at some length to the clergy in Rome, who were at the time managing affairs without a bishop, as well as to the confessors there—the presbyter Maximus and the others who were then shut up in their prison but who are now united with Cornelius in the Church.¹⁵ You can gather from their reply that I wrote to them in this vein. This is what they said in their letter: "However, on this major issue we are indeed in agreement with the opinion which you yourself have argued, namely, that we must wait first, until the Church has peace, and then, after bishops, presbyters, deacons, confessors, and the laity who have remained steadfast have exchanged views in conference together, we can deal with the question of the lapsed."¹⁶ And at the conclusion to this letter (Novatian wrote it at the time, and when he read out aloud himself what he had written, Moyses, then still a confessor and now a martyr, gave to it his signature¹⁷) there was expressed the view that reconciliation should be granted to the lapsed who were sick and near death. This letter was distributed to all parts of the world and has reached the knowledge of all the churches and all the brethren.¹⁸

6.1 And, in accordance with what had been planned beforehand, when the persecution died down and opportunity offered for us to convene together,¹⁹ there gathered in Council a generous number of bishops who had been preserved safe and unharmed thanks to

their own staunch faith and the protection of the Lord.²⁰ Scriptural passages were produced, in a lengthy debate, on both sides of the issue²¹ and eventually we arrived at a balanced and moderate decision, striking a healthy mean.²² On the one hand, hopes for reconciliation and for admission to communion were not to be denied altogether to the lapsed, for there was the danger, otherwise, that in their despair they might fall away even further, and finding themselves shut out from the Church,²³ they might follow the ways of the world and start living no better than pagans. But in turn, on the other side, the strictness of the gospel teachings ought not be so relaxed that the fallen should be allowed to come rushing forward to communion pell-mell. Rather they should undergo prolonged penitence, and with grief and tears beg for indulgence from the Father; their various cases should be scrutinised individually, along with their personal attitudes and the special pressures under which they may have acted.²⁴

All this is contained in the document which I am sure must have reached you; in it there are listed, in summary form, the various resolutions we passed.²⁵

6.2 And in case anyone might regard the number of bishops who met in Africa to have been too few, you should know that we wrote to Rome also on this matter, to our colleague Cornelius.²⁶ And he, meeting in Council with a large number of his fellow bishops, has agreed upon the same verdict as ours, after debating with equal seriousness and striking the same healthy balance.²⁷

7.1 I have felt compelled to write to you now on all this, so that you can be convinced that I have taken no action without grave consideration,²⁸ but that, according to the policy I had adopted in my earlier letters, I deferred all questions for determination at our debates together in Council. I certainly did not admit to communion any of the fallen before that time, for it was still possible for them to win not only pardon but even a martyr's crown.

7.2 But, afterwards, as the college of bishops harmoniously agreed²⁹ and as was demanded in the interests of gathering our scattered brethren together and of healing their wounds, I yielded to the urgent needs of the times and considered we ought to make provisions that would bring salvation to the many. And you should realise that today I am not deviating in any way from those measures which were resolutely adopted at our Council after we had debated to-

gether, however many may be the rumours that are now widely broadcast, and whatever the lies now in general circulation against the bishops of God—slanders that have in fact issued from the mouth of the devil in an attempt to rupture the bonds of catholic unity.

7.3 But your duty is clear. As a loyal brother and as a fellow bishop who is at one with us, you should not lend a ready ear to the words of apostates and slanderers; rather you should take care in judging the actions which your colleagues, men of moderation and sobriety, have taken, in the light of what you know about our lives and strict moral conduct.³⁰

8.1 I now turn, my dearly beloved brother, to the character of our colleague Cornelius. My purpose is that you should have a more truthful appreciation of Cornelius, as we do, relying not on the lies of evil-tongued calumniators but rather on the judgment of God, who made him a bishop, and on the testimony of his fellow bishops, who, without exception the whole world over, have given him their approbation in unanimous accord.³¹

8.2 Firstly, what commends our dearly beloved Cornelius to God and to Christ and His Church as well as to all of his fellow bishops and what brings him particular credit and renown is this: Cornelius did not get to the episcopate by one sudden step; rather, having advanced through all the successive clerical offices and having served the Lord honourably in these services of religious administration, he reached the lofty pinnacle of the episcopacy by climbing up through every grade in the Church's ministry.³²

8.3 In the second place, Cornelius neither solicited nor sought that office of bishop, much less did he come charging in and seize it, like some other people who are swollen and bloated with their conceit and arrogance. But he remained as ever gentle and meek, behaving precisely in the manner usually displayed by those who are chosen by God's will for such a position. As you would expect of a man of modesty and virginal chastity, a man of inborn humility and unfailing self-effacement, so far from resorting to violence in order to be made bishop, as certain other people have done, he actually suffered violence himself in that he had to be coerced into accepting that office of bishop.³³

8.4 And bishop he was made, by a large number of our colleagues who were present at the time in the city of Rome and who

have sent to us on the subject of his appointment testimonials which acclaim his honour and esteem and cover him with glory by their praises.³⁴ Moreover, Cornelius was made bishop by the choice of God and of His Christ, by the favourable witness of almost all of the clergy, by the votes of the laity then present, and by the assembly of bishops, men of maturity and integrity.³⁵ And he was made bishop when no one else had been made bishop before him, when the position of Fabian, that is to say, the position of Peter and the office of the bishop's chair, was vacant.³⁶

But that position once having been filled by the will of God and that appointment having been ratified by the consent of us all,³⁷ if anyone wants to be made a bishop after that, it has to be done outside the Church: if a man does not uphold the Church's unity, it is not possible for him to have the Church's ordination. No matter who he may be, and however much he may sing his own praises, and whatever rights he may lay claim to, he is not one of us, he is an alien, he is an outsider. And in these cases there cannot be, after the first, any second appointment; should, therefore, anyone be appointed after the one who must be the only one appointed, he becomes then not even appointed to the second place, but nothing at all.

9.1 So, then, Cornelius took on this office of bishop, obtained neither through any corruption nor any extortion but through the will of God, who is the one who makes bishops.³⁸ Look at the courage he displayed in the very act of taking on that office, look at his resoluteness of spirit, the steadfastness of his faith; these are qualities we cannot fail to recognise, if we are honest, and admire. For he took his seat on his bishop's chair in Rome without a tremor of fear precisely at the time when that savage tyrant was menacing bishops of God with dire and dreadful horrors,³⁹ at a time when news that a rival emperor was being raised up against him he would receive with far greater patience and forbearance than word that a bishop of God was being appointed in Rome.⁴⁰

9.2 There can be no doubt, dearest brother, that such a bishop deserves to be honoured with the highest commendation for his faith and courage. He must surely be accounted amongst the glorious confessors and martyrs, for he remained seated on his chair for so long a time, awaiting the executioners of his own body, the avengers of that enraged tyrant.⁴¹ Cornelius had resisted his ferocious edicts,⁴² in

the vigour of his faith he had trampled underfoot all his threats and torments and tortures. They would come to attack him, sword in hand, to crucify him, to roast him in flames, to mangle his bowels and limbs in some exquisite form of punishment. It is true that the Lord, our protector, in His majesty and goodness did protect, after his appointment, the one who was appointed bishop according to His will. Yet, from the point of view of his readiness to sacrifice himself⁴³ and of the fears he endured, Cornelius suffered all that he could suffer.⁴⁴ The tyrant was later to be vanquished by the arms of battle; Cornelius had vanquished him already by his office of bishop.⁴⁵

10.1 But don't be surprised, all the same, that there are in circulation some disgraceful and malicious stories concerning him. You must be aware that this is a work the devil is always engaged in, to lash the servants of God with lies and to disfigure their glorious reputation with fictitious rumours so that those who shine brightly in the light of their own conscience may be blackened by the reports of others.⁴⁶

10.2 And you should also be aware that our colleagues have inquired into the matter⁴⁷ and have ascertained, beyond any shadow of doubt, that Cornelius has not been soiled with the stain from any certificate of sacrifice (a story which some are broadcasting), neither has he joined sacrilegiously in communion with bishops who themselves have sacrificed; rather he has united with us only those whose cases have been heard and whose innocence has been established.⁴⁸

11.1 Indeed, in the case of Trofimus (on which you ask that I write to you), the situation is quite different from that reported to you by the rumour and lies purveyed by the spiteful. For our dearly beloved brother Cornelius has done no more than our predecessors also have often done: for the sake of gathering our scattered brethren together, he has made concessions in the face of necessity.⁴⁹

11.2 Large numbers of Trofimus' congregation had seceded, following Trofimus. But Trofimus then proceeded to return to the Church and to acknowledge his former error, making amends for his offence and penitently begging for pardon. Indeed, he showed perfect humility and atonement by calling back the brethren whom he had so recently led away. His prayers were therefore heard and into the Church of the Lord were admitted not so much Trofimus as the large number of brethren who had remained with Trofimus, all of

whom would have refused to return to the Church had they not come in the company of Trofimus.⁵⁰

11.3 And so, after a large number of our colleagues there had debated the matter together,⁵¹ Trofimus was received back; the return of the brethren and salvation restored to so many brought atonement on his behalf. Yet Trofimus was allowed in only on the condition that he be admitted to communion as a layman—it is not true (as letters from spiteful enemies have told you) that he now occupies the position of bishop.⁵²

12. You also mention that it has been reported to you that Cornelius is admitting to communion, indiscriminately, those who have sacrificed; this, too, is one of those fictions and rumours originating with those apostates.⁵³ For those who withdraw from us are incapable of praising us, nor should we expect to find favour with those who reject favour with us,⁵⁴ who rebel against the Church, and who wildly fling themselves into the work of inciting our brothers away from the Church. And so, my dearly beloved brother, I do ask you not to listen too readily to whatever stories are being spread about concerning Cornelius, or myself, nor to give ready credence to them.

13.1 But the facts are as follows.

Should anyone fall seriously ill, in accordance with our resolution we bring comfort to them in their time of danger.⁵⁵ But once comfort has been brought to them and peace has been granted to them in that danger, we cannot then set about choking them or suffocating them or, by laying violent hands on them ourselves, forcing on their end. It is as if they absolutely have to die after so receiving peace, because it is to the *dying* that we grant peace! Whereas, in fact, we can see clear proof of God's loving-kindness and His paternal gentleness, should it so happen that those who receive the pledge of (eternal) life by being granted peace, then have their own lives prolonged here on earth after receiving that peace.⁵⁶

And so, if, after the bestowal of peace, God should grant a reprieve, no one should find in that grounds for attacking their bishops, especially as it has been firmly resolved that we are to bring comfort to our brothers who are in danger of death.

13.2 What is more, my dearly beloved brother, you should not judge (as some do) that those who obtained certificates are to be put on a par with those who offered sacrifice. Why, even amongst those

who actually sacrificed there is often to be discerned a great diversity in circumstances and conditions. For example, we should not put on a par the man who without hesitation sprang forward of his own free will to perform the accursed sacrifice, and another who after putting up a long struggle and resistance eventually approached that deadly task only under compulsion.⁵⁷ Equally different is the man who thrust forward his entire family as well as himself, and another who alone confronted the test on behalf of everyone else, thereby protecting his wife, his children, and his entire household at the cost of endangering himself.⁵⁸ Finally, the man who forced his own tenants and friends to perpetrate that criminal action is not to be equated with the man who spared his tenants and farmers,⁵⁹ who welcomed under the shelter of his own roof many brethren who were refugees in flight on their way to exile,⁶⁰ one who can present and offer before the Lord many souls alive and safe today to intercede for pardon on behalf on his one wounded soul.

14.1 There are, then, these great differences even amongst those who offered sacrifice. It is, therefore, manifestly callous and cruelly overrigid to insist on including amongst those who did offer sacrifice those who merely obtained certificates. For in the case of a person who acquired such a certificate⁶¹ he may plead for himself: "I had previously read and I had learnt from my bishop's preaching⁶² that we should not offer sacrifice to idols and that a servant of God ought not to worship images. And so, in order to avoid doing this action which was forbidden, I seized an opportunity which offered itself for obtaining a certificate (which I would certainly not have acquired had there not presented itself such an opportunity).⁶³ I either went up to the magistrate myself or I gave instructions to another who was on his way up to him. I declared that I was a Christian, that it was forbidden to me to offer sacrifice, that I could not approach the altars of the devil, and that I was, therefore, offering payment in order to avoid doing what was forbidden to me."

14.2 But as it is, the person who was thus tainted with a certificate has learnt from our admonitions that he ought not to have done even this and that, even though his hands remain undefiled and his mouth unpolluted by any contact with that deadly food, his conscience nonetheless has been polluted.⁶⁴ After hearing this advice from us, he is now in tears, and he is sorrowful, realising that he has

sinned. But he thus gives clear assurance that, whilst in the past he went astray not so much out of wickedness as out of error, he is now ready and instructed for facing the future.

15.1 But if we are to reject the repentance of such people (who remain in some degree confident, and not overburdened, in their consciences), they will promptly follow the devil's invitation and dash off into heresy and schism,⁶⁵ taking along their wives and their children whom they had preserved in safety.

And as for us, on the day of judgment there will be found written down against our names that we failed to look after the sheep that was wounded, and that for the sake of one wounded sheep we lost many that were unharmed; and that, whereas the Lord left the ninety-nine sheep that were sound and went in search of the one which had strayed and was weary and having found it He carried it Himself on His own shoulders, we not only fail to seek out those that are weary⁶⁶ but we even drive them away when they approach us. It will be charged to us that precisely at the present time when false prophets are running amok in the flock of Christ, tearing it to pieces, we are presenting an opening to dogs and wolves to do their worst; those who were not destroyed through the attacks of the persecution, we are now destroying ourselves through our own callousness and inhumanity.⁶⁷

15.2 And so, my dearly beloved brother, what will we have done about the words of the Apostle: *I please all men in all things, seeking not what is profitable to myself but profitable to the many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me just as I also am of Christ?* And again he says: *To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak.* As also he says: *If one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it, and if one member rejoices, all the other members rejoice with it.*⁶⁸

16.1 But quite different, dearly beloved brother, is the thinking of philosophers, in particular of the Stoics:⁶⁹ they claim that all sins are equal and that it is quite wrong for a man of gravity to be easily moved to pity.⁷⁰ But the fact is that a vast distance separates Christians and philosophers, and we are warned by the Apostle: *Beware lest you fall prey to the empty wiles of philosophy.*⁷¹ We ought, therefore, to shun any notions which do not issue from the clemency of God but which are rather begotten of the arrogance and rigidity of philosophy.

16.2 By contrast, we read of Moses in the Scriptures: *Now Moses was an exceedingly gentle man.* And in His own Gospel the Lord says: *Be merciful just as your Father has shown mercy to you.* And again: *The healthy have no need of a doctor but rather those who are sick.*⁷²

16.3 What sort of healing art can a man practise who claims: "I look after only the healthy" (who do not require any doctor)?⁷³ Whereas it is to those who are wounded that we ought to provide our assistance and our healing remedies. And we should not regard those who we see were injured in the fatal persecution as dead but rather as lying unconscious. I say unconscious, for had they been completely dead, none of them would ever have become subsequently confessors and, indeed, martyrs.⁷⁴

17.1 There is, therefore, still within them that which by subsequent penitence may be revived into faith. And moreover, penitence is the source which provides arms and strength for renewed valour.

17.2 But a man cannot be so rearmed if he falls away altogether out of despair. For if he has been cruelly and harshly excluded from the Church, he may turn to the ways of the heathen and the practices of the world;⁷⁵ or, being cast out from the Church, he may go over and join the heretics and schismatics, but even if he may subsequently be put to death for the sake of the Name, it will not be possible for him to merit a crown by his death, being as he is outside the Church and cut off from the unity of charity.⁷⁶

17.3 In the light of all this, dearly beloved brother, it was our resolution that their cases should each be examined separately. For a start, those who had obtained certificates should be admitted to communion.⁷⁷ But in the case of those who had sacrificed, comfort should be brought to them at the hour of their death;⁷⁸ our reasoning was that in the grave there is no confession⁷⁹ and that we cannot insist that a man does penitence if the fruits of that penitence are withheld from him.

So now, should battle overtake him before his death, he will be found strengthened by us and armed for battle; if, on the other hand, he should fall desperately ill before any such battle, he departs with the solace of being restored to peace and to communion.⁸⁰

18.1 But the Lord is the one who will come to judge; we pass no prejudgment ourselves. If He finds the sinner's repentance to have

been fully and satisfactorily completed, then He can ratify the verdict which we have determined here on earth.⁸¹ If, on the other hand, we have been fooled by someone's sham repentance, God, who is not mocked and who can see into the hearts of men,⁸² will pass judgment on matters which we have discerned ourselves but imperfectly, and the Lord will emend the sentence of His servants.

Yet, for our part, my brother, we ought all the while to keep in mind the words of Scripture: 18.2 *A brother who helps a brother will be exalted*, and that the Apostle likewise has said: *Each one of you keep watch over yourselves lest you, too, fall into temptation; bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ*. We should further recall that he also warns in his epistle, by way of reproof to the proud and to break their arrogance: *And he who thinks he stands, let him take heed lest he fall*, as elsewhere he also says: *Who are you that you pass judgment on another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. But stand he shall, for God has power to keep him upright*. We should remember, too, the word of John when he demonstrates that Jesus Christ the Lord is our advocate and propitiator for our sins: *My little children, these things I write to you lest you fall into sin. But if anyone has sinned, we have an advocate before the Father Jesus Christ the Just: He is Himself the propitiation for our sins*. And the apostle Paul has similarly declared in his epistle: *If Christ died for us when we were still sinners, how much more surely, being now justified in His blood, shall we be rescued through Him from the divine wrath*.⁸³

19.1 Bearing in mind this kindness and mercy which He shows, we have no right ourselves to be overrigid or harsh and callous in caring for our brothers. Rather we ought to mourn with those who mourn and weep with those who weep;⁸⁴ in so far as we can, we should set them on their feet again with the help and comfort of our love. We have no right to be so hardhearted and unyielding⁸⁵ as to knock back their repentance, but, on the other side, neither ought we to be so soft and easygoing as to slacken the rules and let all and sundry return to communion.

19.2 See, your injured brother lies there before you on the battlefield, wounded at the hands of our foe. On the one side is the devil, striving to have killed the man he has already wounded; on the other side is Christ, urging that the man whom He has redeemed should not be wholly lost. Which of these two do we assist? On whose side

do we stand? Do we lend our support to the devil so that he can destroy him; do we simply walk past our brother lying there half-dead, like the priest and levite in the Gospel?⁸⁶ Or rather, being priests of God and of Christ, do we imitate Christ's teaching and example, snatch our wounded brother from the jaws of our foe, tend him, and keep him safe for God's judgment?

20.1 There is no reason for you to imagine, dearly beloved brother, that our brethren will be any the less courageous or that there will be a decline in the number of martyrs simply because repentance is made easier for the fallen and some hope of reconciliation has now been offered to those who do penance. For the strength of the true believers continues unshaken, the integrity of those who fear and love God with all their hearts remains as steadfast and as firm as ever.

20.2 Now even in the case of adulterers we allow a certain period for penitence and then peace is granted to them. Yet that has not caused any decline in virginity in the Church; the glorious ideal of chastity is not fading away simply because of the sins of others. The Church continues to flourish and bloom, crowned with the flowers of her many virgins; chastity and continence preserve their long-continued glory, the power of purity is not crushed because penitence and pardon are conceded to the adulterer.⁸⁷

20.3 And you must realise that it is one thing for a man to stand by, awaiting the granting of pardon,⁸⁸ and quite another thing for him to achieve the heights of glory; it is one thing for him to be thrown into prison and not to emerge from it until he pays the very last farthing,⁸⁹ and quite another thing for him to receive all at once the rewards for faith and valour;⁹⁰ it is one thing for a man to be wracked by long grieving over his sins and to be purged and purified over a lengthy period of time by fire,⁹¹ and it is quite another thing for him to have purged away all his sins by a martyr's death.⁹² In a word, to hang in doubt on the day of judgment awaiting the verdict of the Lord is far different from being crowned by the Lord without a moment's delay.

21.1 And you must remember that even amongst our predecessors there were certain bishops here in our own province⁹³ who judged that peace ought not to be granted to adulterers and they, therefore, shut off completely any room for penitence in the case of

sins of adultery. And yet that did not cause them to withdraw from the college of their fellow bishops, nor to shatter the unity of the catholic Church, obstinate in their harshness and rigour though they remained. Accordingly, he who refused to grant peace to adulterers did not separate himself from the Church simply because others were granting such peace. 21.2 Provided that the bonds of harmony remain unbroken and that the sacred unity of the catholic Church continues unimpaired,⁹⁴ each individual bishop can arrange and order his own affairs, in the knowledge that one day he must render an account to the Lord for his own conduct.⁹⁵

22.1 For my own part, I am astonished that there are some who are so obstinate as to judge that no opportunity for penitence ought to be granted to the fallen and who consider that pardon must be denied to those who do penance. And yet it is written: *Remember whence you have fallen, do penance and perform your former good works.*⁹⁶ Now these words are certainly directed at a man who has undoubtedly fallen and whom the Lord is encouraging to rise up again through good works. For it is also written: *Almsgiving delivers from death,*⁹⁷ and, there, is clearly meant not deliverance from that death which the blood of Christ has quenched once and for all and from which the saving grace of baptism and of our Redeemer has delivered us,⁹⁸ but deliverance from that death which afterwards creeps in through sin.⁹⁹

Furthermore, in another passage, an opportunity is indeed granted for penitence and the Lord actually threatens the person who fails to do penitence: *I have (He says) many things against you because you allow your wife Jezabel, who declares herself to be a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants, to commit fornication and to eat of foods offered in sacrifice, and I gave to her an opportunity to do penitence and she refused to repent of her fornication. See, I will cast her upon a couch, and those who have fornicated with her I will cast into great tribulation unless they do penitence for their deeds.*¹⁰⁰ Obviously the Lord would not have encouraged them to do penitence were it not the case that He promises pardon to the penitent. And to this effect in the Gospels He declares: *I say to you that likewise there will be rejoicing in heaven over a sinner who does penitence rather than over ninety-nine just who have no need of penitence.*¹⁰¹

22.3 We read in Scripture: *God did not make death neither does He take joy in the destruction of the living.*¹⁰² Clearly, therefore, He who would have no one perish desires that sinners should do penitence

and through penitence return again to life. Hence, too, through the prophet Joel He proclaims in these words: *And now the Lord your God says, return to me with all your heart, at the same time with fasting and weeping and mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the Lord your God because He is merciful and loving, slow to anger and full of kindness and He condemns the evil He has inflicted.*¹⁰³

22.4 Similarly we read in the Psalms of both the strictness and the compassion of God, who is at once menacing and merciful, who punishes that He may correct and when He has corrected saves: *I will visit, He says, their wicked deeds with the rod and with the lash their iniquities. But my mercy I will not scatter away from them.*¹⁰⁴

23.1 The Lord also illustrates the compassion of God the Father when He says in the Gospel: *What man is there among you who if his son should ask for bread would hand him a stone, or if he should ask for a fish would hand him a snake? If you, then, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your sons, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him?*¹⁰⁵

23.2 Here the Lord is drawing a comparison between a father according to the flesh and God the Father with His never-ending and boundless compassion. Now suppose that evil, earthly father has been gravely offended by his sinful and wicked son: even so, if later on he should see that this same son has now mended his ways, that he has put aside the iniquities of his past life, that by remorse and repentance he has been restored to sober and honest living and to the practice of virtue, why then he is glad and rejoices, and he welcomes back the son whom he has previously thrown out and with a father's joy and delight embraces his son.

But how much more must that one, true Father who is kind and merciful and compassionate, indeed who is Himself kindness and mercy and compassion, how much more must He take joy in the repentance of His own sons and no longer threaten them with His wrath if they are repentant or with punishment if they weep and mourn, but promise to them instead His pardon and forgiveness.

23.3 Hence, in the Gospel the Lord can call blessed those who mourn,¹⁰⁶ for he who mourns arouses His mercy, whereas he who is obdurate and proud heaps wrath upon himself and punishment in the judgment to come. 23.4 And that is the reason why, dearly beloved brother, in the case of those who do no penance, who give no evi-

dence that they are wholeheartedly sorry for their sins, who make no public profession of their grief, we have determined that they ought to be altogether excluded from any hope of peace and communion if, on becoming dangerously ill, they should start to beg for them.¹⁰⁷ Obviously it is not repentance for their sin which drives them to ask but the warning of fast-approaching death; and he does not deserve to receive consolation in death who has failed to reflect that one day he must die.

24.1 Now as regards Novatian personally, dearly beloved brother, you ask that I write to you explaining what heresy it is he has introduced. In the first place I must make clear to you that it is not right for us even to want to know what it is he is teaching, since he is teaching *outside*. Whoever he may be, whatever his qualities, he can be no Christian who is not inside the Church of Christ. Sing his own praises for all he is worth, flaunt as he will in proud phrases his philosophy and his eloquence,¹⁰⁸ he has, nonetheless, failed to maintain charity with his brethren and unity with the Church, and he has therefore lost even what he had formerly been.¹⁰⁹

24.2 Unless you really think that he is a genuine bishop who, at a time when a bishop had already been made within the Church by sixteen of our fellow bishops, goes to great efforts and intrigue to get himself made a bishop at the hands of renegades, and made a fake and foreign bishop at that!¹¹⁰ Moreover, there is but one Church founded by Christ but it is divided into many members throughout the world; likewise, there is but one episcopate but it is spread amongst the harmonious host of all the numerous bishops. And yet, despite this arrangement established by God, despite this unity in the catholic Church which is universally linked and locked together, he is now attempting to set up a man-made church and he is sending out to numerous cities upstart apostles of his own in order to lay down brand-new foundations for an establishment of his own devising.¹¹¹ And whereas in every one of the provinces and each of the cities there have been long since appointed bishops who are venerable in age, sound in faith, tested in tribulation, and proscribed in persecution,¹¹² he even has the effrontery to appoint over and above them a new set of spurious bishops.¹¹³

24.3 Fancy imagining that he could sweep the entire globe with this perverse novelty or that he could smash the framework of the

Church's body simply by scattering his seeds of discord. He fails to realise that though schismatics are always hot with enthusiasm at the very beginning, they are never able to expand or increase what they have unlawfully initiated but that, right from the start, they begin to fade away, they and all their evil rivalries.

24.4 Indeed he could not now retain the position of bishop even if he had been made bishop before anyone else, since he has broken away from the body of his fellow bishops and the unity of the Church. For the Apostle does warn us to give support to one another lest we depart from that unity which God has established. To quote his own words: *Supporting one another in love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*¹¹⁴ A man, therefore, who preserves neither the unity of the Spirit nor the bond of peace but cuts himself off from the ties of the Church and the college of bishops can have neither the power nor the dignity of a bishop, for he has chosen to maintain neither the unity nor the peace of the episcopate.

25.1 And what is more, look at the puffed-up arrogance of it all, the total disregard for meekness and humility, the supreme display of personal pride, that a man should dare to do or even imagine himself able to do what the Lord did not allow even the apostles to do, that he should think he is able to divide the tares from the wheat, or as if it was to him that had been granted power to wield the winnowing fan and to cleanse the threshing floor, that he should set about separating the chaff from the grain.¹¹⁵

25.2 And despite the fact that the Apostle says: *But in a great household there are not only vessels of gold and of silver but also vessels of wood and of clay*, he actually thinks he can pick out the vessels that are of gold and of silver but that he can despise, condemn, and cast away the vessels that are of wood and of clay, whereas the vessels of wood are to be burnt in the flames of the divine fire only on the day of the Lord and the vessels of clay are to be smashed only by the one to whom has been entrusted the rod of iron.¹¹⁶

26.1 But if he has really set himself up as the searcher of men's hearts and reins and as the judge of others,¹¹⁷ then let him at least judge in all cases with complete fairness.¹¹⁸ He must be fully aware of the words of Scripture: *See, you have been made whole; sin no more lest anything worse befall you.*¹¹⁹ Let him, therefore, exclude from his company and following defrauders and adulterers.¹²⁰ For the case of one

who has committed adultery is far graver and much more serious than the case of one who has obtained a certificate of sacrifice: the latter has sinned under compulsion, the former of his own choice;¹²¹ the latter was the victim of error, thinking that it was enough to avoid offering sacrifice, the former has assailed another's marriage rights or he has visited some brothel, going down into the sewers and slimy stews of the rabble¹²² and there his own sanctified body, God's temple, he has befouled with loathsome filth. To quote the Apostle: *Every sin that man commits is outside the body, but he who commits adultery sins against his own body.*¹²³

26.2 Yet even to these sinners penitence is allowed and hope is still left to them if they show sorrow and make amends for their sin, just as the Apostle himself indicates: *I fear lest perchance when I come to you I may mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the foul deeds they have practised, of their acts of fornication and lust.*¹²⁴

27.1 And there are no grounds for these upstart heretics to feel self-satisfied because, as they say, they have no communion with idolaters. For in their company are both defrauders and adulterers, and such sinners are guilty of the crime of idolatry if you follow the words of the Apostle: *Know this well and understand that no adulterer or fornicator or defrauder (for that is idolatry) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* And again he says: *Mortify, therefore, your members which are on earth, laying aside fornication and impurity and evil desire and lust, which are all slavery to idols. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming.*¹²⁵

27.2 Furthermore, as our bodies are members of Christ and we are, each of us, a temple of God, whoever by adultery violates that temple of God violates God; and whoever in committing sin does the will of the devil is being a slave to demons and their idols.¹²⁶ For evil deeds do not proceed from the Holy Spirit but from the promptings of the Enemy, and from the unclean spirit are born desires which drive men to act against God and be a slave to the devil.

It follows, therefore, that if they claim one man is polluted by another's sin and if, as they maintain and contend, the idolatry of the guilty passes on to the innocent, then, on their own argument, they cannot clear themselves of the guilt of idolatry, since it is established on the authority of the Apostle that adulterers and defrauders, with whom they are in communion, are idolaters.¹²⁷

27.3 But this is not for us: we remain true to our faith, we follow the guidance set by God's teaching,¹²⁸ we are in agreement with the dictates of truth. We maintain that each person must be held responsible for the sin he commits himself and that no one can be made guilty for anyone else, for the Lord warns us with these words: *The just man's justice will be upon him, and the wicked man's wickedness will be upon him,* as likewise He says: *Fathers shall not die for their children and children shall not die for their fathers. Every man shall die for his own sin.*¹²⁹

That is what we read and follow. We, therefore, certainly believe that no one ought to be debarred from the fruits of satisfaction and the hope of reconciliation. We put our faith in the divine Scriptures, we follow the authority and encouragement of God Himself; we are, accordingly, convinced that sinners are invited back to do penitence and that pardon and forgiveness are not denied to the penitent.

28.1 What a way to mock our brethren and to frustrate them, what a way to delude hapless sinners and to make their sorrows in vain, what a profitless and fruitless teaching that emanates from this heretical establishment! Imagine exhorting people to do penitence and make atonement, and at the same time taking away all healing power from that atonement. Fancy saying to our brethren: "Lament and pour forth tears and spend your days and nights in sorrow, and for washing away and cleansing your sin perform generous and frequent good works, but for all that you do it is outside the Church that you shall die. You should do whatever leads to reconciliation but never will you receive the reconciliation which you seek." Who would not be lost at once, who would not fall away in utter despair, who would not give up any thought of sorrowing for sin?

28.2 Do you think a farmer could carry on working if you said to him: "Use all your farmer's skill in working this land, do your very best to cultivate it, but no harvest will you reap, no vintage will you press,¹³⁰ no crop will you gather from your olive grove, no fruit will you pick from the trees?"

28.3 It is as if you were trying to encourage a man to own and run ships, and were to say to him: "My friend, purchase timber from the very best forests, fashion your keel with specially strong and hand-picked beams of oak, work away that your ship may be constructed and fitted with rudder and ropes and sails, but when you

have done all this, no fruit will you see from its trading and its voyages."

29.1 This is tantamount to blocking off and cutting short the way to sorrow and the route to repentance. And whereas in the Scriptures the Lord God goes out of His way to welcome those who return to Him and who repent, yet we, by our callousness and cruelty in cutting off the fruits of repentance, we are totally destroying repentance itself. But if we find that no one ought to be prevented from doing penitence and that, in as much as the Lord is compassionate and merciful, reconciliation can be granted through His bishops to those who implore and call upon the mercy of the Lord, then we have no alternative but to recognise the sorrows of those who bewail their sin and we have no right to deny the fruits of repentance to those who grieve.

29.2 And because in the grave there is no confession and the rite of reconciliation cannot take place there,¹³¹ those who are genuinely repentant and who ask ought for the time being to be accepted into the Church and there be kept for the Lord.¹³² One day He will come to His Church and will surely pass judgment on those whom He finds inside within it. 29.3 But apostates and renegades, enemies and opponents, all those in fact who scatter the Church of Christ, even if they have been put to death for His name but outside the Church, they cannot, according to the Apostle,¹³³ be admitted to the peace of the Church, because they have not maintained the unity either of the Spirit or of the Church.

30. For the moment, dearly beloved brother, I have briefly run through, as best I can, these few points—although there is still much left to say—so that I could meet your request and might join you by ever closer ties to the fellowship of our body of bishops, your colleagues. But should you get the opportunity and the means to visit us, we could discuss at greater length together and confer more completely and fully on these matters in the hopes of furthering blessed concord.

I wish that you, dearly beloved brother, may ever fare well.

LETTER 56

Cyprian sends greetings to his brothers Fortunatus, Abymmus, Optatus, Privatianus, Donatulus, and Felix.¹

1. My dearly beloved brothers, you have written to me that when you were in the town of Capsa² for the ordination of a bishop,³ our brother and colleague Superius drew your attention to the case of Ninus, Clementianus, and Florus.⁴ These brothers of ours had previously been arrested during the persecution, and stoutly confessing the Name of the Lord had withstood the violence of the magistrate and the attacks of the frenzied mob.⁵ Subsequently, however, whilst being subjected to savage tortures before the proconsul,⁶ they gave way under their extreme torments, and through those protracted agonies fell from the heights of glory which they were scaling in all the vigour of their faith. Nevertheless, since this grave fall, incurred through compulsion and no choice of their own,⁷ they have been doing penitence continuously over these last three years.⁸ And so you judged that you ought to inquire whether by now it might be right to admit them back into communion.⁹

2.1 Now, in so far as my personal views are concerned, my own judgment¹⁰ is that the Lord's mercies will not be wanting to those who, it is acknowledged, took their stand at the battlefront, confessed the Name of the Lord, and by their dogged and resolute faith withstood the violence of the magistrates and the onslaught of the raging mob; they endured imprisonment, and amidst the menaces of the proconsul and the roar of the crowd that pressed around put up a lengthy resistance against prolonged bouts of tortures that mangled and wrenched their limbs. Hence, their preceding merits help to excuse and compensate for their giving way, through the weakness of the flesh, at the very last. To have forfeited their glory is, therefore, enough to suffer for men of such calibre; we have no right to shut against them the door of pardon or to deprive them of their Father's compassion and of communion with us. As you said in your letter, they have passed three years in continuous and bitter mourning, in the most profound sorrow and repentance. That, in our estimation,