



Writings of the First Christians

The Echo of the Gospel

Charles Belmonte

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Contents

Preface

Part I. INTRODUCTION

1. God's Revelation: Sacred Scriptures and Tradition
2. Fathers of the Church

Part II. THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

3. The Didaché
4. St Clement of Rome: Epistle to the Corinthians
5. St Ignatius of Antioch: Letter to the Ephesians
6. Letter to the Magnesians
7. Letter to the Trallians
8. Letter to the Romans
9. Letter to the Philadelphians
10. Letter to the church of Smyrna
11. Letter to St Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna

12. St Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna: Letter to the Philippians
13. Letter on the Martyrdom of St Polycarp
14. Hermas: The Shepherd
15. Epistle of Barnabas
16. Second Epistle of St Clement to the Corinthians

Part III. THE AGE OF PERSECUTIONS

17. Letter to Diognetus
18. Acts of the Martyrdom of St Justin
19. The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs
20. Proconsular Acts of the Martyrdom of St Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage
21. Martyrdom of Sts Perpetua and Felicity
22. Epitaph of Abercius

Preface

How was the preaching of the Gospel first received? What was the "impact" of the Good News on the listeners' lives? How were the early Christians' lives transformed by the demands of following Jesus? To know the answer to these questions, we must read the texts of the early Fathers of the Church, who received the Christ's teachings directly from the apostles.

The apostles transmitted the word of God to a first generation of Christians, who were simple people with some formation in Greek and Jewish culture. Few of these were specialists in philosophical questions. Thus, the extant writings produced by this first generation of Christians –called the Apostolic Fathers, for having being taught by the apostles– are mostly pastoral in character, paternal exhortations written in *koiné*, the popular Greek language. We hear in these texts the echo of Christ's message of salvation, and of the preaching of the apostles.

The writings of the early Fathers of the Church can help us understand better the revealed truths. Somehow, these writings are like a continuation of the New Testament; they are, in fact, the first links in the

chain of Tradition. They may have been written many centuries ago, but they have not lost their freshness and vigor: They can still inspire us in our dialogue with God, stir us out of our self-complacency or lukewarmness, and encourage us to aspire for new goals of sanctity and apostolate.

The so-called Reformers cut off Sacred Scriptures from the living Tradition of the Church. On the other hand, the rationalists treated Sacred Scriptures as purely human documents, and interpreted them by using scientific and historical norms alone. The Church protested against these errors and encouraged us instead to go to the witnesses of Tradition in order to clarify the meaning of Scriptural passages. The First Vatican Council, for instance, warned against interpreting Sacred Scriptures contrary to the unanimous agreement of the Fathers (Sess. 3, c. 2). The Second Vatican Council has also reminded us of the supreme importance of the study of the Fathers of the Church (*Optatam Totius*, n. 16).

There are excellent critical collections of the Early Fathers' works. Unfortunately, it is not so easy to have one of such collections at home for use as spiritual reading or as inspirational source book. This volume is an attempt to offer these texts to a wider

circle of Christians who want to familiarize themselves with the thoughts of our ancestors in the faith—to go to the roots, as it were, so as to understand what the primitive Church believed and prayed.

With this purpose in mind, the author has sought to clear the texts (as translated from the originals) of complicated words and expressions. Whenever possible, archaic terms have been substituted with their modern equivalents.

To ease the burden for those who may have little knowledge of Patrology, a selection has been made of the most relevant passages of each work, but seeking all the while to present a complete picture of it. The paragraphs or chapters omitted have not been indicated in the text. Their chapter numbers identifies all passages.

May the joyful light of Christ's truth, present in these writings, transform the reader's life as was the experience of the early Christians: Each tried to make his life consistent—coherent—with his faith.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

1

God's Revelation: Sacred Scriptures and Tradition

Revelation and Sacred Tradition

“At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). God chose to reveal to us the mysteries of salvation. He did so by speaking through a long line of heralds of his word—beginning with the prophets of old and ending with his very Son, Jesus the Lord, in whom the fullness of Revelation is brought to completion.

God, however, did not want this message of liberation to be known by only a few. He saw to it that what he had revealed would remain forever whole and entire, and be passed on to all generations. To assure this stability, Jesus Christ founded his Church. Built upon the Rock—the apostle Peter (Mt 16:18)—the Church was to be in essence *universal* (in Greek, *catholic*).

Christ commissioned the apostles to preach to all men his Gospel, which is the source of all the truths necessary for salvation and moral teaching. He also ordered them to administer the heavenly gifts, the sacraments.

This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the apostles. By their oral preaching, and by their example, the apostles handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ himself, reinforced by the ineffable experience of having lived close to him and seeing what he did. They also incorporated in their teaching what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The commission was fulfilled, too, by those apostles and apostolic men who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, put the message of salvation in writing.

The apostles knew very well that the Gospel had to be kept forever whole and alive within the Church. Thus, they appointed bishops as their successors, giving them the authority to teach in their own place. The apostles warned the Christians to hold fast to the traditions that they had learned either by word of mouth or by letter; these we call the Church’s *Tradition*.

“Tradition” means “handing on”—the apostles handed on what they themselves had received from Christ. Before a line of the New Testament was written, it was the Church that preached Christ to the new converts. And it was on the apostles’ testimony that the first converts believed in Christ.

Tradition also means “that which is handed on”—the content of the teachings that the apostles received from Christ. This Tradition includes everything that contributes to holiness of life and to the increase in faith in the people of God. Thus, with her teaching, life, and worship, the Church perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she is, and all that^[1] she believes.^[2] This Tradition developed in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Sacred Tradition and human traditions

The Bible mentions two kinds of religious traditions: divine and human.

God wanted *divine Tradition* preserved and honored because he made it part of the deposit of faith. As St Paul affirmed: “Stand fast and uphold the traditions just as I have handed them on to you” (1 Cor 11:2; see also 2 Thess 2:15 and 3:6). Against this, the Protestants claim that all Tradition is man-made, not coming from God, made by those who have the power to teach in the Church.

The Fathers of the Church received this divine Tradition from the apostles, their ancestors, and faithfully transmitted it.

On the other hand, Christ accused the Pharisees of being too concerned about the *traditions of men*, which had their origin in the opinions of earlier teachers, while neglecting the divine traditions of God’s Law: “You put aside the commands of God to cling to the traditions of men” (Mk 7:8).

With these man-made traditions, the Jews were forever adding little precepts and interpretations to the Law of God; instead of helping its fulfillment, these human traditions suffocated and contradicted it.

Jesus challenged these innovations and denounced the hypocrisy and insincerity of the teachers of the Jews. Something similar happens nowadays with the innovations of religious sects.

As in any other institution, however, human traditions can also be found in the Church. But these traditions have only a temporary value. Moreover, the Church is able to distinguish the enduring word of God from human traditions that are only of transient worth.

Sacred Scriptures, Tradition, and Magisterium

There is a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and the Sacred Scriptures. Both flow from the same source, merge, and tend to the same end. The whole of Sacred Scriptures *is* the word of God entrusted by Christ and the Holy Spirit to the apostles and their successors. The bishops, the successors of the apostles, remain as a *body*, in unity of communion and of faith, headed by the bishop of Rome, the successor of St Peter. They have the duty to proclaim the Sacred Scriptures, as the word of God, faithfully preserve it, explain it, and make it more widely known; they have to hand on all that the Church has received from the Lord. When they so *transmit* the word of God, they are making—and keeping—Tradition.

Consequently, it is not from Sacred Scriptures alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything that has been revealed. Holy Mother Church teaches us to accept and venerate both Sacred Scriptures and sacred Tradition with the same loyalty and reverence.

In other words, sacred Tradition and Sacred Scriptures form *one* sacred deposit of the word of God, entrusted to the Church. And the task of authentically interpreting the word of God has been assigned exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, the *Magisterium*. Yet, this Magisterium is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully.

These three elements—sacred Tradition, Sacred Scriptures, and the Magisterium—are so linked that one cannot stand without the other two. All three, together and each in its own way under the action of the Holy Spirit, contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.

How to Distinguish Catholic Faith from Error

Some historical personalities have unfortunately either interpreted the Sacred Scriptures not in agreement with Tradition, or distorted sacred Tradition, or defied the Magisterium of the Church. In fact, most of these heretics often tried to pass themselves off as the true Church, and their errors as the true faith.

How can we distinguish the true Catholic faith from error?

In his *Commonitorium* (nos. 2-3), St Vincent of Lerins, a monk of the fifth century, sought a method by which the Christian faith can be distinguished from error. The following paragraphs are a transcription of his conclusions.

After consulting with many persons outstanding in sanctity and doctrine, and inquiring about the topic, I have found consensus on the following: “To unmask the schemes of the heretics, avoid their subterfuges, and maintain himself wholesome in unpolluted faith, with God’s help, a Christian must support his faith with two means: the authority of divine law, and the Tradition of the Catholic Church.”

Somebody may object, “The canon of the Scriptures is sufficient for everything; why do I need to add the authority of the Church to interpret it?”

I answer: The Scripture –because of its loftiness– is not identically and universally understood by all. The same words are diversely interpreted by different people. There are as many interpretations as readers; [Here St Vincent names the most notorious heretics before him. Then he concludes:] such is also the case of Nestorius in our present time.

Thus, to avoid the manifold subtleties of error, it is absolutely necessary to interpret the writings of the prophets and the apostles following the line of Catholic sense.

The greatest care must be applied in the Catholic Church to maintain *what had been believed everywhere, always, and by all*. This is what properly and truly speaking “Catholic” means: the idea of universality applied to places, time, and persons. We shall be Catholic if we adhere to universality, antiquity, and general consensus.

We adhere to *universality* if we confess as the one and true faith what the entire Church professes in the whole world.

We adhere to *antiquity* if we do not break away from the sense proclaimed by our holy predecessors and fathers.

We adhere to the *general consensus* if –within this antiquity– we embrace the definitions and doctrines of all, or almost all, bishops and teachers.

Concrete Applications of the Method

The *Commonitorium* continues by offering concrete applications of this rule:

What should a Christian Catholic do if a little fraction of the Church separates from the communion in the universal faith?

- Surely, he should set the health of the entire body ahead of the interest of a rotten and infected limb.

What if the heretical novelty is not limited to a small group but threatens the entire Church?

- In this case, a Christian should adhere to antiquity; obviously, the faith cannot be altered by any recent lie.

What if on looking into antiquity, one discovers that the error had been shared by many persons, or even by an entire city or region?

- In such a case, one should carefully prefer the decrees –if there are such– of an ancient universal council to the recklessness and ignorance of all those persons.

What if a new viewpoint comes up, about which nothing has been defined?

- Then one should make research and compare the opinion of our ancestors; but only of those who always remained in the communion and faith of the one Catholic Church, and became proven teachers, even though they belong to different times and places.

A Christian can believe without any doubt whatever he has found to be believed, not by one or two proven doctors only, but by all in full agreement; whatever has been maintained, written, and openly taught in a frequent and constant manner.

[1]. . St Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*, n. 2-3.

[2]. Cf. II Vat. Council, Const. *Dei Verbum*, 8.

2

Fathers of the Church

The Fathers of the Church, Teachers of the Faith

From a very early date, the title *father* was applied to bishops as witnesses of Christian Tradition and as teachers of the faith. We find this usage in St Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians: “You may have thousands of guardians in Christ, but you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (1 Cor 4:15).

Later on, the term *father* was extended to include ecclesiastical writers who were not bishops but who were accepted as representatives of the Tradition of the Church. St Jerome, for example, was not a bishop, but was numbered by St Augustine among the Fathers.

Already in the first centuries of the Church, the teaching of the earlier Fathers was being cited by the later ones as the sure guide to the authentic faith. Thus, St Vincent of Lerins (year 434) warns: “If some new question arises on which no ultimate decision has been given, you shall then have recourse to the opinions of the Holy Fathers; of those, at least, who, each in his own time and place, remaining in the unity of communion and the faith, are accepted as approved masters.”#1

Today, the title “Fathers of the Church” is applied only to those writers who combine four necessary qualifications:

- (a) orthodoxy of doctrine;
- (b) holiness of life;
- (c) ecclesiastical approval; and
- (d) antiquity.

These qualifications must be taken in a broad sense.

We also need to distinguish between *Patrology* and *Patristics*. The first refers to study of the life and writings of the Fathers, while the other deals with the theological thought of the Fathers.

The so-called patristic era is held to begin with the first noncanonical (that is, non-Scriptural) Christian writings. The authors of these writings which have survived from the first and early second century are called the *Apostolic Fathers*. They are called “apostolic” because of their close connection with the apostles; they are the first links in the chain of Tradition. The term has been applied to St Clement of Rome, St Ignatius of Antioch, St Polycarp of Smyrna, Hermas, Papias of Hierapolis, and the unknown authors of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, and the *Didache*.

Ecclesiastical Writers and Doctors of the Church

We refer to those authors who lack any of the first three distinctive marks of the Fathers of the Church simply as *ecclesiastical writers*. Thus, some of them may have even been heretics. Yet, their study is interesting because it helps us understand the scope of the orthodox definitions of that period.

On the other hand, some writers have been recognized as *Doctors of the Church* for the eminence of their learning and the excellence of their teaching. Aside from scholarship, however, they must have shown orthodoxy in doctrine and holiness of life, and must have been expressly declared so by the Church. Although some Fathers of the Church are also Doctors of the Church, *antiquity* is not required for one to be declared a Doctor of the Church.

Among the Great Doctors of the Oriental Church are St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nazianzus, St John Chrysostom, and St Athanasius. The four Great Doctors of the West are St Ambrose, St Jerome, St Augustine, and St Gregory the Great. The number of Doctors of the Church now stands at 32.

Why Study the Fathers?

Why, one may ask, are professors and students urged to look back to the past when in the Church and in society today there are so many serious problems that require urgent solution? In answer, Pope John Paul II explains that “the Church still lives today by the life received from her Fathers and on the foundation erected by her first constructors. She is still being built today in the joy and sorrow of her journeying and daily toil.”#2

The Second Vatican Council has also reminded us of the supreme importance of the study of the Fathers of the Church.#3

More recently, the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education has issued the document *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church in the Formation of Priests* which we shall summarize henceforth.

The Fathers of the Church are important because:

- (a) They are exceptional *witnesses of Tradition*.
- (b) They have passed down to us a *theological method* that is both enlightened and reliable.
- (c) Their writings offer a *spiritual and apostolic richness* that makes them great teachers of the Church yesterday and today.

Privileged Witnesses to Tradition

The documents of the Magisterium attribute to the Fathers the distinction of being privileged witnesses to Tradition. In the flow of living Tradition that continues from the beginning of Christianity through the centuries up to our present time, the Fathers occupy a very special place. They stand head and shoulders above other protagonists in the history of the Church. They have laid down the first basic structures of the Church, together with doctrinal and pastoral positions that remain valid for all times.

In the Christian mind, the Fathers are always linked to Tradition, since they have been both its protagonists and its witnesses. They are closer to the sources of Revelation in their purity. Some of them –the Apostolic Fathers– were witnesses to the apostolic Tradition, the teachings transmitted by the apostles, the source from which Tradition itself is drawn. In particular, the Fathers of the first centuries can be considered authors and exponents of a “founding” Tradition, which was preserved and continuously elucidated on, in subsequent ages.

In any case, the Fathers have transmitted what they received: “They have taught the Church what they have learned in her... What they found in the Church they kept; what they learned they taught; what they learned from their Fathers they transmitted to their children.”#4

There are many instances in which the Fathers hold an almost unanimous interpretation of a specific passage of Sacred Scriptures. The Church regards such an interpretation not as a private opinion but as ecclesiastical doctrine. Thus, J.H. Cardinal Newman describes the importance of this coincidence:

I follow the ancient Fathers, not as thinking that on such a subject they have the weight they possess in the instance of doctrines or ordinances. When they speak of doctrines, they speak of them as being universally held. They are witnesses to the fact of these doctrines having been *received*, not here or there, but everywhere. We receive those doctrines, which they thus teach, not merely because they teach them, but because they bear witness that all Christians everywhere then held them.

The Fathers do not speak of their *own private* opinion; they do not say, “This is true, *because* we see it in Scriptures” –about which there might be differences of judgment – but, “This is true, because in matter of fact it is held, and has ever been held, by all the

Churches, down to our times, without interruption, ever since the apostles.”#5

The Fathers of the Church are our ancestors in the faith, the remote founders of the Christian heritage that is ours. We are bound to them in the same way that all men are bound to their ancestors by gratitude and reverence. This is piety, the virtue that links us to our origins—as does family piety, patriotic piety, and more so, the piety we owe to God.

Besides, in considering the climate of our contemporary culture, there are many parallels to be drawn between the present and the Roman era, despite their obvious differences. Now, as then, one world is fading, while another one is being born.

The Fathers have shown the vital link that exists between Sacred Scriptures, Tradition, and the most urgent problems of the present moment. When so many efforts seem to be sterile, there is a fresh breath of true wisdom and Christian authenticity that can be drawn from the patristic works. It is a breath that has immensely contributed to the resolution of numerous liturgical, ecumenical, missionary, and pastoral phenomena, as was the case in the Second Vatican Council. Hence, the Fathers have shown their unfailing relevance and continue to have many things to say to those who seek the truth.

Theological Method

The Fathers gave a reflective response to the divine Scriptures. But their response was not so much an abstract theory as daily pastoral practice. They acquired this experience by teaching in the heart of the liturgical assemblies gathered together to profess the faith and celebrate the worship of the Risen Lord. In that sense, they were the authors of the first great Christian catechesis.

We find in the Fathers some particular attitudes and points that must be kept in mind:

- (a) a constant recourse to Sacred Scriptures and the sense of Tradition;

- (b) awareness of Christian originality, while recognizing the truths contained in pagan culture;

- (c) defense of the faith as the supreme good and a continuously deepening understanding of the content of Revelation; and

- (d) the sense of mystery of the divine.

Recourse to Sacred Scriptures and Sense of Tradition

The Tradition to which the Fathers are witnesses is a living Tradition that demonstrates unity in variety and continuity in progress. The Church's Tradition is not a monolithic, immovable and sclerotic block, but a multiform organism pulsating with life. It is a practice of life and doctrine that is marked, on the one hand, by uncertainties, tensions, disputed questions solved only after periods of trials and hesitation and, on the other, by timely and courageous decisions of great originality and decisive importance.

To follow the living Tradition of the Fathers does not mean clinging onto the past as such. Rather, it means adhering to the faith with an enthusiastic sense of security and freedom. All the while, one maintains a constant fidelity to that which is foundational: an essential, enduring, and unchanging fidelity –"up to the shedding of one's blood"– to dogma and to moral and disciplinary principles. And these time-tested principles are all the more indispensable, now that many new things are making headway.

The Fathers did not have at their disposal the philological, historical, and anthropological knowledge we now have. Nevertheless, they can teach us a truly *religious* approach to Sacred Scriptures, as well as an interpretation that constantly adheres to the sense of the *entire Church*, proceeding through history under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When these two principles or standards –religious and Catholic– are neglected in modern Scriptural studies, the latter often end up impoverished and distorted.

Whenever it has been necessary to denounce the erroneous deviations of certain schools of thought, the Church has always referred to the Fathers as a guarantee of truth. In fact, various Councils have begun their solemn declarations with references to the patristic Tradition by using the formula: "In following the Holy Fathers...."

The Fathers' catechesis was entirely centered on the mystery of Christ. They proceed

- from God
- through Christ
- to the Church, as the sacrament of union with God and dispenser of divine grace,
- in order to return to God.

Rather than getting lost in numerous peripheral problems, the Fathers always aimed at the essentials, while being faithful to the entire sacred deposit of the faith.

The Fathers' veneration for and fidelity to the Sacred Books was as staunch and solid as their veneration for and fidelity to Tradition. They did not consider themselves masters but servants of Sacred Scriptures, since they received these from the Church. They read and commented on them *in* and *for* the Church, according to the rule of faith proposed by ecclesiastical and apostolic Tradition.

One major characteristic of the life of the modern Church is the return to Sacred Scriptures. If it is to be genuine, however, this trend must be accompanied by a parallel return to the Tradition attested to by the Fathers' writings.

Biblicism

The recent document of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education mentioned earlier declares that in recent times, there are some who pay little attention to the Fathers' testimony and, in general, to ecclesiastical Tradition. They merely confront biblical texts with present social realities or with the concrete problems of modern life, and invariably turn to the human sciences for help. These theological currents, as a result, do away with the historical dimension of dogmas. They do not pay enough attention to the immense insights of the patristic era and of the Middle Ages.

In our times, there are schools supposedly of religious or theological thought that are virtually, if not actually, detached from the stream of Tradition. Hence, their speculation either is reduced to pure "biblicism," or becomes a prisoner of the proponents' historical horizon, especially when taken over by the various fashionable philosophies and ideologies of the day. Thus, we find theologians who, in succumbing to such tendencies, think that they are doing theology but are really only doing history, sociology, etc... They flatten the contents of the Creed to a purely earthly dimension.

Christian Originality and Inculturation

Christian teachings enable man to judge human wisdom and to distinguish truth from error. The Fathers were clearly aware of this fact. Being anchored to this norm of faith, the Fathers accepted many contributions from Greco-Roman philosophy, while rejecting its grave errors. They especially avoided the danger of syncretism, which was so widespread in the then-prevailing Hellenistic culture. They also avoided rationalism, which tended to reduce the faith to only those aspects that were accepted by the contemporary thinkers.

The Fathers being aware of the universal value of Revelation, began the great task of Christian “inculturation,” as it is usually called today. They are the best example of a rich encounter between faith and culture, faith and reason—an example that continues to be a guide for the Church of all ages.

The Fathers treated the Catholic faith with the utmost respect and in complete fidelity to its biblical basis. At the same time, their faith had an openness of spirit toward new needs and new cultural circumstances. These are the two characteristics of the living Tradition of the Church.

Sense of Mystery of the Divine

The first thing that strikes us in the Fathers' thought is their living sense of the transcendence of the divine Truth contained in Revelation. They had a deep sense of mystery and piety toward God. Thus, they steered clear of the temptations of exaggerated rationalism, as well as of a sterile and resigned fideism.

Unlike many other ancient and modern thinkers, they gave proof of great humility before the mystery of God contained in Sacred Scriptures. In their modesty, they preferred to be mere commentators, careful not to add anything that might alter the authenticity of the mystery of God. Thus, St Augustine quipped, "A faithful ignorance is preferable to a foolhardy knowledge." And before him, St Irenaeus stated that the divine generation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is *ineffable* [too great to be described in words], and those who presume to explain it "have lost the use of their reason."

Cultural, Spiritual, and Apostolic Wealth

Many of the Fathers were *converts*. In them, the sense of newness of Christian life was wedded to the certainty of the faith. Hence, an “explosive vitality,” a missionary fervor, and a climate of fraternity sprang in the Christian communities of their times. Souls were inspired to be heroic in their daily personal and social life.

This fervor was manifested especially through the practice of the works of mercy, almsgiving, care of the sick, widows, and orphans, respect for women and every human person, the education of children, respect for life in its origins, conjugal fidelity, respect and generosity in the treatment of slaves, honesty in dealings with other men, freedom and responsibility before the public powers, and defense and support of the poor. There were all forms of Christian commitment—in ordinary life and even to the supreme sacrifice of martyrdom.

Christians lived like their contemporaries, but distinguished themselves from the surrounding pagan world in specific aspects of their conduct. They lived detached from earthly goods; some lived celibacy *propter regnum coelorum*—devoted to God. They made penance; some lived community life. In fact, many forms of private devotion (such as family prayer, daily prayers, and the practice of fasting) and devotions held in common (Sunday celebration, veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and vigils) date back to this age.

The early Christians made the best use of what was humanly noble in the ancient world. This way, they purified what was less perfect, and contributed to the creation of a new culture and civilization inspired by the Gospel. Hence, by following the Fathers in their spiritual itinerary, we, too, shall grasp more easily the nucleus of our faith and what is *specific* of our Christian identity.

1. *Commonitorium*, Chapter 41.
2. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Patres Ecclesiae*, Jan. 2, 1980.
3. *Optatam Totius*, n. 16.
4. St Augustine, *Iul.*
5. *Discussions and Arguments*, II, 1.

Part II

The Apostolic Fathers

3

The Didaché

(AD 80-100)

*The **Didaché** is a valuable source of insights into the life of the early Christians. Intended as a summary of Catholic doctrine that also touches on liturgy and questions of morality, it is addressed to those preparing themselves for baptism.*

There is no precise date of composition. It was probably written between the years 80 and 100. Therefore, it is even older than the last books of the New Testament.

*The original title is “The Lord’s Instruction (**Didaché**) to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles.”*

The first part of this book is an instruction for the catechumens on morals and discipline. This instruction follows a method common for both Jews and Greeks: presenting the two opposite ways, that of good and that of evil.

1 There are two ways, the Way of Life and the Way of Death, and there is a vast difference between them. The Way of Life is: First, you shall love God who created you, and secondly your neighbor as yourself. And do not do to another anything that you would not have done to yourself. Now the message of these words is this: Bless those that curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. If you love those who love you, what merit will you have? Do not even pagans do this? Love those who hate you, and you will have no enemies.

Refrain from sensual and bodily desires.

If a person slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him, and you will be perfect.

If anyone forces you to walk one mile, go two with him.

If someone takes your cloak, give him your inner garment as well.

If someone takes from you what is yours, do not demand it back, not even if you can. Give to everyone who asks, and do not refuse, for it is the Father's Will that a share of his own gifts be given to all.

Blessed is the man who gives, as God has told us to do, for he is without blame. Woe to him who takes. Yet if a person takes because he is indigent, he is innocent. But if he is not in need, he will be judged as to why he received and for what purpose. He will be in dire straits when examined for what he has done; and he will not be released until he has paid the last penny. We may add: Let your gift sweat in your hands until you know to whom you are giving.#1

The author goes on to warn the catechumens against murder, perjury, and all the great sins. Here we find one of the earliest explicit condemnations of abortion in Christian literature. Fraternity among men, including the practice of fraternal correction, is demanded.

2 My son, do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not corrupt young people, teaching them to sin. Do not commit sins of impurity. Do not steal. Do not practice magic or sorcery. Do not procure abortion, nor destroy a newborn child. Do not covet your neighbor's goods.

Do not swear falsely or bear false witness; do not slander or bring up past injuries.

Do not be double-minded or double-tongued; for a double tongue is a deadly snare. Your word shall not be false or vain, but endorsed with deeds. Avoid greed, extortion, hypocrisy, evil intentions, and pride. Do not concoct evil plans against your neighbor. Do not hate any man; some you will have to correct, some you will have to pray for, and some you shall love more than the breath of life that is in you.

3 My son, do not be irascible; wrath leads to murder. Do not be envious, controversial, or quarrelsome; these vices are occasions of deaths.

My child, do not consent to evil desires, for these lead to fornication. Do not use foul language or let your eyes wander, for from those come adulteries.

Be always sincere, for lies breed thefts. Do not allow yourself to be taken over by greed or vain glory, these vices breed thefts.

My son, avoid tale-bearing, it leads to detraction. Be patient, compassionate, sincere, peaceful, faithful always to the words you have heard.

Do not exalt yourself or consent to impulsiveness. Receive all events that may come, aware that nothing happens without God's consent.

4 My son, do not create divisions among men. Rather, you should promote peace among those who are fighting. Judge with justice, and do not discriminate against any person when correcting faults. Do not be of two minds, whether something should be this way or the other.

Do not hold your hands open for receiving and closed for giving. If you acquire anything by the labor of your hands, be ready to give it for the redemption of your sins.

Do not abandon the commandments of the Lord; keep them as you have received them, without adding or taking away anything.

Confess your sins in the church, and do not go to your prayer with an evil conscience.

This is the Way of Life.

Then the opposite way –the Way of the Death– is described:

5 And this is the Way of Death: First, it is an evil and accursed way of life, involving murder, adultery, lustful desires, fornication, theft, idolatry, magic arts, charms, robberies, false witness, hypocrisy, duplicity, fraud, vanity, malice, stubbornness, covetousness, foul talk, jealousy and envy, arrogance, haughtiness, boastfulness, lack of fear of the Lord.

You find in this Way those who are awake not for good but evil purposes, haters of truth, lovers of lies, strangers to meekness and long-suffering, in love with trivial things, always seeking a return, unmindful of the poor, uncaring of the oppressed, ignorant of their Creator, abortionists, murderers of children, corrupters of the creatures of God; those who reject the

needy, crush the afflicted, side always with the rich, and unjustly judge the poor. This is sinful. My children, may you be delivered from such as these!

The second part is an exposition of the sacraments. It describes baptism, which usually was done by immersion although sometimes by pouring. Fasting is to be observed on Wednesday and Friday.

7 To baptize, proceed as follows: After first explaining all these doctrinal points, baptize in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, by immersion in running water –like a river. If you do not have a steady source of running water, baptize with any water, cold or warm –like in a bath. But if you do not have either, just pour some water on the head three times in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let the one baptizing, and the person to be baptized, fast beforehand for one or two days.

8 You are to fast on Wednesday and Friday. And do not pray as the hypocrites do, but as the Lord commanded us in the Gospel, by saying “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One, for thine is the power and the glory forever.” Pray thus three times a day.

The oldest known Eucharistic Prayer is contained in this part. The Eucharist is also called “a spiritual food and drink.” The Church means not only the congregation of believers gathered for prayer, but also the all-embracing universal Church.

9 Celebrate the Eucharist as follows: Say over the cup: “We give you thanks, Father, for the holy vine of David, your servant, which you made known to us through Jesus your Son. To you be glory for ever.”

Over the broken bread say: “We give you thanks, Father for the life and the knowledge which you have revealed to us through Jesus your Son. To you be glory for ever. As this broken bread, made with grain scattered on the mountains, was gathered and became one, so too, may your Church be

gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. For glory and power are yours through Jesus Christ for ever.”

Do not let anyone eat or drink of the Eucharist with you, except those who have been baptized in the Name of the Lord. For the statement of the Lord applies here also: “Do not give to dogs what is holy.”

10 After you have eaten, offer thanks in this manner: “We thank you, Holy Father, for your Name which you enshrined in our hearts. We thank you for the knowledge, faith, and immortality which you revealed to us through your Son Jesus. To you be glory for ever. Almighty King, you created all things for the sake of your Name; you gave men food and drink to enjoy so that they might give you thanks. Now you have favored us through Jesus your Son with this spiritual food and drink, as well as with eternal life. Above all we thank you because you are mighty. To you be glory for ever.

“Remember, Lord, your Church and deliver her from all evil. Perfect her in your love; and, once she has been sanctified, gather her together from the four winds into the kingdom which you have prepared for her. For power and glory are yours for ever.

“May grace come and this world pass away! Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is holy, let him come. If anyone is not, let him repent. *Maranatha*. Amen.”

The third part contains disciplinary norms of conduct. It describes the procedure to select bishops and deacons, the duties toward the hierarchy, and warns against the false preachers who try to take advantage of the good will of Christians. It sets the rules for discerning which ones truly “speak in the Spirit,” since it must have been a disturbing problem in those days.

11 If anyone comes to you and teaches the same things I have taught you, receive him. If a wicked person comes to you and teaches a different doctrine, do not listen to him (cf. 2 John 10). If one teaches so as to increase the practice of virtues and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him in the Name of the Lord.

Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. Do not, however, allow him to stay more than one day, or, if necessary, two. If he remains for three days, he is a false prophet. If he asks for money, he is a

false prophet. Not everyone who speaks in a spirit is a prophet, unless he behaves like a man of God. By their behavior, then, the false prophet and the true one shall be known.

It continues explaining the principles of charity and the necessity of earning a livelihood.

12 If a transient visitor arrives, assist him as much as you can, but he may not stay with you more than two days, or, if necessary, three. If he intends to settle among you, he must work for his living. If he has no trade or craft, use your judgment to find a job for him, so that a follower of Christ will not live idle in your midst. If he is not satisfied with this arrangement, be sure he is trying to make a living out of being a Christian. Be on your guard against such people.

The true prophet deserves help.

13 Take all first fruits of vintage of grapes and of the harvest, of cattle and sheep, and give these first fruits to the prophets. Likewise, when you open a new barrel of wine or oil, take the first draught and give it to the prophets. Of money and cloth or any other possession, first set aside a suitable portion, and give it as it is said in the commandment.

The Mass celebrated on Sundays is described in chapter 14. The Eucharist is described as “a sacrifice.” It also mentions the need for confession of sins and reconciliation with one’s neighbor before receiving the Eucharist.

14 On the Lord’s day, when you have been gathered together, break bread and celebrate the Eucharist. But first confess your sins so that your offering may be pure. If anyone has a quarrel with his neighbor, that person should not join you until he has been reconciled. Your sacrifice must not be defiled. In this regard, the Lord has said: “In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice. I am a great King, says the Lord, and my Name is great among the nations.”

15 Correct one another, not in anger but in peace, as you have it in the Gospel. And let no one speak with anyone who has harmed his neighbor, nor let him be heard until he repents.

*The **Didaché** ends with a warning of things to come.*

16 Be watchful over your eternal life. Your lamps are not to go out, and you must not remain unprepared, but ready, for you do not know the time when our Lord is going to come.

 You should often gather together to receive the means of sanctity for your souls. The entire period of your perseverance in the faith will be of no use to you unless you are found perfect at the last moment.

 In the last days, false prophets and deceivers will increase, sheep will be turned into wolves, and charity will be changed into hatred. For, as permissiveness increases, men will hate and persecute one another. And then the Deceiver of the world will come disguised as the Son of God; he will perform signs and wonders; the world will be delivered into his hands, and he will commit such outrages as have never been since the world began.

 Then all mankind will pass into trial by fire, and many will be scandalized and will perish. But those who persevere in their faith will be saved from the curse.

 Then the signs of the truth will appear: the first sign, an opening in the heavens; the second, a trumpet blast; the third, the resurrection of those who are dead, but not of all, but just as it was said, "The Lord will come and all his holy ones with him. Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven."

Footnote:

1. This last sentence seems to contradict the preceding instruction; it is probably a proverb added by some copyist.

4

St Clement of Rome (AD 92 to 101)

The Epistle to the Corinthians

St Clement was the fourth bishop of Rome (after St Peter, Linus, and Cletus) from year 92 to 101. St Clement was ordained by St Peter. We have very few other data on his life. His writings lead us to think he was a Jew with a good knowledge of Greek philosophy and of Sacred Scriptures. Some think he was related to the Flavii, the ruling family of emperors Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. He could have been in some way at the service of that family. This fact could explain his knowledge of army life and his respect for Roman institutions and authorities. The Church venerates him as a martyr; it seems he was deported to southern Russia, and later drowned in the sea with an anchor tied at his neck.

The Epistle of St Clement, Bishop of Rome, was motivated by “the strife, friction, and schisms” that were afflicting the Christian community at Corinth. Some members of this community dared to depose several clerics of the local church in defiance of ecclesiastical authority.

The tone of St Clement’s Epistle is one proper to an outspoken, firm, yet fatherly reprimand addressed to an entire congregation. He assumes the right to intervene in the internal affairs of another local church, which is distant from Rome. He does not excuse himself for doing so; on the contrary, he begs for pardon for not having intervened earlier due to the ongoing persecution by Domitian. He does not give allowance for parleying; what he expects is outright submission. Clement’s only justification is that he speaks “as the

representative of the Roman Church” who writes under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and should be obeyed under pain of sin (chapter 59).

It is generally supposed to have been written in or about the year 96, and is, therefore, prior to some books of the New Testament and the letters of St Ignatius of Antioch. St John the Apostle must have been still alive in Ephesus, in the same ecclesiastical province of Corinth. Yet the appeal to set things straight is to Clement, not to John. Clement is now the voice of Peter, the Chair of Rome. These facts make it difficult to affirm that the Primacy of Rome was an addition of Constantine or the Dark Ages.

This epistle, a model of pastoral letters, was accepted and read for many years in the church assemblies. Clement was successful in restoring order. Thus, this epistle conclusively proves that Christians of this early age already regarded the Bishop of Rome as the visible head of the Universal Church.

When St Clement quotes the words of Christ, he does not use the written gospels. He quotes from an oral tradition. This does not mean that the first three gospels were unknown to him, but that Christ’s teaching was transmitted both in writing and in the living tradition of the Church.

In the first section of the letter, St Clement praises the community at Corinth for their virtues.

1 You certainly did everything without making distinction of persons, and regulated your conduct by God’s commandments. You were obedient to your superiors and paid due respect to the old men among you. You trained the young people to habits of modest and sober thoughts. You encouraged the women to discharge all their duties with a pious, blameless, and undefiled conscience, showing their husbands due affection; and you taught them to live in mortification, to remain within the established norms of obedience, and to manage their households with responsibility.

2 You were all humble, and in no way arrogant, preferring to be obedient rather than to give orders, happier to give than to receive, content

with the things Christ has given us, attentive to his words, which you had laid up carefully in your hearts, and keeping his sufferings before your eyes.

In this way, a profound, rich peace was granted to all, you had an unquenchable desire to do good, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit was poured forth on all of you. Full as you were of holy intentions, you stretched forth your hands toward almighty God, begging him to be merciful on your undeliberate [venial] sins.

The third chapter, by way of contrast, describes the current situation, and indicates the roots of the trouble: jealousy and envy: “Everyone follows the appetites of his depraved heart, for they are taken over by that unjust and wicked jealousy and envy through which death came into the world.”

In the following chapters, St Clement uses the examples of the Old Testament (Cain, the brothers of Joseph, etc.) and the present testimony of the martyrs. A qualified eyewitness, St Clement gives in chapters 5 and 6 the earliest testimony to the martyrdom of St Peter and St Paul at Rome. The journey of St Paul to the Iberian peninsula is implied.

5 Let us leave behind the examples from times of old, and come to those who struggled closest to us; let us consider the noble models of our own generation. It was through jealousy and envy that the greatest and most upright pillars of the Church were persecuted and struggled unto death.

Let us set before our eyes the good apostles. First of all, Peter, who because of unreasonable jealousy, suffered not merely once or twice but many times, and having thus given his testimony, went to the place of glory that he deserved.

It was through jealousy and conflict that Paul showed the way to the prize of perseverance. He was put in chains seven times, sent into exile, and stoned; a herald both in the east and the west, he achieved a noble fame by his faith. He taught justice to the entire world and, when he had reached the limits of the western world, he gave his testimony before those in authority; then he left this world and was taken up into the holy place, as a superb example of endurance.

The sixth chapter gives us information about Nero's persecution of the Christians, many of them women.

6 Around these men with their holy lives there gathered a great throng of the elect, who, though victims of jealousy, gave us the finest example of endurance in the midst of many indignities and tortures.

Through jealousy, women were tormented like Dirce or the daughters of Danaus, suffering terrible and unholy acts of violence. But they courageously finished the race with faith till the end and despite their bodily weakness won a noble prize. It was jealousy that separated wives from husbands, and violated the words of our father Adam: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Jealousy and strife have overthrown great cities and uprooted mighty nations.

7 We are writing this, beloved, not only as a warning for you, but also as a reminder to ourselves; for we are all placed in the same arena, and the same contest lies before us. Let us, then, give up vain and useless desires, and go straight to the glorious and venerable norms contained in our tradition. Let us consider what is good, what is pleasing, what is acceptable in the sight of him who made us.

St Clement continues inviting all to repentance and conversion.

Let us fix our gaze on the Blood of Christ, realizing how precious it is to his Father, since it was shed for our salvation and brought the grace of repentance to all the world.

If we review the various ages of history, we will see that in every generation, the Lord has offered the opportunity of repentance to any who were willing to turn to him. When Noah preached the need of conversion, all who listened to him were saved. Jonah told the Ninevites they were going to be destroyed, but when they did penance, their prayers gained God's forgiveness for their sins, and they were saved, even though they were not of God's people.

8 Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the ministers of God's grace have spoken of repentance; indeed, the Master of the whole universe

himself spoke of conversion with an oath: “As I live,” says the Lord, “I do not wish the death of the sinner but his repentance.” He added this evidence of his goodness: “House of Israel, repent of your wickedness. Tell the sons of my people: If their sins should reach from earth to heaven, if they are brighter than scarlet and blacker than sackcloth, you need only turn to me with your whole heart and say, ‘Father,’ and I will listen to you as to a holy people.”

In other words, God wanted all his beloved ones to have the opportunity to repent, and he confirmed this desire of his almighty Will.

9 Thus, we should obey God’s sovereign and glorious Will, and hope for his mercy and loving kindness with bended knees. We should be suppliant before him and turn to his compassion, rejecting empty works, quarreling, and jealousy, which only lead to death.

The author exhorts the readers to humility.

13 Brothers, we should be humble in mind, putting aside all arrogance, pride, and foolish anger. Rather, we should act in accordance with the Scriptures, as the Holy Spirit says: “The wise man must not boast of his wisdom nor the strong man of his strength nor the rich man of his riches. Rather, let him who glories glory in the Lord by seeking him and doing what is right and just.”

Recall especially what the Lord Jesus said when he taught gentleness and endurance in suffering. “Be merciful,” he said, “so that you may have mercy shown to you. Forgive, so that you may be forgiven. As you treat others, so you will be treated. As you give, so you will receive. As you judge, so you will be judged. As you are kind to others, so you will be treated kindly. The measure of your giving will be the measure of your receiving.”

Let these commandments and precepts strengthen us to live in obedience to his sacred words, with humility in our hearts. As Scripture asks: “Whom shall I look upon with favor except the humble, gentle, and meek man who trembles at my words?”

16 Christ belongs to the humble and not to those who exalt themselves above His flock. The Lord Jesus Christ, having the scepter of God’s greatness, did not come into the world with pomp and arrogance –although he

could have come thus. He came in a spirit of humility, as the Holy Spirit said of him: “I am a worm, not a man; the scorn of men, despised by people.” Dearly beloved, look at the example he gives us. If the Lord humbled himself to his extent, what should we do, who –through him– have placed ourselves under the influence of his grace?

14 Thus, it is right and holy, brethren, that we should be obedient to God rather than follow those proud and arrogant ringleaders of quarrels born of envy. No ordinary harm, surely, but serious danger will follow if we recklessly yield to the caprices of men who plunge into strife and sedition to estrange us from the cause of right. Let us be kind to one another, imitating the compassion and goodness of our Maker.

19 Sharing then in the heritage of so many vast and glorious achievements, let us hasten toward the goal of peace, set before us from the beginning.

God, in his goodness to all, is the source of the order and harmony existing in the universe.

Let us fix our gaze on the Father and Creator of the whole world, and let us hold on to his peace and blessings, his splendid and surpassing gifts. Let us contemplate him in our thoughts, and with our mind’s eye reflect upon the peaceful and orderly unfolding of his plan; let us consider the care with which he provides for the whole creation.

20 By his direction, the heavens are in motion, and they are subject to him in peace. Day and night fulfill the course he has established without interfering with each other. The sun, the moon, and the clusters of stars revolve in harmony at his command, in their appointed orbits without deviation.

By his Will, the earth blossoms in the proper seasons and produces abundant food for men and animals, and all the living things on it, without reluctance and without any violation of what he has arranged.

The unexplored regions of the abysses and the indescribable realms of the deep are also subject to his laws. The mass of the boundless sea, gathered

together by his ordinance in a single expanse, does not overflow its prescribed limits but acts as he commanded it. For he said: “Thus far shall you come, and your waves will be halted here” (Job 38:11). The ocean, impassable for men, and the world beyond it, are governed by the same edicts of the Lord.

The seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—follow one another in harmony. The winds from the different quarters, each in its proper season, blow without the least deviation. Ever-flowing springs, created for our health and enjoyment, unfailingly offer their breasts to sustain human life.

The tiniest of living creatures meet together in harmony and peace. The great Creator and Lord of the universe commanded all these things to be established in peace and harmony, in his goodness to all, and in overflowing measure to us who seek refuge in his mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ; to him be glory and majesty for ever and ever. Amen.

We must not turn our backs and flee from God's Will. St Clement uses the Scriptures to preach repentance and simplicity of heart and to exhort the Corinthians to flee from hypocrisy.

21 Dear friends, take care that God's blessings, which are many, do not become the condemnation of us all. Thus, we must make good use of the talents received; we must live lives worthy of him; we must do what is good and pleasing to him. He tells us: “The Spirit of the Lord is a lantern, searching the hidden corners of our inmost being” (Prov 20:27).

Remember how near God is. No thought of ours, no conversation we hold, no plan we make, should be cut off from him. We should not turn our backs and flee from God's Will. We should rather turn our backs and flee from stupid and foolish men, who exalt themselves and boast in the arrogance of their reason, than give offense to God.

Make good use of the sacrifice of Christ, whose Blood was shed for us. Obey your superiors; value the advice of the priests; train the young in the fear of God.

Lead your wives toward all that is good. Let them reveal by their conduct that they love chastity; by their gentleness, let them reveal a pure and sincere disposition; by their silence, let them manifest how they mortify their tongues; let them bestow an equal charity, without respect for persons, on all who have a holy fear of God.

Your children must receive instruction and learn to follow in the footsteps of Christ. They must learn how effective humility is before God, what chaste love can accomplish with God, how good and noble is the fear of God; for it brings salvation to all who possess it and who live holy lives with a pure heart. The One whose Spirit is in us is the searcher of our thoughts and of the desires of our hearts. At his Will, he shall take the breath of life from us.

22 All this is strengthened by the faith that comes to us in Christ. He himself addresses us through the Holy Spirit and says:

Come, my children, listen to me:
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
Is there a man who wants life,
desiring to see good days?

Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking what is false.
Turn away from evil and do good.
Seek peace and go in pursuit of it.

The Lord turns his eyes to the just
and his ears to their prayers.
The Lord turns his face against the wicked
to destroy the memory of them from the earth.

The just man calls and the Lord hears
and delivers him out of his troubles.
Many are the trials of the just man
but from them all the Lord will rescue him.
(Ps 33:12-18.20; 31:10).

23 The Father is compassionate and full of generosity; he is kind to those who fear him. In goodness and gentleness, he gives his grace to those who approach him with undivided hearts. We must then put away all duplicity and hypocrisy; we must trust his excelling and ennobling gifts.

Chapter 24 deals about the resurrection of the dead, and points out that God keeps his promises.

24 Consider, beloved, how God keeps on reminding us of the resurrection that is to come; he has made the Lord Jesus Christ the firstfruits of this resurrection by raising him from the dead. Let us look, beloved, at the image of the resurrection that occurs in nature at its appointed time. Day and night show us a resurrection; the night lies in sleep, day rises again; the day departs, night takes its place. Think about the harvest; how the sowing takes place, and in what manner. The sower goes out and casts each seed onto the ground. Dry and bare, they fall into the earth and decay. The greatness of the Lord's providence raises them up again from decay, and out of one many are produced and yield fruit.

27 In this hope, let our hearts be bound fast to him who is faithful in his promises and just in his judgments. He forbade us to tell lies; still less will he himself tell a lie. Nothing is impossible for God, except to tell a lie. Then let our faith in him be awakened; let us reflect that everything is close to him.

By the word of his power, God established all things; and by his word, he can reduce them to ruin. Who shall say to him: "What have you done?" Who shall stand up against the power of his might? He will accomplish everything when he wills and as he wills, and nothing that he has decreed shall pass away. All things stand in his presence, and nothing lies hidden from his counsel.

The heavens proclaim the glory of God,
and the firmament reveals the work of his hands.
Day unto day takes up the story
and night unto night makes known the message.
No speech, no word, no voice is heard. (Ps 18:2-4).

28 Since He knows all things, even our deepest thoughts and yearnings, let us fear God and rid ourselves of impure desires to do works of evil, so that we may be protected by his mercy from the judgment that is to come. Who can escape his mighty hand? What world will give asylum to one who deserts him?

O where can I go away from your Spirit,

or where can I hide from your face?
If I climb the heavens, you are there.
If I take the wings of the dawn
and go to the sea's furthest end,
your right hand is there,
If I lie in the grave, you are there. (Ps 138:7-9).

Where, then, can one go, where can one escape to, from the presence of him whose hands embrace the universe?

29 Let us then approach God in the state of grace, raising up to him hands pure and undefiled, out of love for our good and merciful Father who made us a chosen portion for himself.

29 Let us then approach God in the state of grace, raising up to him hands pure and undefiled, out of love for our good and merciful Father who made us a chosen portion for himself.

*The bishop of Rome explains the role of faith in the salvation of man. In his reference to Abraham, he includes **faith** and **deeds** in the same sentence. Faith comes first, but it should be a living, coherent faith reflected in life.*

31 God's blessing must be our objective, and the way to win it, our study. Search the records of ancient times. Why was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because of his upright and straightforward conduct, his deeds inspired by faith? As for Isaac's faith, it was so strong that, assured of the outcome, he willingly allowed himself to be offered in sacrifice. Jacob had the humility to leave his native land on account of his brother, and to go and serve Laban. He was given the twelve tribes of Israel.

Faith itself is God's gift poured on us as he wills; faith is not merely a human effort or exercise.

32 Honest reflection upon each of these examples will make us realize the magnitude of God's gifts. All the priests and levites who served the altar

of God descended from Jacob. The human nature of the Lord Jesus derived from him. Through the tribe of Judah, kings, princes, and rulers sprang from him. Nor are his other tribes without their honor, for God promised Abraham: “Your descendants shall be as the stars of heaven.”

It is obvious, therefore, that none of these owed their honor and exaltation to themselves alone, or to their own labors, or to their virtuous deeds. No; they owed everything to God’s Will.

So likewise with us, who by his Will are called in Christ Jesus. We are not justified by ourselves, our wisdom, intelligence, piety, or by any action of ours, however holy, but by faith, the one means by which God has justified men from the beginning. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

After explaining that Abraham was justified by faith, and that this faith comes through Jesus Christ, St Paul concluded that we should not “continue in sin.” St Clement argues similarly, that faith—the beginning of salvation—should produce good works enlivened by charity.

33 What must we do then, brothers? Give up good works? Stop practicing Christian charity? God forbid! We must be ready and eager for every opportunity to perform every good work, and put our whole heart into it.

Even the Creator and Lord of the universe rejoices in his works. By his supreme power, he set the heavens in their place; by his infinite wisdom, he gave them their order. He separated the land from the waters surrounding it and made his own Will its firm foundation. By his command, he brought to life the beasts that roam the earth. He created the sea and all its living creatures, and by his power set bounds to it.

Finally, with his own holy and undefiled hands, he formed man, the highest and most intelligent of his creatures, the copy of his own image. “Let us make man,” God said, “in our image and likeness. And God made man, male and female he made them.” When he had finished making all his creatures, God gave them his approval and blessing: “Increase and multiply,” he charged them.

We must recognize, therefore, that all upright men feel honored by their good works, and that even the Lord himself took delight in the glory his works gave him.

This should help us to come up with a resolute determination to always do God's Will. Let us put our whole strength into the work of sanctifying our Christian life.

The author encourages the Corinthians to follow the way of truth, thereby preserving unity among Christians. He describes the beauty of God's gifts. Sanctity of life and perseverance in doing God's Will are conditions for receiving these gifts.

30 Since we are children of the Holy One, let us put on unity of mind, thinking humble thoughts, exercising mortification. Let us keep ourselves far from all backbiting and slander, foul and sinful friendship, drunkenness, rebellious desires, uncontrolled passions, detestable adultery, and abominable pride.

Let us associate with those on whom divine grace has been bestowed; let us—with humble minds—put on the garment of cordiality and mortification; keep ourselves from all backbiting and slanderous talk; and let us seek sanctity by actions, and not just words. The Sacred Scripture says: “He who speaks much will hear much against him. Or does the easy talker think that he is righteous?” (Job 11:2).

It is a fatal error to presume about one's receiving grace without corresponding to it; you must cooperate with it energetically; whoever thinks he stands firmly should beware of a fall.

33 What shall we do, brethren? Shall we slacken from doing good, and give up charity? May the Lord never allow this to happen to us; but let us be eager to perform every good work with enthusiasm and zeal.

34 With confidence, the good laborer receives the fruit of his labor; the lazy and careless one cannot look at his employer straight in the eye.

It is our duty then to be eager to do good, for everything is from God. He warns us: “See, the Lord is coming, and the reward he brings is before him, to pay each according to his work” (Is 40:10; 62:11; Prov 24:12; Apoc 22:12).

He urges us, who believe in him with all our heart, not to be idle or lazy in any good work. Our boasting and our confidence must rest on him.

Let us be subject to his Will. Look carefully at the whole host of his angels; they stand ready to serve his Will. The Sacred Scripture says: “Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him, and a thousand served him, and cried out: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole creation is full of his glory” (Dan 7:10; Is 6:3).

We too, dutifully gathered together in unity of mind, should cry out to him continuously as with one voice, so as to share in his great and glorious promises. It is written: “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, man’s heart has not conceived, what great things have been prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

35 Beloved, how blessed, how wonderful, are God’s gifts! Life with immortality, joy with sanctity, truth with confidence, mortification with peace: All these are the gifts that fall within our understanding. What then are the other gifts prepared for those who persevere? Only the most holy Creator and Father of the ages knows their greatness and beauty.

We should then strive with the greatest determination to be found among the number of those who await him, so that we may share in the promised gifts. How will this be, beloved? We shall be awaiting him with the right attitude if our mind is fixed on God through faith, if we seek what is pleasing and acceptable to him, if we fulfill what is according to his blameless Will and follow the way of truth, rejecting all injustice, covetousness, vices, quarrels, malice and deceit, gossiping and slandering, hatred of God, arrogance and boasting, vainglory and attachment.

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Each one should persevere in his vocation, remaining in his own place, and following Christ's orders. Thus, unity will be preserved.

36 This is the path, beloved, by which we find our salvation, Jesus Christ, the High Priest of our sacrifices, the defender and ally in our helplessness. Through him, our gaze penetrates the heights of heaven, and we see, as in a mirror, the most holy face of God. Through Christ, the eyes of our hearts are opened, and our weak and clouded understanding reaches up toward the light. Through him, the Lord God willed that we should taste eternal knowledge, for Christ "is the radiance of God's glory, and as much greater than the angels as the Name God has given him is superior to theirs."

Thus spoke the Father about his Son: "You are my Son. It is I who have begotten you this day. Ask and I shall give you the nations as your inheritance, and the vast, wide earth for your possession." And again he says of him: "Be seated at my right hand, until I make your foes a footstool for your feet."

Now, who are these foes? The wicked and those who run counter to his Will.

Christians should imitate the unity existing in the Roman army.

37 So then, my brothers, let us fight with all our might under Jesus' unerring command. Think of the men serving under our military commanders. How well disciplined they are! How readily and submissively

they carry out orders! Not everyone can be a prefect, a tribune, a centurion, or a captain of fifty, but each man in his own rank executes the orders of the emperor and the officers in command. The great cannot exist without those of humble condition, nor can those of humble condition exist without the great. Always it is the harmonious working together of its various parts that ensures the well-being of the whole.

Another example of unity is that of the members of a human body.

Take our own body as an example: the head is helpless without the feet; and the feet can do nothing without the head. Even our least important members are useful and necessary to the whole body, and all work together in harmonious subordination for the well-being of the body.

38 Let us, then, preserve the unity of the whole Body that we form in Christ Jesus, and let everyone render service to his neighbor in line with the particular gifts he has received. Let the strong care for the weak, and the weak respect the strong. Let the wealthy assist the poor, and the poor man thank God for giving him someone to supply his needs. The wise man should show his wisdom not by his eloquence but in active help; the humble man should not proclaim his own humility, but leave others to do so; nor must the man who preserves his chastity ever boast of it, but recognize that the ability to control his desires has been given him by another.

Think, my brothers, of what clay we were made, how we came into being, and what we were at the first moment of our existence. Think of the tomb of darkness out of which our Creator brought us into his world. Here he had his gifts prepared for us even before we were born. All this we owe to him. Therefore, we must give him thanks for everything. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Later on, the epistle points to a clear distinction between hierarchy and laity. St Clement writes: Special functions are assigned to the high priest; a special office is imposed upon the priests...

The layman is to follow the rules laid down for the laity [40]. *And he concludes: Each of us, brethren, must try to please God*

with a right intention, each in his own place, having always in common the established rule of service [41].

St Clement continues reminding the rebellious Corinthians that the community cannot depose the priests, because the power of the hierarchy does not come from the people but from God through Christ and the apostles.

42 The apostles preached to us the gospel received from Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was God's ambassador. Christ, in other words, comes with a message from God, and the apostles, with a message from Christ. Both these orderly arrangements originate from the Will of God.

After receiving Christ's instructions, the apostles were fully assured through the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and confirmed in faith by the word of God. The Holy Spirit gave them full certainty in the faith. They joyfully went forth to preach the Good News that the Kingdom of God was close at hand.

From land to land and from city to city, the apostles preached and baptized those who obeyed God's Will. From among their earliest converts, they appointed men tested by the Spirit to act as bishops and deacons for the future believers. And this was no innovation, for, a long time before, the Scripture had spoken about bishops and deacons; for somewhere it says: "I will establish their overseers#1 in observance of the law and their ministers#2 in fidelity" (Is 60:17).

St Clement reprimands the Corinthians for removing from office bishops who were appointed by the apostles themselves, or their successors.

44 Our apostles, too, were given to understand by our Lord Jesus Christ that the office of the bishop would give rise to intrigues. For this reason, equipped as they were with perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the men mentioned above, and afterwards they laid down a permanent rule: when these men die, other approved men shall succeed to their sacred ministry. Consequently, we judge it an injustice to eject from the sacred ministry those who were appointed either by the apostles themselves, or later, by other men in high repute and with the consent of the whole Church.

St Clement stresses that the unique duty of the priest is to offer the sacrifice of the Mass.

Our sin will not be small if we reject those who have been offering the Sacrifice proper to the episcopate in a pious and irreproachable manner.

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The Church must not be torn by strife and discord. Seek the good of all, not your personal advantage, if you want to progress in virtue.

46 The command has been written: “Cling to the saints, for those who cling to them will be sanctified.” There is a passage in Scripture, as well, which states: “With the innocent man you will become innocent, and with the chosen you will be chosen also; likewise with the perverse you will deal perversely” (Ps 17:26-27). Associate yourselves, then, with the innocent and the law-abiding; these are God’s chosen ones.

Why are there quarrels and outbursts of passion, divisions, schisms, and even war among you? Do we not have but one God, one Christ, and the same Spirit of grace, which was given to us? Do we not have the same vocation in Christ? Why do we tear apart and divide the Body of Christ? Why do we revolt against our own body? Why do we reach such a degree of insanity as to forget that we are members one of another?

Remember the words of Jesus our Lord: Woe to that man; it would be better for him if he had not been born rather than to be an occasion of sin to one of my chosen ones. Indeed it would be better for him to have a great millstone round his neck and to be drowned in the sea than to pervert one of my chosen ones. #3 Your schism has led many astray, has cast many into doubt, many into discouragement, and all of us into sorrow. And still your rebellion continues.

47 Take up the letter of Blessed Paul the Apostle. What did he write to you in the first days of the preaching of the gospel? Even then you had developed factions. So Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to you concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos. But with that division you incurred less sin because you were supporting apostles of high reputation and a person approved by them.

St Clement urges them to live charity and to seek forgiveness for their sins. Unity will be restored with penance and self-denial for the good of one’s neighbor.

48 We should put an end to this division immediately. Let us kneel down before our Master and implore his mercy with our tears. Then he will be reconciled to us and restore us to the practice of brotherly love that befits us. For this is the gate of justice and sanctity that leads us to life, as it is written: “Open to me the gates of justice. When I have entered there, I shall

praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the just shall enter through it” (Ps 117:19).

There are many gates which stand open, but the gate of justice and sanctity is the gateway of Christ. All who enter through this gate are blessed, pursuing their way in holiness and justice, accomplishing all their tasks without discord.

A faithful may have some gift or charisma; he may be able to speak with wisdom; he may be skilled in the evaluation of what is said; he may be pure and chaste in his actions. But the greater he seems to be, the more humbly he should act; and the more zealous he should be for the common good, rather than his personal interest.

Charity should be at the heart of relations within the Church. Who can express the binding power of divine love and charity?

Christians are often called “the chosen ones” by the Apostolic Fathers. Baptism is a sign of God’s predilection for us; “He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy” (Eph 1:4).

49 Let anyone who truly loves Christ keep his commandments. Who can express the binding power of divine love and charity? Who can find words for the splendor of its beauty? Beyond all description are the heights to which this love lifts us. Charity unites us to God; “it cancels innumerable sins” (1 Pet 4:8). Charity endures everything, suffers everything patiently till the end.

Charity is neither servile nor arrogant. It does not provoke schisms or form cliques, but always acts in harmony with others. By charity, all God’s chosen ones reach perfection; without love or charity, it is impossible to please him. Out of love the Lord took us to himself. Because he loves us and because it was God’s Will, our Lord Jesus Christ gave his Blood for us—he gave his Body for our body, his Soul for our soul.

We are blessed if we fulfill the commands of the Lord out of love of God.

50 See then, beloved, what a great and wonderful thing love of God is; its perfection is beyond any description. Who are worthy to possess it unless God makes them so? Who can truly love and have charity except those to whom God grants it? To God therefore we must turn, begging of his mercy that there may be found in us a genuine love, free from human inclination and beyond reproach.

From Adam down to the present time all generations have passed away; but those who by God's grace were made perfect in charity have a dwelling now among the saints. When at last the Kingdom of Christ appears, they will be made manifest to all. "Take shelter in your rooms for a little while," says Scripture, "until my wrath subsides. Then I will remember the good days, and will raise you from your graves."

We are blessed, beloved, if we fulfill the commands of the Lord in harmonious, loving union, so that through charity our sins may be forgiven. Scripture pronounces "happy those whose transgressions are pardoned, whose sins are forgiven. Happy the man," it says, "to whom the Lord imputes no fault, and in whose mouth there is no deceit." This is the blessing given those whom God has chosen through Jesus Christ our Lord. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Charity leads to repentance. The repentant sinner is told to go to the priest and manifest his sorrow for his sins (no. 57).

51 We should pray then that we may be granted forgiveness for our sins and for whatever we have done yielding to the attacks of our adversary. And as for those who were the leaders of the schism and the sedition, they too should ponder on the reason for our common hope.

A man with charity and fear of God prefers to endure torment himself rather than have his neighbor suffer; and he prefers to suffer criticism silently rather than damage that harmony so admirably handed down to us. For it is better for a man to confess his sins than to harden his heart.

54 Who then among you is generous, who is compassionate, who is filled with charity? He should speak out as follows: If I have been the cause of sedition, conflict, and schisms, then I shall depart. I shall go wherever you wish, and I shall do whatever the community wants. Only let the flock of Christ live in peace with the appointed presbyters [priests].

Whoever acts thus would win great glory for himself in Christ, and he would be received everywhere, “for the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” Those who live without regret as citizens of God’s Kingdom have always acted thus in the past and will thus continue to act in the future.

57 Therefore, you who were rebellious, submit to the presbyters and receive penitential correction with humility, bending the knees of your hearts.

58 Accept our counsel, and you shall have nothing to regret. For as God lives, and as the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit, and the faith and hope of the elect, as surely my pledge will be fulfilled. Those who are eager to yield, and submit with a humble attitude, and without regrets carry out the commandments and precepts given by God will be enrolled and be in good standing among us. Thus we shall all be on the way to salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to him forever and ever. Amen.

Those who disobey the pope are guilty of sin.

59 If anyone disobey what has been said by Christ through us, let them know that they will entangle themselves in transgression and in no small danger. And we shall be innocent of this sin.

Toward the end of the letter, St Clement inserts a prayer used in the solemn Sunday liturgy then. It is directed to God the Father and to Jesus Christ, the Word of God on high, fountain of Wisdom. With its poetic language, it bears witness to Christ’s divinity. It is one of the most precious gems preserved in early Christian literature.

For God’s chosen ones scattered throughout the world, we shall make our constant prayer to the Creator of the universe. May he allow none of them to fall away, but preserve them all through his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, through whom he called us out of darkness into light, out of ignorance to the knowledge of his glorious Name.

Give us grace, Lord, to hope in your Name. To you, all creatures owe their being. Open the eyes of our heart to know you. You alone are the Most High in the highest heavens, the Holy One, whose dwelling is in the Holy.

You humiliate the arrogance of the proud, frustrate the designs of the godless, exalt the lowly, and humble the lofty. You give men wealth and take it away; you slay them, save them, and give them new life.

You alone are the fatherly Protector of spirits, and God of all flesh. Your gaze penetrates the depths, you observe the doings of men. Helper of those in peril, Savior of those in despair, you are the Creator of all spirits, and still keep watch over all of them.

You cause the peoples on the earth to multiply, and from them all you have chosen those who love you through Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. Through him you have instructed us, sanctified us, honored us.

Lord, help and protect us. Deliver those of us who are in distress, pity the lowly, raise up the fallen, show your face to those in need, heal the sick, convert the wayward, feed the hungry, deliver the captives, support the weak, give courage to the fainthearted. Let all nations know that you alone are God; that Jesus Christ is your Son, and that “we are your people and the sheep of your pasture.”

60 Lord, you created the world according to the eternal decree now revealed in your works. You are faithful throughout all generations; you are just in judgment, wonderful in power and majesty. You created all with wisdom, established all with prudence. Everything we see proclaims your goodness. You are kind and compassionate, and never fail those who put their trust in you. Forgive our sins, our failings, and our shortcomings.

Do not hold all the transgressions of your servants against them, but purify us with your truth. And so guide our footsteps that we may walk in purity of heart, in holiness and justice. That we may do what is good and pleasing in your sight and in the sight of our leaders.

Lord, let the light of your face shine upon us, so that we may enjoy your blessings in peace. That we may be protected by your strong hand, and freed from all sin by your outstretched arm; and deliver us from those who hate us unjustly.

Give peace and concord to us and to all mankind, even as you gave it to our ancestors “when they devoutly called upon you in faith and truth.”

This beautiful prayer ends with a petition for the civil authorities. It reveals the primitive Christians' concept of the state. It

also shows that the Roman Church has the welfare of all Christendom at heart.

Grant us to be obedient to your almighty and glorious Name,
and to our rulers and authorities on earth.

61 Lord, you have given the power of government to them,
through your magnificent and indescribable might,
may we acknowledge the honor and glory you have given them,
may we be submissive to them
in perfect obedience to your Will.

Lord, grant them health, peace, concord, and firmness,
so that they may exercise the authority you have given them
without hindrance or blame.

For you, eternal King of heaven, have given the sons of men
glory, honor, and power over all things on earth.

Lord, direct our rulers' minds so that they may choose
what is right and pleasing in your sight,
so that they may administer the power you have given them
in peace, with piety and gentleness,
and thus find favor in your eyes.

Lord, you alone are able to grant these
and even greater blessings upon us.

We render you praise and thanks
through the High Priest and Guardian of our souls,
Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and majesty to you,
now and for all generations,
forever and ever. Amen.

1. In Greek *episkopoi*, bishops; in St Clement, this word may include also the priests, *presbyteroi*.
2. In Greek *diakonoi*, deacons
3. Cf. Mt 26:24; Lk 17:1-2; Mk 9:42.

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St Ignatius of Antioch

Died in the year 110

St Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria at the beginning of the second century, was the second successor of St Peter in that see. He was a disciple of the apostle St John, and also met St Peter, having probably been ordained by him.

During the reign of Emperor Trajan, Ignatius was sentenced to be thrown to the wild beasts. He was transported in chains to his martyrdom in Rome; along the way, he was met by Christians from nearby places. To these friends, he wrote seven letters, six addressed to some Christian communities and one personal letter to Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna. All seven are most beautiful pearls of our extant early Christian literature. His martyrdom took place in the Roman Colosseum in the year 110.

In every paragraph of these letters, there seems to be an implicit allusion to the admonition of St Paul to the Corinthians: "Uphold the traditions just as I have handed them on to you" (1 Cor 11:2; see also 2 Thess 2:15 and 3:6). This insistence on divine Tradition received from the apostles gains significance considering that these letters were written about AD 110, that is, only about ten or fifteen years after the death of the last apostle.

There are three themes developed in St Ignatius's letters: (a) the role of the bishop as a sign of unity of the local church and as pastor fostering sanctity for all; (b) the reality of the Incarnation of Christ—i.e., it was not merely in appearance; and (c) Ignatius's desire to suffer for Christ.

The Letter of St Ignatius to the Ephesians circa year 110

The first four letters were penned at Smyrna. In these, he thanks the Christians for the many proofs of sympathy he had received, exhorts them to obey the hierarchy, and warns them against heretical doctrines. The hierarchy appears to be composed by one bishop for every community, the presbyters (priests), and the deacons.

In this first letter Ignatius tackles the theme of unity—the bishop united to Christ’s mind; the priests united to their bishop; and the laity with the hierarchy.

2 May you ever be my joy, if I ever deserve it! It is right for you to give glory in every way to Jesus Christ, who has glorified you. You must be made holy in all things by being united in perfect obedience, in submission to the bishop and the presbyters.

3 I am not giving you orders as if I were a person of importance. Even if I am in chains for the name of Christ, I am not yet made perfect in Jesus Christ. I am now learning to be a disciple, and I am speaking to you as my fellow disciples. It is you who should be strengthening me by your faith, your encouragement, your patience, your steadfastness.

But since love will not allow me to be silent about you, I am taking the opportunity to urge you to live unity in conformity with the mind of God. For Jesus Christ, our life, without whom we cannot live, is the mind of the Father, just as the bishops, appointed over the whole earth, are in conformity with the mind of Jesus Christ.

4 It is fitting, therefore, that you should be in agreement with the mind of the bishop—in fact you are. Your excellent presbyters—they are a credit to God—are as harmoniously united to the bishop as strings to a harp. So, in your symphony of minds and hearts, -the song you sing is for Jesus Christ.

But you, the laity, should also form a choir, so that, in harmony of sound through unity of hearts, taking the key note from God, you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father. If you do this, he will listen to you and recognize his Son’s melody. He will see from your good works that you are members of his Son. It is then profitable for you to live in perfect unity, so that at all times you may have a share in God.

5 If in a short span of time I have become so close a friend of your bishop—in a friendship not based on human grounds but on spiritual—how much more blessed you are! For you are as united with him as the Church is to Jesus Christ; and as Jesus Christ is to the Father. As a result, all things are in harmony through unity. Let no one deceive himself: Unless a person is within the place for sacrifice [the Church], he is deprived of the Bread of God. If the prayer of one or two has such power, how much more has the prayer of the bishop and the entire Church.

Christians should lead a coherent life.

7 Some among you have acquired the vice of going about with the Holy Name on their lips, while they indulge in practices which are an insult to God. These you must avoid as wild beasts; they are rabid dogs that bite in secret. You must beware of them, for they are hard to cure.

15 It is better to keep silence and be something than to talk and be nothing. Teaching is an excellent thing, provided you practice what you teach.

In a prevailing atmosphere of corruption, a Christian should pray and fight to persevere and lead others to Christ.

10 Pray unceasingly also for the rest of men. There is still hope that they may be converted and find their way to God. By the testimony of your clean lives, offer them an opportunity of becoming your fellow disciples.

Meet their angry outbursts with your gentleness, their boasts with your humility, their contempt with your prayers, their errors with your constancy in the faith, their cruelty with your serenity. Above all, do not try to match their example.

Let us prove ourselves their brothers through kindness. Let us strive to follow the Lord's example and see who among you can suffer greater wrong with patience, who more deprivation, who more contempt. Thus, no weed of the devil will be found among you; and you will persevere in perfect chastity and sobriety, in body and soul, through Jesus Christ.

The fate of those who corrupt the faith.

16 Do not be deceived, my brethren, those who corrupt the families will not inherit the Kingdom of heaven. If those who commit that sin according to the flesh will suffer death for ever, how much more will suffer a man who corrupts the faith of the others; a man who spreads his own evil doctrine among those for whom Jesus Christ was crucified. Such a filthy creature will go into unquenchable fire, and so also will anyone who listens to him.

Jesus is declared to be true God and true man. He was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.

7 There is one Physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, who is God and became man, true life in death. He sprung both from Mary and from God; therefore, he was subject to suffering and, on the other respect, incapable of it, Jesus Christ our Lord.

18 Our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God's plan; of the seed of David, it is true, but also of the Holy Spirit.

19 The virginity of Mary, her giving birth to the Man-God, and also the death of the Lord true God; these are three mysteries loudly proclaimed to all, but hidden from the Prince of this world.

Christ, true God, dwells in the soul of a Christian as in a temple. The sacraments—instituted by Christ—are means to achieve sanctity.

9 You are like stones prepared for a temple of God the Father. You are hoisted to the heights of the edifice by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the Cross; using for a rope the Holy Spirit.

Your faith is what pulls you up, and charity is the road which leads you to God. And thus you become wayfarers all, carrying God with you, carrying a temple, carrying Christ with you, carrying holiness, with the commandments of Christ covering you as a tunic.

12 You have shared in the sacraments with Blessed Paul, a great saint and martyr. Throughout his letter [to the Ephesians], he directed you to remain faithful children of God in Jesus Christ. May I remain in Paul's footsteps when I reach God.

13 Strive for sanctity, celebrate frequently the Eucharist, and praise God. When you do so, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and his attacks are blunted by your fortitude in the faith.

15 Let us therefore do all things in the conviction that Christ dwells in us. Thus we shall be his temples, and he will be our God within us. And this is the truth, and he will be made manifest before our eyes. Let us, then, love him as he deserves.

The letter ends with a petition for unity.

20 Show obedience to the bishop and to the presbyters with undivided mind. Break the one Bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, and everlasting life in Jesus Christ.

21 I offer my life as a ransom for you. Remember me as Jesus Christ remembers you. Pray for the Church in Syria, away from which I am being led with chains to Rome, though I am the least of all the faithful there. But then, I was granted the favor of contributing to the honor of God. Farewell! May God the Father and Jesus Christ, our common Hope, bless you!

6

Letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to the Magnesians

(circa year 110)

St Ignatius is the first writer to use the words “Christian” and “Christianity” as titles of honor. We should be Christians in deed, as well as in name.

A Christian is seen as living “in God,” “in Jesus Christ.” The preposition “in” occurs six times in the first four lines of the Greek text. This fact shows that the early Christians had a profound understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the Church at Magnesia on the river Meander, a church blessed with the grace of God the Father in Christ Jesus, our Savior, in whom I salute you. I send you every good wish in God the Father and in Jesus Christ.

1 I was delighted to hear of your love of God, so well ordered and devout, and so I decided to address you in the faith of Jesus Christ. Honored as I am with a name of the greatest splendor [Christian], though I am still in chains, I sing the praises of the churches. And I pray that they be united with the flesh and the spirit of Jesus Christ, who is our eternal life. This is a union in faith and love, to which nothing must be preferred; and, above all, a union with Jesus and the Father. For if in him we endure all the power of the Prince of this world, and escape unharmed, we shall make our way to God.

2 I have had the honor of seeing you in the person of Damas your bishop, a man of God; in the person of your worthy presbyters, Bassus and Apollonius; and in the person of my fellow-servant, the deacon Zotion. May I continue to take delight in this deacon, for he is obedient to the bishop as one is to the grace of God; obedient to the presbyters as to the law of Jesus Christ. #1

The bishop's power comes from Christ. Thus, even the authority of a young bishop is never to be questioned.

3 It hardly becomes you to take advantage of your bishop because of his youth. You should show him every mark of respect because he embodies the authority of God the Father. This, I understand, is what your holy priests do. They do not take advantage of his youthful condition but pay respect to him with the prudence that comes from God; or rather, not to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ, to the bishop of all.

 So then, for the honor of Him who has chosen us, it is proper to obey without hypocrisy. For a man does not so much deceive the bishop he can see, but rather he is trying to deceive someone he cannot see. In such a case, he is dealing not with a man, but with God, who knows the secrets of the heart.

4 We should then really live as Christians and not merely have the name; for many invoke the bishop's name but do everything apart from him. Such men, I think, do not have a good conscience, for they do not attend at regular church meetings, as commanded.

5 All things have an end; and two things, life and death, are side by side set before us. And each man will go "to his own place." Likewise, there are two coinages, one of God and the other of the world, each with its own image. Thus, unbelievers bear the image of this world; and those who have faith, animated with love, bear the image of God the Father through Jesus Christ. Unless we are ready to die, as he did after his Passion, his life is not in us.

*We obtain from this letter a vivid picture of the dignity accorded the bishop in the primitive Church. St Ignatius mentions nothing of the prophets or preachers who were still going from one locality to another, as described in the **Didaché**. Here, a bishop alone leads each community. He is surrounded by the priests and deacons. The bishop is the source of unity in the local church; he presides as God's representative. All are united in one prayer, one hope, in love, and in holy joy.*

6 In the persons I mentioned, I saw and loved in faith your whole community; go on. I urge you to strive to continue doing all things in harmony with God. The bishop is to preside as God's representative, the presbyters are to function as the apostolic council, and the deacons, who are so dear to me, are to be entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before time began and has now at last manifested himself to us.

Follow the ways of God, and have respect for one another. Let no one judge his neighbor as the world does, but love one another always in Jesus Christ. Let there be nothing among you that could divide you, but live united with the bishop and those who preside, serving all as a sign and a pattern of eternal life.

7 The Lord did nothing either by himself or through his apostles without his Father, with whom he is united; so too, you should undertake nothing without the bishop and the presbyters. Do not attempt to convince yourselves that what you do on your own account is right and proper. No, when you meet together, there must be just one petition, one prayer, one mind, one hope, in love and in holy joy; thus, you will have Jesus Christ, one and perfect before all else.

You must all come together to the one temple of God, one altar, to the one Jesus Christ, who came forth from the one Father, while still remaining one with him, and returned to him.

8 Do not be led astray by false doctrines or by old and idle tales. For if we still live by the Jewish law, we admit that we have not received grace. The holy prophets lived in conformity with Jesus Christ, and that is why they were persecuted. They were inspired by his grace to convince an unbelieving world that there is one God, manifested now through Jesus Christ his Son, his Word. He came forth from the Father and was in all things pleasing to the One who sent him.

Reason for the Sunday observance.

9 Those who lived by the ancient customs attained a fresh hope; thus, they no longer observed Saturday, but Sunday, the Lord's day. On that day,

life arose for us through Christ and through his death.

Some deny this mystery, but through it we have received our faith and because of it we persevere. May we prove to be disciples of our only teacher, Jesus Christ.

Christ did not come to annul, but to perfect the Law and the Prophets.

Even the prophets awaited him as their teacher, since they were his disciples in spirit. That is why Christ, whom they rightly awaited, raised them from the dead. How then can we live without him?

You have Christ within you.

10 Let us not be insensible to Christ's loving kindness. For if he had acted as we do, we would have been lost indeed. Therefore, let us become his disciples and learn to live in the Christian way. Those who are called by any other name are not of God.

Cast out the evil leaven that has become old and sour, and replace it with the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. He must be the salt of your lives, so that none of you may become corrupt, since it is by your purity of life that you will be judged.

It is absurd to profess Christ with the lips and at the same time practice Judaism, for Christianity did not result into faith in Judaism, but Judaism into faith in Christianity. Thus, everyone professing faith in God was assembled in the bosom of Christianity.

The historical reality of Jesus' deeds.

11 I do not write this to you, my dear friends, because I have heard that anyone of you were men of that ilk. Though I am a lesser man than yourselves, I write this to guard you all against falling into the snares of false doctrine. Have a firm faith in the reality of the Lord's birth, and Passion and Resurrection which took place when Pontius Pilate was procurator. All this deeds were truly and certainly accomplished by Jesus Christ, who is our hope. May none of you ever turn away from him!

Live in Christ, persevere in his commandments. St Ignatius asks for prayers.

12 May you be my joy in all things, if I deserve it. For although I am in chains, I do not deserve to be compared with any of you who live in freedom. I know that you are not inflated with pride, for you have Jesus Christ within you. And I know that you blush when I praise you, as the Scripture says: “The just man is his own accuser” (Prov 18:17 Septuagint Greek version).

13 Take care, then, to be firmly grounded in the teaching of the Lord and his apostles, so that you may prosper in all your doings, both in body and in soul, in faith and in love, in the Son, and in Father and in the Spirit, in the beginning and in the end, along with the most worthy bishop and his spiritual crown, your presbyters, and with the deacons, who are men of God.

Be obedient to the bishop and to one another, as Jesus Christ was in his humanity to the Father, and the apostles to Christ and to the Father and to the Spirit, so that there may be unity in flesh and in spirit.

14 I have exhorted you only briefly, for I am aware that you are filled with God. Remember me in your prayers, that I may happily make my way to God. And remember the Church in Syria, of which I am an unworthy member. How I need your united prayer and love in God! Remember then, the Church in Syria, that it may be strengthened through your prayers.

15 The Ephesians at Smyrna, where I write these lines, send their greetings. They have come together here, like yourselves, for the glory of God. They have encouraged me in every way and so has Polycarp, their bishop. The other churches, too, greet you for the glory of Jesus Christ. Farewell; may you abide in God’s peace, possessing that undivided spirit which is Jesus Christ.

Footnote:

1. There is a reference to the sacraments in the former expression, and one to preaching in the latter.

Letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to the Trallians

(circa year 110)

This letter was written in Smyrna while St Ignatius was on his way to martyrdom in Rome. It contains a warning against heresy; its message is: I wish to forewarn you, for you are my dearest children.

Ignatius, also called Theophorus [i.e., carried by God, or God bearer], to the holy church at Tralles in the province of Asia, dear to God the Father of Jesus Christ, elect and worthy of God, enjoying peace in body and in the Spirit through the passion of Jesus Christ, who is our hope through our resurrection when we rise to him. In the manner of the apostles, I too send greetings to you with the fullness of grace and extend my every best wish.

Hierarchical structure of the local church.

1 Reports of your splendid character have reached me; how you are beyond reproach and ever unshaken in your patient endurance—qualities that you have not acquired but are yours by nature. My informant was your own bishop Polybus, who by the Will of God and Jesus Christ visited me here in Smyrna. He filled me with such consolation that—even in chains for Christ as I am—I rejoiced, seeing your whole community embodied in him, always following God. Moreover, when I learned from him of your God-given kindness toward me, I broke out in words of praise for God.

2 You are obedient to your bishop, as you would be to Jesus, Christ; this shows me that you are not living with merely a human outlook but with supernatural outlook, in the manner of Jesus himself, who died for us that you might escape death by faith in his death. Thus one thing is necessary, and you already observe it, that you do nothing without your bishop; indeed, be subject to the clergy as well, seeing in them the apostles of Jesus Christ, our hope, for if we live in him we shall be found in him.

Deacons, too, who are dispensers of the mysteries of Jesus should in all things be pleasing to all men. For they are not mere servants with food and

drink, but servants of God's Church; hence, they should guard themselves against anything deserving reproach as they would against fire.

3 Similarly, all should respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, just as all should regard the bishop as representing the Father, and the priests as God's senate and the college of the apostles. Without these three orders, you cannot begin to speak of a church.

I am confident that you share my feelings in this matter, for I have had an example of your love in the person of your bishop, who is with me now. His whole bearing is a great lesson, and his very gentleness wields a mighty influence.

Temptations against humility and perseverance.

4 By God's grace, there are many things I understand, but I keep well within my limitations for fear that boasting should be my undoing. At the moment, then, I must be more apprehensive than ever and pay no attention at all to those who flatter me; their praise is as a scourge. For though I have a fierce desire to suffer martyrdom, I do not know if I am worthy of it. Most people are unaware of my passionate longing, yet the devil attacks me with increasing intensity. My present need, then, is for humility, by which the Prince of this world is defeated.

The bishop is responsible for the faith of the faithful. To be in communion with him is to be safeguarded against error and heresy. Error is always found mixed with truth. Once again, the Church is called "the place of the Sacrifice."

6 And so I strongly urge you to abstain from the alien food—heresy—nourishing yourselves exclusively on Christian doctrine. It is not I, but the love of Jesus Christ, that speaks.

The heretics mingle poison with Jesus Christ, as one might administer a deadly drug in sweet wine. They do not give a hint of their manipulation, so that, trusting the sweetness of the potion, a man drinks his own death.

7 Be on your guard against such men.

You will maintain doctrinal purity if you are not proud and keep close to Jesus Christ, to the bishop, and to the teachings of the apostles.

Whoever is within the place of the Sacrifice—the Church—is pure; whoever is outside is impure. Whoever acts apart from the bishop, the priests, and the deacons is not clear in his conscience.

8 I am not aware of anything of the sort among you; in writing this, I only wish to warn you as I foresee the snares of the devil, for you are my dearest children.

Renew yourselves in the faith that is the Body of Christ and in the love that is his Blood.

Put on the armor of patience; strengthen your faith, which is the Body of the Lord; increase your charity, which is the Blood of Jesus Christ. No one must bear a grudge against his neighbor. Never give the pagans the slightest pretext, so that the great majority who serve God will not be mocked because of the folly of a few. Woe to him on account of whose folly God's Name is blasphemed.

*The following paragraphs contain a warning against Docetism. For the proponents of this heresy, the sufferings and death of our Lord were not real; he only **seemed** to have lived, suffered, and died in a human way (see also the letter to the church of Smyrna, nos. 1 and 2). St Ignatius asserts that Christ is true man and really suffered as such.*

9 So turn a deaf ear to the talk of anyone whose language has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. Descended from David, Jesus was truly born of Mary; he really ate and drank. He was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate, and truly died by crucifixion, while heavenly and earthly beings and those under the earth looked on. He truly rose from the dead, being raised by his Father. Those who believe in him will be raised like him by the Father. We shall rise again in Christ, without whom we do not have true life.

10 There are men who do not believe in God; they have no faith. If, as they say, Christ's suffering was only an illusion—it is they themselves who are a mere illusion—why then am I a prisoner, and why do I want to fight with the wild beasts? I would then be dying in vain; I would be lying to you about the Lord.

Unity in the Church, the Body of Christ.

11 Avoid, then, those poisonous growths that bear deadly fruit; the mere taste of them is sudden death. Such growths are not of the Father's planting; if they were, they would appear as branches of the Cross, and their fruit would be imperishable.

The head cannot come to life without the limbs; Christ invites you through his passion and Cross to be members of his Body. God offers us union, that is, himself, the very ground of unity.

12 I send you greetings from Smyrna and from all God's churches which are here with me. They have been a comfort to me in every way, both physically and spiritually.

I wear my chains for the sake of Jesus Christ, praying all the time that I may reach God through them. My chains are my plea to you. Continue to live together in that harmony of yours, and persevere in prayer together. It is fitting that everyone, and especially the presbyters, should comfort the bishop and thereby honor the Father and Jesus Christ, and his apostles.

I beg of you, if you love me, listen to me, so that this letter of mine may not witness against you. And pray for me, too, lest I be found unfit, for in God's mercy I need your charity to make me worthy of the destiny I am eager to meet.

13 The communities of Smyrna and Ephesus send greetings. In all your prayers, remember the church in Syria. I am unworthy to claim membership in it, being the least of them all. And now, farewell in Jesus Christ. Be submissive to your bishop, as you would to God's command, and also to the clergy. As individuals, love one another with undivided affection. My life is being sacrificed for you, not only at this moment, but also when I shall come before God. Though I am still in danger, God the Father, through

Jesus Christ, is my pledge that my prayer and yours will be heard. My desire is that, through him, you may be found without fault.

Letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to the Romans

This is the last of four letters that St Ignatius wrote from Smyrna. As days went by, he became more aware of his impending martyrdom, which he considered an honor and a duty. A thought loomed dark in the bishop's mind. Some of the Christians of Rome were influential. Might they not try to obtain a revocation of his death sentence? To avoid such calamity, St Ignatius decided to write to the Romans to beg them not to intervene in his behalf through misplaced charity.

Thus, St Ignatius expresses his love for Jesus and his desire to die for him. These passages have no equal in Christian literature.

*When one compares the tone of the epistles of St Ignatius, one notices that the epistle addressed to the church of Rome is different. There is no doubt that the bishop of Antioch is writing to a superior. He greets the church that is "presiding in the chief place of the Roman territory;" evidently, presiding not over itself but over the other Christian communities. He calls her "the one presiding in charity," or "presiding in the bond of love." This is his way of saying "presiding over the Church universal." St Ignatius will be the first writer to use the expression "Catholic Church" (Cf. **Ep. to the Smyrneans**, 8) to designate the Church founded by Christ.*

*St Ignatius consistently uses this term, **tes agapes**, to designate each of the local churches. It literally means "love" or "charity," probably meaning "a community bound with charity."*

In every community, each faithful is directly linked with God; the sum total of these links is like a strong fabric that binds the faithful among themselves, forming a people "brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," #1 with visible and social dimensions.

The Church arises as a universal communion of charity, founded on faith, on the sacraments, and on the hierarchy. Pastors and

faithful –individually and as a community– receive the spiritual nourishment from the channels of grace, obeying the Holy Spirit, who is a Spirit of truth and love.

The expression “presiding in the bond of love” assigns to the Roman church authority to guide and lead in the new order brought into the world by Christ’s divine love for men. It is one of the earliest declarations of the Primacy of Rome coming from a non-Roman ecclesiastic.

Ignatius called Theophorus, to the church that has found mercy in the transcendent Majesty of the Father on high and of Jesus Christ, his only Son; to the church which is loved and enlightened by the Father, who wills all that exists, through the love of Jesus Christ our God; to the church which also presides in the chief place of the Roman territory; a church worthy of God, worthy of honor and of praise, worthy to be called blessed, worthy to receive the answer to its prayer, pure, and presiding in the bond of love among Christian communities, maintaining the law of Christ and bearing the Father’s Name.

I greet this church in the Name of Jesus Christ, Son of the Father. And I heartily wish every pure joy in Jesus Christ our Lord to you who are in union, body and soul, with his every command; to you who are filled with the grace of God without wavering, and cleansed wholly from all foreign stain.

A Christian should try to please God and not men. St Ignatius’s desire of doing God’s Will.

1 Through my prayers, I have been granted the favor of seeing you, my holy brothers, face to face, as indeed I have constantly asked. I now hope to embrace you as a prisoner in Christ Jesus, provided that it is God’s Will for me to be found worthy to reach the goal.

A good start has been made. May I gain the grace to secure my prize without hindrance! For I fear that your love may harm me. It is easy for you to reach your end; but hard for me to win my way to God, if you should not allow me to be martyred.

A martyr is an eloquent witness of the faith, a word of God.

2 I wish you to please God and not men—as indeed you are doing. I shall never again have such an opportunity to get to God, nor will you, if you remain quiet, ever have the credit for a greater achievement. If you keep silent about me, I will become a word of God; but if you love me in a purely human manner, I will become a meaningless sound.

Allow me to become a sacrifice to God; let my blood be spilled while there is still an altar at hand. Thus you may form a choir of love and sing praise to the Father in Christ Jesus for so graciously summoning the bishop of Syria from the sun's rising to come to the place of its setting. It is a fine thing for me to set with the sun, leaving the world and going to God. May I rise in his presence!

The holy bishop asks the Romans to let him not only be called a Christian, but also prove to be one. He remarks that the teachings of Roman church are universal doctrine.

3 You have been teachers for all. You have never impeded the martyrs from winning their triumph, but rather trained them for it. And so I am asking you to be consistent with the lessons you have taught. Just beg for me the courage and perseverance not only to speak but also to desire what is right; that I may not only be called a Christian, but also prove to be one. If I prove myself to be a Christian, then people will know about it, and my loyalty to Christ will be apparent when the world sees me no more.

Christianity wins more adherents by the life of the faithful than by long discussions of its merits.

Nothing you can see is truly good. Thus, our God Jesus Christ is the more clearly seen now that he has returned to his Father. Our task is not to produce persuasive propaganda but to live our greatness; Christianity shows its greatness even when it is hated by the world.

Allow me to suffer for Christ.

4 I am writing to all the churches to declare to them all that I am glad to die for God, if only you do not hinder me. I beg you not to show me a misplaced kindness. Allow me to be the food of wild beasts that I may come to God. I am God's wheat, and I shall be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become Christ's pure bread.

I would prefer that you goad the beasts to become my tomb and to leave no scrap of me behind; then once I have fallen asleep, I do not wish to be a burden to anyone. I shall be a true disciple of Christ when the world no longer sees my body. Pray to Christ for me so that by these means I may become a sacrifice to God.

The following testimony makes St Ignatius an important witness to the sojourn in Rome of Sts Peter and Paul. Significant also is the fact that, although St Ignatius calls for unity in each of his letters, he does not do so in the one addressed to the Romans. The Roman church is the center of unity. He does not presume to issue orders to the Roman church, for it has the authority of the Prince of the Apostles.

I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles, I am a condemned criminal; they were free, I am still a slave. But if I suffer, I shall become a freed man of Jesus Christ, and I shall rise again to freedom in him.

5 Now as a prisoner, I am learning to give up my own wishes. All the way from Syria to Rome, I am fighting wild beasts, by the land and by the sea, by day and by night, chained as I am to ten leopards, I mean the detachment of soldiers who guard me. The better you treat them, the worse they become. Because of their cruelty, I am more and more learning to be a true disciple, but not by this am I justified.

How happy I will be with the beasts which are prepared for me! I hope that they will make short work of me. I shall even coax them to devour me quickly and not to be afraid of touching me, as sometimes happens; in fact, if they hold back I shall force them to eat.

Bear with me, for I know what is good for me. Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible rob me of my price, which is Jesus Christ! The fire, the cross, packs of wild beasts, lacerations,

rendings, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of the whole body, the horrible tortures of the devil—come what may, if only I may gain Jesus Christ!

St Ignatius declares that his earthly desires have been crucified. Christian life consists in imitating Christ. This imitation should be more than merely accepting Christ's teachings; it should lead to conform oneself with his Passion and Death—that is, to accept mortification and to have a sense of commitment in life for one's mission. Hence, St Ignatius's desire for martyrdom.

6 I have no use for the delights of this world and all its kingdoms. I would prefer dying in Jesus Christ to ruling over all the earth. I seek him who died for us; I desire him who rose for our sake.

I am about to be born again. Understand me, my brothers; do not hinder me from coming to life, do not wish me to die. I desire to belong to God, not to the world. Do not seduce me with perishable things.

Let me see the pure light; when I am there, I shall be truly a man at last. Allow me to imitate the sufferings of my God. If anyone has God in him, let him understand what I want and have sympathy for me, knowing what drives me on.

A true disciple is ready to sacrifice his life for Jesus.

7 The Prince of this world wants to snatch me away and destroy my desire to be with God. So, let none of you who will be there give him help. Take my part instead—that is, God's part. Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips and the world in your hearts.

Envy should have no place among you. And if, when I get there, I should plead for your intervention, pay no attention to me. No, believe instead what I am writing to you now.

I am writing to you while still alive, but I long for death. My Love has been crucified, and I am no longer in love with perishable, material things. But a living water speaks within me, saying: "Come to the Father."

The imitation of Christ is not something abstract or figurative; it is accomplished in union with the hierarchy and with the

participation in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist.

I take no delight in corruptible food or in the pleasures of this life. I want the Bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David. And for drink I want his Blood, the sign of his immortal love.

8 I no longer wish to live, as men count life. And I shall have my way, if you wish it so. Wish it, then, so that you, too, may have God's favor. With these few words, I beg you to believe me. Jesus Christ will make plain to you the truth of what I say; he is the true voice that speaks the Father's truth.

Pray for me that I may reach my goal. I have written to you not prompted by merely human feelings and values, but by God's purpose for me. If I am to suffer, it will be because you loved me well; if I am rejected, it will be because you hated me.

9 Remember in your prayers the church of Syria: it now has God for its shepherd, instead of me. Jesus Christ alone will be its bishop, along with your love. For myself, I am ashamed to be counted among its members, for I do not deserve it, being the least of all, born out of due time. Yet, if I make my way to God, by his mercy I shall be someone.

I greet you from my heart, and so do the churches that have welcomed me not as a mere chance visitor but as the representative of Jesus Christ. Yes, even the churches that were not on my route humanly speaking, though spiritually on the same journey, were there in advance to meet me in city after city.

Footnote:

1. "*De unitate Patris at Filii et Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata*" (cf. St Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.*, 23.)

Letter of St Ignatius to the Philadelphians

From Smyrna, St Ignatius was taken to Troas. There he wrote his letters to the Christians at Philadelphia and Smyrna, as well as the personal letter addressed to St Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. While in Troas, Ignatius had received word that the persecution had ceased in Antioch. He urged the Christians of Philadelphia and Smyrna, as well as the bishop of the latter city, to send delegates to congratulate the brethren of Antioch.

These letters contain earnest pleas for unity of faith and personal sacrifice. Unity must be built in Christ, around the bishop with the presbyters and deacons. Unity is the result of each one's union with Christ, who fosters that unity with his grace; he dwells in us as in a temple.

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the church of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ located at Philadelphia in the province of Asia. You have felt God's compassion and been given his peace; you have been firmly established in union with God; you are now filled with serene joy in the Passion of our Lord; by his mercy, you believe in his Resurrection. I greet you in the Blood of Jesus Christ.

You are my abiding and unshakable joy. You will always be so, if you continue united with your bishop and with his presbyters and deacons, all appointed in accordance with the mind of Christ. Chosen by his own Will, Christ has confirmed them in the power that the Spirit gives.

I know that your bishop has been given his ministry, which serves the common good, neither by his own efforts, nor from men nor even out of vainglory, but from the love of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am deeply impressed by your bishop's wisdom; he can do more by his silence than others by empty talking. He is attuned to the commandments like a harp with its strings. I call him blessed, then, for his determination to please God. I know he is virtuous and perfect, stable and calm; in this he imitates the sweet wisdom of the living God.

No matter what difficulties a Christian may encounter, fraternal charity and unity around the hierarchy are the weapons of defense.

2 You have been born of the light of truth, therefore flee from divisions and bad doctrines. Follow the Shepherd. Where the Shepherd is, there you, as his flock, must follow. There are many wolves who seem trustworthy. But they actually are trying to snatch the athletes running God's race with the bait of deadly pleasure. If you stand united, they will not succeed.

3 Avoid these poisonous weeds, not planted by the Father, whose gardener is not Jesus Christ.

For all who belong to God and Jesus Christ are with the bishop; all who repent and return to the unity of the Church will also belong to God, so that they may live according to Jesus Christ.

Do not be deceived, my brethren; anyone who follows a schismatic will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Anyone who adheres to strange doctrines severs all connection with the Passion.

The Eucharist, described as a sacrifice, is the center of unity among Christians.

4 Take care, then, to take part only in the one Eucharist; for one is the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one the cup to unite us with his Blood; one is the altar of the Sacrifice, just as there is one bishop assisted by the presbyters and the deacons, my fellow servants. Thus you will do everything according to the Will of God.

5 My brothers, I overflow with love for you, and with a joyous heart, I try to make you strong in your faith—although it is not so much I but Jesus Christ. Although imprisoned for his sake, I still fear because I am full of imperfection. But your prayers will make me perfect in the eyes of God, so that I might yet receive the inheritance promised me by the merciful God. I seek refuge in the person of Christ through the Gospels, and I obtain comfort from the apostles through the true ministry of the Church.

Christians should be united among themselves and their bishop as Christ is united to his Father.

7 God, for whose sake I am in chains, is my witness; I have not learned unity from any human source. No, the Holy Spirit keeps on uttering this: “Do nothing against the directives of the bishop; keep your body as the temple of God; love unity, flee from divisions; imitate Jesus Christ, for he did as the Father wanted him to do.”

Imitating Christ is not something abstract; it is to accept with simplicity the implications of Christ's Cross in daily life, preserving the deposit of faith. This identification with Christ is accomplished united to the hierarchy by participation in the sacraments, most especially the Holy Eucharist.

St Ignatius affirms the harmony of God's revelation; the Old Testament agrees with the New Testament, both have God as their main author; both have Christ at their center.

8 I played my part, like a mediator appointed to bring about unity. For wherever there is division or anger, there is no place for God.

God forgives all who repent, if their contrition leads them to union with God and communion with the bishop. I trust in the grace of Jesus Christ; he will break all your bonds.

I exhort you never to act with a sectarian spirit, but to heed what you have learnt from Christ.

I heard some say, “Unless I find it in the ancient Scriptures [Old Testament], I do not believe what is preached. I do not believe in the Gospel.” I answered them, “The Gospel is implicit in the Old Scriptures.” They replied, “That is precisely the point at issue.”

To me, the official document is Jesus Christ; the inviolable record is his Cross, his Death, and his Resurrection, and the deposit of his faith which he brought about. In these I desire to be saved by your prayers.

9 There were priests in the Old Testament, but they were under Christ, the High Priest. The Holy of Holies, and the sacred mysteries of God [the sacraments] were committed to him. He is the door of the Father,

through whom Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, the apostles, and all the Church must enter.

All these holy things [the sacraments] are means to attain union with God.

These means are effective so long as your faith is alive with charity.

11 The brethren of the church at Troas—a community of love—greet you. Farewell in Christ, our common hope.

Letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to the church of Smyrna

In the following passages, we shall see that St Ignatius based his faith on the fact that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. This was the cornerstone of his belief, this was the faith that he taught. And it was this faith that sustained him till martyrdom.

From Ignatius, known as Theophorus, to the Church of God the Father and of Jesus Christ, his beloved Son, at Smyrna in Asia. I wish you all joy in an immaculate spirit of fidelity to the word of God. By his mercy, you have won every gift and lack none. God loves you, filled as you are with faith and charity. Persevere fruitful in sanctity.

A Christian should live as if nailed to Christ's Cross.

1 I celebrate the glory of Jesus Christ, God, because he has given you the gift of wisdom. I am well aware of the perfection of your unshakable faith. You are, as it were, nailed in body and soul to the Cross of Jesus Christ, confirmed in charity through his Blood.

The two natures of Christ, divine and human, are described in these opening lines. Against the Docetist and Gnostic heresies, St Ignatius testifies that Christ's Passion was real and not merely a pious story. By sharing in his Resurrection, Christ is calling us to his Kingdom and glory.

You have a firm faith in our Lord because he is “of the race of David according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3), but God's Son by the Will and power of God. He was truly born of the Virgin and baptized by John, so that

the divine plan of salvation might be fulfilled. He was truly nailed to a Cross in the flesh for our sake in the time of Pontius Pilate and the Tetrarch Herod.

We are the fruit of his most blessed Passion. By his Resurrection, he has raised up a banner flying all the time to assemble his saints and faithful ones (Jews and Gentiles alike) in the one Body of his Church.

2 For Christ endured all this for us, for our salvation; and he really suffered, just as he truly rose from the dead. Do not be fooled when you hear some unbelievers say that his Passion was merely in appearance. That is false.

It is rather these unbelievers who exist only in appearance; and, as their belief, so their end shall be. They shall not resurrect with their glorious bodies; they shall be like demons.

3 As for myself, I know and believe that Christ was united with his Body even after the Resurrection. When he visited Peter and his companions, he said to them: “Take hold of me, touch and see that I am not a spirit without a body.”

Immediately they touched him and believed, clutching at his Body and his very spirit. And for this reason they despised death and conquered it.

In addition, after his Resurrection, the Lord ate and drank with them like a real human being, even though in spirit he was united with his Father.

4 And so I am giving you serious instruction on these things, dearly beloved, even though I am aware that your faith is strong.

The real presence of our Lord in the Eucharist is emphasized.

6 Let no one be deceived. Judgment will be meted out, even to heavenly beings, the glorious angels and principalities, to visible or invisible beings, if they do not believe in the Blood of Christ.

Observe those who hold erroneous opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ, which we have received, and see how contrary, their opinions are to the mind of God.

They do not perform works of charity, have no care for the widows, nor orphans, nor the suffering people, nor those in prison or out of it; they

have no care for the hungry or thirsty.

7 They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the Body of our Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins; the Body that the Father, in his goodness, raised from the dead.

 Rejecting the “gift of God,” they are perishing in their contestation. It would be better for them to love, so that they too might rise again.

 Keep away from such men; do not speak with them either in public or in private.

Earlier, St Ignatius had requested their prayer of intercession for the conversion of these stubborn heretics.

4 Only pray for them, so that they may repent, difficult as it may seem. Yet Jesus Christ, our true Life, has the power to do even this.

The bishop is the High Priest of the liturgy and the dispenser of the mysteries of God. Neither baptism, nor the Eucharist, nor the ‘agape,’ may be celebrated without him. For St Ignatius, “to follow” him means to obey him in matters of doctrine and ecclesiastical government. The Eucharist is described as the sacrifice of the entire Church. No one can turn it into a private concern.

8 You should all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father; follow the college of priests as you would the apostles; respect the deacons as you would God’s commandment.

 No one should do anything pertaining to the church without the bishop. The Eucharistic liturgy should be considered legitimate only when it is celebrated by the bishop or by whomever he authorizes.

 No one is authorized to baptize or to celebrate the Eucharist and have a community meal (*agape*) without the bishop. On the other hand, whatever he approves is also pleasing to God. In this way, everything you do will be lawful and valid.

In the following passage, we have the earliest occurrence of the term “the Catholic Church” (year 110). “Catholic” means

“universal,” including all the faithful collectively, with Christ at the Head. Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist is the nucleus around whom the Church is constituted.

Wherever the bishop is, there should be the congregation; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there the Catholic Church is.

In the final greetings, St Ignatius thanks the Smyrneans for their prayers.

9 You have been my consolation. May Jesus Christ be the same for you. You were charitable with me when I was with you, and when I was away. May God repay you. You will be with him one day, if you endure all things for his sake.

10 Nothing you gave is lost to you. I offer my life for you and also my chains, which you did not despise, nor were you ashamed of them. Jesus Christ, who is fidelity itself, will not be ashamed of you either.

11 Your prayer has reached as far as the church in Antioch of Syria, to which, though unworthily –for I am the least among them– I belong. I come from there in chains which are pleasing to God, and I salute you all. By the divine Will, it has been granted to me that, through your prayer, I might reach God. This is not by any merit of mine, but by the grace of God; and I pray that the final grace may be given me.

Letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna

This is a personal letter from St Ignatius to bishop Polycarp of Smyrna, although some portions are addressed to all the faithful of that city. His style is direct and even blunt when he warns Polycarp of the dangers of false doctrines and reminds him of his duties as a pastor.

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to Polycarp, who is bishop of the church of Smyrna, or rather he who has for his bishop and guardian God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, greetings and all good wishes.

1 Contemplating how uncompromising your union with God is, how firmly built as if upon a solid rock, I am full of thanksgiving to Him for allowing me to see your blessed countenance. May I forever enjoy the sight of it in God!

We must bear with everything for God, so that he in turn may bear with us. Christian life is like running in on race course. The struggle is in sanctity and personal apostolate.

The letter continues with specific directions for the administration of the episcopal office, applicable to all with authority.

The divinity of Christ is implied; he is timeless (achronos), eternal, and invisible (aoratos).

Clothed, as you are, with the garment of divine grace, I encourage you to press forward on your course and also to persuade all men to run to salvation.

Fulfill your assignment with constant concern for the others, both in the spiritual and in the material aspect. Be concerned about unity, the greatest of all goods. Carry all men in your heart as the Lord carries you in his Heart. Have patience with all in charity, as indeed you do.

Give yourself to prayer continually; ask for an increase in wisdom and understanding; keep alert without getting tired. Deal with each man individually, following God's way. Be patient with the defects of all, like a perfect sportsman of God.

The greater the toil, the richer the reward.

2 The physician heals all wounds, but not with the same medicine. High fever, for instance, is calmed with cold, moist poultices. Thus, you must win over your more troublesome disciples by kindness. If you love only the good ones, you gain no merit.

Be prudent as the serpent in all things, and innocent as the dove always. You are both body and soul; therefore, deal gently with the manifestations of human fault that are visible, and pray that you may get to know those invisible. Thus, you will lack nothing, but abound in every gift of grace.

Do as your vocation requires. As the pilot pursues favorable winds and the storm-tossed sailor seeks the harbor, you should reach for God together with your people.

Exercise self-discipline and mortification, for you are God's athlete. The prize is immortality and eternal life, as you know full well.

For your sake I sacrifice myself, I with my chains, which you have kissed.

3 Do not be overwhelmed by those who seem trustworthy and yet teach heresy. Remain firm, like the anvil under the hammer. A good athlete must receive blows in order to win the fight. So too must we endure everything for God, so that he in turn may bear with us.

Be more diligent in everything. Understand how important this is in these times. Look for him who is outside time, the eternal One, the invisible, who became visible for us; he cannot be touched and cannot suffer, yet he became subject to suffering and endured so much for our sake.

4 Do not neglect widows; after the Lord, you must be their guardian. Nothing must be done without your knowledge, and you must do nothing without God's knowledge, as indeed is the case. Stand firm. Services should be held more often. Seek out everyone by name.

Do not look down upon slaves, whether men or women; yet they too should not be arrogant, but should give better service for the glory of God; thus, they will gain from him a better freedom. They should not be anxious for their freedom to be bought at the community's expense, for they might then become the slaves of their own desires.

In these lines, St Ignatius encourages married people to live chastity within their state, avoiding sinful practices. Matrimony, as in St Paul's letters, symbolizes the eternal bond between Christ and his bride, the Church. Marriages should be contracted before the bishop. St Ignatius also praises virginity for God's sake. He exhorts all to do everything for God's glory.

5 Evil practices should be avoided; indeed, have conversations with the faithful to warn them. Thus, tell my sisters to love the Lord and be content with their husbands in the flesh and in the spirit. In the same way, tell my brothers in Christ's Name to love their wives as the Lord loves his Church.

If anyone can remain chaste, imitating the Savior in his flesh, let him do so without ever boasting. For if he boasts of it, he is lost; if—for this reason—he thinks himself better than the bishop, he is lost.

Those who marry should be united with the bishop's knowledge, so that the marriage may follow God's will and not merely the desires of the flesh.

Let everything be done for God's glory.

Christian vocation is a beautiful commitment to fight God's battle in firm solidarity with all other Christians.

6 Pay close attention to your bishop, so that God may listen to you. My life is a sacrifice for those who are obedient to the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons. May I share my prize with them in God!

Work together, struggle together, run the race together, suffer together, take your rest together, and rise up again as stewards, members of his household, and servants of God.

Seek to please God, whose soldiers you are, and from whom you draw your pay. Let none of you become a deserter. Let your baptism be your

shield, your faith a helmet, your charity a spear, your fortitude a suit of armor covering your entire body.

Let your good works be your deposit, like money put in a bank, so that you may draw out well-earned savings in due time. So be humble, be patient and gentle with one another, as God is with you. May you be my joy always!

7 I have heard that –through your prayers– the church of Antioch in Syria is now in peace. Thus, I gather fresh courage, while I abandon confidently myself in God. If only I find my way to God through my passion! I will be found to be a disciple of Christ at the resurrection.

My most blessed Polycarp, a Christian is not his own master; his time belongs to God. We are doing the work of God; and a prize will be ascribed to you as well, when you have accomplished your part. I have trust in the grace of God that you are ready to act generously when it comes to doing the work of God. Since I knew so well your love for the truth, I have limited my appeal to these few words.

8 I could not write to all the churches because I am sailing at once from Troas to Neapolis, for such is the order of the day.

I want you, therefore, as one who knows God's purpose, to write to the main churches of the East and bid them to do the same with the rest. Those who can should send representatives to Antioch to give them some consolation. The rest should send letters through your delegates. Thus, your community will be honored for a good work that will be remembered forever, as their bishop deserves.

I wish all of you well forever in Jesus Christ; through him may you all persevere united to God and under his care. Farewell in the Lord!

St Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna; Letter to the Philippians

(circa year 130)

St Polycarp was a well-known and venerable figure of the first half of the second century. From Tertullian, St Irenaeus, and Eusebius, we learn that he listened at Ephesus to St John the Apostle, who appointed him bishop of nearby Smyrna.

Of his life, we know that St Polycarp journeyed to Rome to consult with Pope Anicetus on some ecclesiastical matters; that he was the spiritual father of St Irenaeus of Lyons; and that St Ignatius of Antioch wrote to him the preceding letter. St Polycarp was martyred in the year 156; the next chapter contains the details of his martyrdom. St Ignatius and St Polycarp are the great links between the apostles and the succeeding generations of early Christian Apologists.

The Christian community of Philippi had asked from Polycarp a copy of the letters of St Ignatius of Antioch. Polycarp sent these, together with this letter in his own hand. Some dispute that the present text may be the combination of two letters of St Polycarp

1 From Polycarp and his fellow priests to the pilgrim Church of God at Philippi: May you have mercy and peace in abundance from Almighty God and Jesus Christ our Savior.

I rejoice with you greatly in the Lord Jesus Christ because you have assumed the pattern of true love and have rightly helped on their way those who were in chains. Such chains are a rich crown for the chosen ones of our Lord and God.

I am glad, too, that your deep-rooted faith, proclaimed of old, still abides and continues to bear fruit in the life-giving power of our Lord Jesus Christ. He, for our sins, did not refuse to go down to death, and “God raised

him up after destroying the pains of hell.” #1 With a glorious joy that no words can express, you believe in Christ without seeing him. This is the joy in which many wish to share, “knowing that by grace you are saved, not by anything of your own” (Eph 2:8), by the Will of God through Jesus Christ.

2 So prepare yourselves for the struggle, serve the Lord in fear and truth. Put aside empty talk and the desire to be like the others; your faith must be in him who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him a share in his own glory and a seat at his right hand. To him everything was made subject in heaven and on earth; all things obey him, who will come as Judge of the living and the dead. All who refuse to believe in him must answer to God for the Blood of his Son.

He who raised him from the dead will raise us, too, if we do his Will and keep his commandments, loving what he loved, refraining from all wrongdoing, fraud, greed, malice, and slander. We must abstain from false witness, not returning evil for evil, nor curse for curse, nor blow for blow, nor denunciation for denunciation. Always remember the words of the Lord who taught: “Do not judge and you will not be judged; forgive and you will be forgiven; be merciful and you will find mercy; the amount you measure out to others will be the amount measured out to you. Blessed are the poor and those who suffer persecution, for theirs is the Kingdom of God” (Mt 5:3.10).

3 It is not out of presumption that I write to you, my brothers, on what sanctity of life means, but rather because you asked me to do so. For neither I nor anyone like me can equal the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul. When he was in your city, he fully and courageously taught the men of that time the word of truth; when he was absent, he wrote you letters. By carefully studying these letters, you can strengthen yourselves in the faith that has been given to you. This faith is “the mother of us all;” it is followed by hope, and preceded by charity –love of God, of Christ, of our neighbor. Whoever lives within this framework has fulfilled the commandment of sanctity. For anyone who has charity is far from sin.

4 The source of all evil is the desire to possess. Mindful that we brought nothing into this world and can take nothing out of it, put on the armor of a holy life. Begin by learning how to walk in the commandment of the Lord.

Teach your wives to walk in the faith that has been handed down to them. In charity and in purity, women must cherish their husbands with complete fidelity; they must esteem all others equally, in complete chastity; they must raise their children in the discipline that comes from fear of God.

Teach widows to be discreet in all that concerns the faith of the Lord; they must pray for all without ceasing, shunning all calumny, gossip, false witness, greed, in a word, every sort of evil. They must bear in mind that they are God's sacrificial altar. He sees everything clearly, nothing escapes his vigilance, be it calculation, intentions, thoughts, or some secret desire of the heart.

5 God, as we know, is not mocked. Walk in a way that is worthy of his commands and his plan for salvation. Deacons, in the same way, must be blameless in the sight of his goodness, for they are ministers of God and of Christ, not of men. They must avoid slander, hypocritical talk, and greed. Compassionate and diligent, they must control all their desires, walking according to the truth of the Lord who became the servant of all. If we please him in this life, we shall receive the life to come; he has promised us that he will raise us from the dead, and we will reign with him, if we lead lives worthy of him.

Young men must likewise be clean in all respects, loving purity above everything else and keeping themselves free from the chains of selfish passions. It is fundamental to be cut off from self-indulgence, since self-indulgence is at war against the Spirit; and you know perfectly well that "people of immoral lives, the adulterers, the effeminate, and the homosexuals will not inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9). You must abstain from all this.

Young girls must also walk with an innocent and pure conscience. This is what our faith tells us.

The letter contains a portrait of the ideal priest.

6 Priests should be compassionate and merciful to everyone, bringing back those who have wandered astray, visiting the sick; they must not neglect widows and orphans, or the poor, but "always providing for what is good in the sight of God and of men" (2 Cor 8:21). They should entirely refrain from

anger, human respect, and prejudice; love of money should be wholly alien to them. They should not be rash in believing something said against another, or too severe in judging others, since they know that we are all debtors through sin.

If we pray to the Lord to forgive us, we must in turn forgive. Now we stand before the eyes of our Lord and God; later “we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, each to give an account of himself” (Rom 14:10.12). Let us then serve God with fear and reverence.

The Lord’s command is also the command of the apostles who preached the Gospel to us, and the command of the prophets who foretold the Lord’s coming. We must carefully observe what is good, avoiding anything that might cause another to stumble; we must shun false brothers and those who assume the Lord’s Name hypocritically and lead the unwary into error.

*St Polycarp defends the faith in the mystery of the
Incarnation of our Lord, and the reality of his death on the Cross.*

7 Anyone who does not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh is the Antichrist. And anyone who refuses to admit the testimony of the Cross is of the devil. Whoever perverts the Lord’s words to suit his own desires and denies that there is a resurrection or a judgment, that one is the firstborn of Satan.

So, let us abandon the folly of the crowd and their false teachings; let us return to the teaching that was handed down to us from the beginning. We must be alert in prayer, constant in fasting; and in our prayers, let us beg God, who sees everything, “not to lead us into temptation.” For, as the Lord has said, “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

8 Without interruption, let us persevere in our hope and in the guarantee of our salvation, that is, Christ Jesus. “In his mouth, no hint of guilt was discovered; he committed no sin and yet bore our sins in his own Body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:22.24). Rather, he endured everything for our sake so that we might live in him.

Let us then imitate his patience in suffering; if we suffer because of his Name, let us give him that glory. This is the personal example he has given us; this is the object of our faith.

9 I ask you all to respond to the call of God, to practice boundless patience, and to bear your sufferings. Your own eyes have seen it not only in blessed Ignatius, Zosimus, and Rufus, but in others from among you as well, to say nothing of Paul and the other apostles. Be assured that all these men “did not run their race in vain” (Phil 2:16). No, they ran it with faith and with sanctity of life; now they are with the Lord in the place they have earned, because they accompanied him in suffering. “Their love was not for this present world” (1 Tim 4:10); it was for Jesus, who died for our sakes and was raised up again by God, for our sakes.

Generosity and works of mercy are marks of a Christian.

10 Be steadfast, then, and follow the Lord’s example; be strong and unshaken in faith; love the community and one another. United in the truth, show the Lord’s own gentleness in helping one another, and look down on no one. If you can do better, do not put it off, because generosity in the struggle frees one from eternal death.

Be subject to one another, and always behave honorably among the pagans. You will be praised for the good you have done, and the Lord will not be blasphemed because of you. But woe to him on whose account the Name of the Lord is blasphemed. Teach everyone to live soberly, just as you live yourselves.

11 I am greatly saddened on account of Valens, who was once made a priest among you; he does not understand the dignity of his calling. So I urge all of you to be chaste and honest, to avoid greed, and to refrain from every form of evil. If a man cannot control himself in these things, how can he teach others? If he does not avoid greed, he will be defiled by idolatrous practices and will become as one of the pagans who know nothing of the Lord’s judgment. Or, as Paul teaches: “Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world?” (1 Cor 6:2).

However, I have never seen or heard of anything of that sort among you, for whom blessed Paul labored and whom he commends at the beginning of his letter. He spoke in high terms of you in all the churches that had come to know God, at that time; we ourselves had not yet come to that knowledge.

Brothers, I am deeply sorry for Valens and for his wife; may the Lord grant them true repentance. As for yourselves, be mortified in those matters. Do not look on such people as enemies, but invite them back as weak members who have gone astray, so that the entire Body of which you are a part will be saved. In doing this, you are contributing to your own spiritual development.

12 I am sure that you are well grounded in the Scriptures and that nothing of their message escapes you. I, however, am not so fortunate. As these same Scriptures put it: “Be angry and do not sin” (Ps 4:5) and “do not let the sun set on your anger” (Eph 4:26). Blessed is the man who bears this in mind, as I am sure you do.

May God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Eternal High Priest himself, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and in truth and in great gentleness. May you never know anger, but be patient, without resentment, long-suffering, persevering, and chaste. May he grant you a place among his saints; and may he give the same to us, along with you, as well as to all on earth who put their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and in his Father, who has raised him from the dead.

Prayer for the civil authorities is expressly advised.

Keep all the saints in your prayers. Pray, too, for our rulers, for our leaders, and for all those in power; even for those who persecute and hate you, and for those who are enemies of the Cross. Thus, your good works will be seen by all men, and you will be perfect in God.

13 Both you and Ignatius have written me to ask whether anyone going to Syria will deliver your letter, as well as ours. If the opportunity offers itself, I will do it; if I cannot, I will send a representative.

As you request, we have returned to you the letters Ignatius sent us and as many other letters as we had; they are being enclosed with this letter. You will derive great benefit from them, for they are full of faith and patience, and great edification in all that refers to our Lord. Send us any certain information you may have about Ignatius and his companions.

14 I am sending this letter to you by Crescens, whom I commended to you when I was present, and do so again. He has lived blamelessly among us, as I am sure he will among you. When his sister comes to you, she, too, will come with our commendation.

Footnote:

1. (Acts 2:24) This is the earliest registered quotation from the Acts of the Apostles.

Letter on the Martyrdom of St Polycarp

(year 156)

St Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was arrested in Rome. Refusing to worship Caesar, he was accused of offenses against the emperor and sentenced. At the age of eighty-six, he died a martyr on February 23 of the year 156.

A Christian eyewitness wrote the following account of St Polycarp's martyrdom. The church of Smyrna endorsed it as a letter to the Christian community of Philomelion.

*This account of the martyrdom reveals the great personality of the saint, his faith, his fortitude. It also bears witness to the Christian custom of rendering **veneration** to the martyrs, for they imitated Jesus in his sufferings and death and are friends of Christ. This veneration must be distinguished from the cult of **adoration** we give Jesus Christ because he is God.*

The invocation that the author of the letter puts in the mouth of the dying martyr is an important example of early Christian prayer. Not only in the precise formulation of the dogma of the Blessed Trinity, but throughout, the invocation reminds us of the liturgical texts.

Address

The Church of God at Smyrna to the Church of God at Philomelion and to all the communities of the holy Catholic Church everywhere. May the mercy, peace, and love of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ descend on you abundantly.

1 Brethren, we are writing to you in connection with the persecution and martyrdom of Christians in Rome; blessed Polycarp was among them.

Polycarp waited to be betrayed, like our Lord. We, too, should imitate Christ, seeking not only our own good but also the good of all our brethren. This is the mark of true and steadfast charity, that we desire not only our own salvation but also the salvation of all our companions.

The Persecution of Decius

2 Torn by the whips till their flesh lay open, revealing their veins and arteries, the martyrs persevered. Even the bystanders pitied them and wept. They were so heroic that they uttered neither a sigh nor a groan. Even in the midst of tortures, these noble martyrs of Christ were not concerned about themselves but about the glory of God.

The Lord himself was present in their souls and spoke to them. Docile to the grace of Jesus, they despised the world's torments, exchanging eternal happiness with a single hour of sufferings. Even the fire applied on them by the cruel torturers felt cold to them, as they considered the eternal inextinguishable fire they would escape. With the eyes of their faith, they saw the good things reserved for those who persevere, "which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered onto the heart of man" (1 Cor 2:9).

3 The devil used many tricks against them, to force them to deny their faith through continuous punishment. But thank God, he failed in every case.

The young and noble Germanicus began strengthening them in their faith by the fortitude he showed in facing the wild beasts. The proconsul tried to convince him to give up on account of his youth. But Germanicus induced the animals to rush upon himself, that he might sooner escape and jump to heaven.

The Christians were considered atheists because they did not regard the emperor as a god. They were forced to invoke the emperor's genius—that is, the emperor's divine nature.

At this point, the entire crowd was amazed at the courage of the pious Christians and shouted, "Down with the atheists! We want Polycarp!"

Some Avoided Martyrdom

4 There was a man in the group called Quintus, a Phrygian who had come all the way from his native land to offer himself voluntarily for martyrdom. He even compelled others to follow him. Upon facing the wild beasts, Quintus was terrified. The proconsul, after a good deal of persuasion, was successful, and he convinced the man to offer sacrifice and swear he was not a Christian.

Brethren, this is the reason why we do not approve of those who give themselves up voluntarily. This is not the message of the Gospel.

Polycarp Went into Hiding

5 Days earlier, as soon as he had heard of the persecution, the venerable Polycarp remained calm and showed no alarm. In fact, he wanted to remain in the city, but the majority prevailed on him to go away quietly. Thus, he stayed in a small farm on the outskirts of the city. There he devoted himself to prayer for all mankind, and for the Christian communities all over the world, as he always did.

Once, while praying, three days before his arrest, Polycarp had a vision. He saw his pillow ablaze. He turned to those praying with him and announced, "I am to be burned alive."

6 The search party that had been looking for him kept on his trail, so he moved to another farmhouse. They barely missed him. Failing to find him, they took hold of two slaves, one of whom confessed under torture. It was impossible for him to hide, betrayed, as he was by people in the same household.

The chief of police, who happened to be called Herod, was very anxious to bring Polycarp to the amphitheater. Thus, Polycarp would fulfil his mission and have a share with Christ; but for those who betrayed him, may they share the same fate as Judas.

The Arrest of Polycarp

7 It was Friday, about supper time, when the police went out with the cavalry under full armor, as if they were going after a bandit, bringing the two slaves with them. Late in the same night, they caught up with Polycarp; he was in the upper room of a cottage, resting in bed. He could have tried to escape to another hideout, but he did not want to, saying, "God's Will be done."

When Polycarp heard that they were in, he went downstairs and spoke with them. All present marveled at his age and his courage. They wondered why there was so much concern in arresting a man of his age.

Because of the hour, he immediately ordered the men to be served food and drink. For himself, he only asked to be allowed to pray for an hour without interruption.

When they agreed to this, Polycarp stood there and made his prayer. So full of God's grace he was that he could not stop praying for two hours, to the amazement of the bystanders. Many of them expressed regret for having had to arrest such a God-loving old man.

8 In his prayer, Polycarp remembered everyone with whom he had ever been acquainted, great or small, famous or lowly, and the entire Catholic Church, all over the world. When finally he had finished his prayer, it was time to leave, they seated him on an ass and led him into the city. And it was a great Sabbath day!

The chief of police, Herod, and his father, Niketas, met Polycarp and took him in their carriage. Sitting on either side of him, they tried to convince him.

"What is wrong," they asked, "with just saying that Caesar is the lord, burning some incense, and all the rest of it—and so saving your life?"

At first, Polycarp made no answer. And when they insisted, he told them, "I am not going to do what you are telling me."

When they got nowhere trying to change his mind, they began to threaten him. Finally, they threw Polycarp out of the carriage so violently that he hurt his shin. Polycarp did not stop and continued walking along with them so briskly that he did not notice his wound.

Thrown to the Arena

The occasion came, and Polycarp was led to the amphitheater, where the noise was so loud that no one could be heard.

9 As Polycarp was to enter the arena, he heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Have courage, Polycarp, and act like a man." No one noticed where the voice came from, but all around him heard it.

There was a big uproar among the crowd when they realized that Polycarp had been finally captured. As he was pushed forward, the proconsul asked him if he was Polycarp. And when he said he was, the proconsul urged him again to deny his faith.

"Think of your age," he told him, and gave him other human reasons. "Swear by the emperor's genius. Change your mind. Say, 'Down with the atheists!'"

With a grave countenance, Polycarp looked at the crowds of Godless pagans in the bleachers. Then pointing at them with his hand, he

looked up to heaven and said, “Down with the atheists!”

10 The proconsul kept on insisting, “Take an oath, and I will let you go. Curse Christ.”

Polycarp replied, “For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has never failed me. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?”

“Swear by the emperor’s genius,” the proconsul persisted.

“If you thought I was ever going to swear by the emperor’s genius, you do not know who I am. I will tell you clearly, I am a Christian. If you want to know about Christianity, set a day and hear me.”

The proconsul said, “Convince the people, not me.”

But Polycarp replied, “According to our teaching, we are supposed to pay due respect to official authority because it is established by God, provided this does not lead us to commit sin. I thought it was worthwhile to discuss this with you. As for the people, I do not think it worth to defend myself before them.”

11 The proconsul said, “I have wild animals. And I shall throw you to them unless you change your mind.”

“Bring them in,” said Polycarp, “for it is forbidden to us to change from better to worse. On the other hand, it will be good to change from violence to justice.”

“Since you despise the wild beasts,” said the proconsul again, “I shall have you burned by fire if you do not change your mind.”

But Polycarp answered, “The fire you threaten me with, burns for an hour and after a while goes out. It seems you do not know of the fire of eternal punishment, and of the Judgment to come that is stored up for the wicked.”

“Well, what are you waiting for? Bring in whatever you like!”

Burned Alive

12 Saying this and many other things, Polycarp was filled with courage. His face was radiant with joy. He did not collapse in terror; rather, it was the proconsul who was amazed.

The proconsul, then, sent his herald out into the middle of the arena to announce three times, “Polycarp has admitted that he is a Christian.”

When the herald had said this, the entire crowd, made up of pagans and Jews of Smyrna, roared back in an uncontrollable burst of anger. They began to shout all together to have Polycarp burned alive. What he had seen happening to his pillow in a vision was to be fulfilled.

13 When the pyre was ready, Polycarp loosened his girdle and took off all his clothes. He made an effort also to remove his shoes, though he had been unaccustomed to this, for the faithful always vied with each other in their haste to touch his body. Even before his martyrdom, he had already received every mark of honor in tribute to his holiness of life.

There and then Polycarp was surrounded by the firewood for the pyre and tied to the scaffold. When they tried to fasten him also with nails, he said: "Leave me just as I am. The One who gives me strength to endure the fire will also give me strength to stay quite still on the pyre, even without the precaution of your nails."

14 So they did not fix him to the pole with nails but only fastened him instead. Bound as he was, with hands behind his back, he stood like a noble ram, chosen out for sacrifice from a great flock; a worthy victim made ready to be offered to God.

St Polycarp's prayer describes with precision the mystery of the Blessed Trinity; it reminds us of the early liturgical formulas.

Looking up to heaven, Polycarp said:

Lord, almighty God,
Father of your beloved and blessed Son
Jesus Christ,
through whom we have come to the knowledge of you,
God of angels, of powers, of all creation,
and of saints of all races
who live in your presence!
I bless you
for judging me worthy
this day and this hour,
to share with the multitude of martyrs

in the chalice of Christ, your Anointed One,
and so I may rise again to eternal life
in soul and body,
immortal through the power of the Holy Spirit.
May I be received among the martyrs
in your presence today
as a rich and pleasing sacrifice.
God of truth, who cannot deceive,
you have prepared this beforehand;
you revealed it to me,
and now you have fulfilled your promise.

I praise you for all things,
I bless you,
I glorify you
through the eternal High Priest
Jesus Christ,
your beloved Son.
Through him be glory to you,
together with him and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.
Amen.

15 When he had said “Amen” and finished the prayer, the officials at the pyre lit it. A great flame burst out, and those of us privileged to see it witnessed a strange and wonderful thing. Indeed, we have been spared in order to tell the story to others.

Like a ship’s sail swelling in the wind, the flame became as it were a dome encircling the martyr’s body. Surrounded by the fire, his body was like bread that is baked, or like gold and silver white-hot being purified in a furnace, not like flesh that has been burnt. So sweet a fragrance came to us that it was like that of burning incense or some other precious, sweet-smelling spice.

Stabbed to Death

16 Eventually, these evil men realized that Polycarp’s body could not be consumed by fire; so they ordered an executioner to go up and stab him with a dagger.

When he had done this, there was much blood. The fire was extinguished. The crowd were amazed at the contrast between the death of unbelievers and the death of God's chosen ones. Polycarp was one of the elect, a prophetic and apostolic teacher of our days. He was the bishop of the Catholic [i.e., universal] Church at Smyrna.

Honor Paid to Martyrs

17 Many of us wanted to remove his body and touch his holy relics. But the vicious, envious Evil One, the enemy of the children of God, saw the strong faith of Polycarp and how his life – holy from the beginning of his vocation – was now crowned with the laurels of immortality, winning an incontestable triumph. Envious, he planned that we should not be able to keep his relics.

He inspired Niketas, Herod's father, to request the governor not to release the body. "There is a danger," Niketas reported, "that they may abandon the Crucified and begin adoring this man."

He did not know that we adore Christ as the Son of God; but the martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord; they deserve this veneration because of their unsurpassable love for their King and Teacher.

Veneration of the Relics

18 When the centurion realized we wanted to venerate Polycarp's remains, he confiscated the body and right there burned it.

Then, at last we gathered his charred bones, more precious than jewels and finer than gold, and buried them in a suitable spot.

There we gather as often as possible with joy and gladness, and the Lord allows us to celebrate the day of his martyrdom as his real birthday. We pray both for those who have already fought in the contest, and for those still practicing and training for the fight to come.

19 This is the story of the blessed Polycarp. He was not only an extraordinary teacher, but also an exemplary martyr, whose death everyone wants to imitate, because it was so much in the line of the Gospel of Christ.

By his fortitude, he overcame the unjust proconsul and thus won the crown of immortality. Now he rejoices with the apostles and all the saints, glorifying God the Father Almighty and blessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the

Savior of our souls, the Helmsman and Guide of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.

20 You requested a complete account of all that had happened. Up to the moment, we had only given brief details through our brother Marcion. When you receive this letter, circulate it among the brethren who are more distant, so that they, too, may glorify the Lord, who chooses some of his servants for heroic deeds.

21 The martyrdom took place on the second day of the month of Xanthicos –that is, the seventh day before the first of March, a great Sabbath day, at the eighth hour.

 Polycarp was arrested by Herod; Statius Quadratus was proconsul. But Jesus Christ was reigning forever, to whom be glory, honor, majesty, and domination forever from generation to generation. Amen.

Hermas: The Shepherd

The Shepherd is a book of revelations that were supposedly granted to Hermas in Rome. These revelations were made by an old matron and by an angel disguised as a shepherd; hence, the title of the book.

Parts of this book were written around the year 95; the others, around the year 150.

Written in apocalyptic style, the Shepherd is divided in three sections containing five visions, twelve commands, and ten parables.

In the first visions, the Church appears as a venerable matron. In the third vision, the Church is compared to a tower, still under construction. It shall be completed on Judgment Day.

Sharing of Goods with the Needy [Third Vision, 9]

While I was praying, the heavens opened and I saw an elderly matron clothed in shining white raiment, with a book in her hands. She sat down and told me:

Listen to me: Live in peace with one another, care for one another, help one another. Do not enjoy God's creatures absolutely and all by yourselves, but give a share to those in need.

Some people acquire diseases and weaken their bodies by eating too much, while others, having nothing to eat, are weakened in their bodies from lack of sufficient food and suffer ill health.

This failure to share with those who have nothing is harmful to you, who have enough but do not share.

Keep in mind the judgment to come. You rich, seek out those who are hungry so long as the tower is not yet completed. After the completion of the tower, you will wish to do good but will not have the opportunity.

You who pride yourselves on your wealth, attend to the groan of the poor; their cry will reach the Lord, and you and your possessions will be shut out from the tower.

The Shepherd, the Angel of Repentance, commanded me to write as follows:

Give to All from the Fruits of Your Labor [Second Commandment]

Clothe yourself with sanctity of life, in which there is no room for evil actions, no room for offenses against your neighbor; everything is done with serenity and cheerfulness.

Your talent is God's gift. Do good, and from the fruit of your work –God's gift– give to those in need, without discrimination. Do not debate to whom you should and to whom you should not give. Give to all; God wants all sharing from his gifts.

Those who have received will give an account to God: why they have received and for what purpose.

Those who accept gifts because they are in need will not be judged; those who accept gifts under false pretenses will be punished.

Under these circumstances, the giver is innocent, since he only performed the service that the Lord had commanded him to do, with simplicity and without discriminating to whom he should give and to whom he should not. This service becomes acceptable in God's eyes. The man who thus serves with simplicity will live unto God.

With his talents, a Christian should acquire a treasure before God, by sharing his wealth with others.

A Christian Is a Citizen of Heaven [First Parable]

Be careful, while you live in this foreign land, not to acquire anything superfluous. Be ready, for the ruler of this city may expel you for not complying with his law. You should come out of his city and enter your own, and there observe your own law forever with joy and without pain.

Be on your guard, you who serve the Lord, and keep him in your heart. Remember God's commandments and the promises he made; do his works. Trust that he will fulfill his promises if you keep his commandments.

Use the talents God has given you and buy souls, not just fields and houses. Bring to the Lord those souls in trouble. Look after widows

and orphans and do not neglect them. Invest your wealth, and all the gifts you received from the Lord, on this kind of fields and houses.

For this purpose, the Master made you wealthy and gifted; to do this on his behalf. It is far better to buy such lands, possessions, and houses; you will find them later, when you settle in your own city.

Such is the purpose of wealth; a purpose good and holy, free from sadness and fear, full of joy. Do not live then in the luxury of the pagans; it is of no use to you, servants of God.

Fear of God [First Command]

First of all, believe that there is one God. He created all things and set them in order. He caused all things to pass from nonexistence to existence. Though he contains all things, he is himself uncontained, infinite.

Trust God, then, and fear him; and in this fear, be holy. Observe this command and throw far from you all wickedness. Clothe yourself with justice and every virtue; you will live in God if you observe this command.

Avoid Slander; Be Simple [Second Command]

Be simple of heart and innocent. Be like a child who does not know the wickedness that destroys the life of men.

In the first place, do not speak against anybody and do not readily listen to a slanderer. Otherwise, you –the listener– will be guilty of the sin of the slanderer; if you believe the slander. For, by believing it, you will be holding a grudge against your brother, thus sharing in the sin of the slanderer.

Slander is wicked, a restless devil, never at peace, always dwelling among conflicts. Keep away from it, and you shall always live in good terms with all.

Keep these commandments as I have told you, so that you and your family will be found sincere in your repentance, and your heart will be found pure and spotless.

The Two Angels Inspiring Man [Sixth Command]

Listen, now I am going to tell you how to be faithful. There are two angels accompanying man: the angel of justice and the angel of

wickedness.

“How can I distinguish the operations of one and the other,” I said, “if both are with me?”

Listen, he said, and you will learn to distinguish them. The angel of justice is sensitive, modest, gentle, and calm. Whenever this angel talks to your heart, he will speak of justice, chastity, sanctity of life, mortification, and every good deed and practice of virtue. Whenever you feel all these thoughts entering your heart, be sure that the angel of justice is with you. These are the inspirations of the angel of justice. Be faithful to him, and follow his suggestions.

Now observe how the angel of wickedness acts. First of all, he is impatient, bitter, and reckless. His actions are bad and create havoc on the children of God. When he goes up to your heart, recognize him for his deeds.

“Sir,” I said, “I do not know how I should recognize him.”

Listen, he said. When violent anger or a feeling of bitterness comes over you, realize that he is within you. You will feel a tendency toward activism, a desire of spreading yourself in action, of eating too much or going after special delicacies in food and drink, of numerous feasts, and of varied inconvenient amusements. You will feel the desire for worldly companions, greed, arrogance, boasting, and a swarm of related excesses.

Whenever these desires come up in your heart, be sure that the angel of wickedness is within you. Since you already know his deeds, keep away from him, and do not believe him at all; his inspirations are wicked and devastating for the children of God.

Here you have the workings of one and the other angel; understand them and trust only the angel of justice.

Keep away from the angel of wickedness because his inspirations are evil in all aspects.

In the next article [Tenth Command], the Shepherd gives advice on two virtues: unity of life and serenity. The lack of either leads to sadness.

The lack of unity of life –not living a life coherent with one’s faith– blunts man’s perception of the things of God.

Unity of Life

There are some who do not pursue a sincere, deep relationship with God in their ordinary lives. They merely believe, they say, while deeply involved in business, generating income, worldly friendships, and many other materialistic commitments. These men are unable to establish a dialogue with God; their occupations keep their minds in darkness, away from the things of God. They are corrupted, utterly barren.

A good vineyard, when not cared for, grows barren with thorns and weeds. So too happens to those Christians who try to have two separate lives: [one for their faith, and another for their business.] Such persons obscure their discernment for and their perception of justice. When they hear about God and truth, their minds are taken up with their business, and they understand absolutely nothing.

It is different with those who have their hearts directed toward God in the midst of their daily tasks. They understand God's actions more quickly and penetrate into their meaning; they have a holy fear of the Lord. When the Lord dwells in a man, there is also much understanding. Cling to the Lord, and you will grasp and understand everything.

Sadness Is Evil

Take sadness out of your heart, he said, for it is a companion of violent anger and of lack of unity of life.

"How can this be?" I said. "I think that anger is one thing, and lack of unity of purpose in our actions is another. Still, sadness is unrelated to these two."

What a pity, he said, that you fail to grasp this. Sadness is worse than all evil spirits and most dangerous to the children of God. More than the evil spirits, sadness destroys a human being and cuts him off from the Holy Spirit. Only later may man be reconciled with him again.

"I do not understand," I said, "I cannot follow the meaning of your words. How can sadness cut a man off from the Holy Spirit, and later reconcile him with the same Spirit?"

I shall tell you, he said.

There Is No Place for Sadness in a Christian Soul

When a man lacking unity of purpose in his life tries to do something and fails, he becomes sad. He fails because of his divided purpose. Sadness drives away the Holy Spirit from his soul.

Likewise, when violent anger takes hold of a man, he becomes embittered and sad; his actions are bad. He becomes upset for what he does is rotten.

Eventually, he may repent. Sadness may bring a man to salvation if he examines himself, repents of the evil he has done, and makes penance.

Both deeds cause distress: lack of unity life, because man fails to succeed in his actions; and anger, because he commits sin. Both are disliked by the Holy Spirit.

Take sadness off your heart, and give joy to the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, lest he depart from you. The Spirit of God given to this flesh of ours does not endure sadness and gloominess.

Clothe yourself with cheerfulness; it always finds favor with God, and it is acceptable to him. Rejoice. A cheerful man does good, has good thoughts, and rejects gloominess.

A sad man always commits sin. He commits sin because he works against the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of gladness. He commits grave sin because he does not ask help from God to get out of that situation, nor does he confess his faults to God.

“Why does not the prayer of the sad man reach up the altar of God?” I said.

Because sadness occupies his heart. When he is converted, his prayer mingled with sadness does not ascend clean to the altar. As vinegar mixed with wine makes wine unpalatable, so does sadness with the soul.

Reject this wicked sadness, and you will live in God. Cast away gloominess, and clothe yourself with cheerfulness.

It Is Possible to Keep the Commandments [Twelfth Command]

The Shepherd completed his twelve commands. He then said to me: These are the commands. Walk in them, and help others to do so, that their repentance may be sincere and their penance consistent for the rest of their lives.

Fulfill with utmost care this mission I give you now, and work hard; I will be with you. I will cause others to listen to you favorably; they will believe you, repent from their sins, and make penance.

I said to him: “Sir, these commands are great, good, and glorious; they will fill with joy the heart of anyone observing them. But I am not sure if these commands can be kept by anybody; they are very hard.”

He told me: If you face these commands with determination, I will make you able to keep them easily; they will not be too hard for you. If you harbor in your heart the thought that they cannot be observed, you will not observe them.

I tell you, if you do not obey these commands, but neglect them, neither you, nor your children, nor your household will have salvation, since you have already concluded that these cannot be kept by anyone.

Do not fear the devil; he has no power against you. I, the Angel of Repentance, have overcome the devil; I am with you.

The devil cannot lord it over those who serve God with their whole heart and who place their hope in him. The devil may wrestle with them, but he will not overcome them. If you resist him, he will flee from you defeated and confused.

Put your trust in God; do not fall into despair because of your sins, for you will be adding new sins and make your life unbearable. Trust the Lord, turn to him wholeheartedly, and live a holy life for the rest of your days; serve him as he wants to be served, and he will grant you forgiveness for your previous sins; you will obtain the power of mastering the devil's snares.

"Sir," I said, "I now hope to be able to keep these commandments with the Lord's help."

15

Epistle of Barnabas

(circa AD 70 - 79)

Some have attributed this letter to St Barnabas, St Paul's companion, although most certainly it is not his work. It is a letter only in appearance; it contains nothing personal, and lacks the usual introduction and conclusion. Early Christian writers found the epistolary style suitable for instruction and resorted to it frequently.

The first part of this Epistle is doctrinal; the author's purpose is to teach "perfect knowledge" and faith.

1 Greetings, sons and daughters. In the Name of the Lord who loves us, peace be to you.

Because the Lord has given you a great mission to accomplish, I rejoice immeasurably in your blessed and glorious company. You have abundantly received that indwelling grace which is the Spirit's gift; for this reason, I hope in my own salvation. I give thanks all the more when I see that the Lord has poured upon you the bountiful fullness of the Spirit. I have longed so much for you that when I saw you I was overwhelmed.

There is a great store of faith and charity within you because you hope to live in Christ. I am fully aware that I have learned much by speaking with you, while the Lord accompanied me on the road to sanctity of life. Thus, I am compelled to love you more than my own life. I am passing on to you a portion of what I have received; thus, I will be rewarded for serving the spiritual needs of your souls. I am writing you, that you may have perfect knowledge along with your faith.

The author reproaches the Jews for their inability to correctly understand the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the coming of the Messiah. The Jews misunderstand the Law because they interpret it only literally. God does not desire material gifts and bloody sacrifices from us but the offering of one's heart in the form of repentance.

The Lord has given us these three basic doctrines: hope for eternal life, the beginning and end of our faith; justice, the beginning and end of sanctity; and charity, which bears cheerful and joyous witness to a holy life.

The Lord has made the past and present known to us through his prophets, and he has given us the ability to taste the fruits of the future beforehand. When we see prophecies fulfilled in their appointed order, we are bound to make a more generous and higher offering to adore him. Let me suggest a few things –not as a teacher, but as one of you– which will make you happy in the present situation.

2 Since evil days are upon us and the Worker of malice gains power, we must attend to our own souls and seek to know the ways of the Lord. In these times, reverential fear of the Lord and perseverance will sustain our faith. We will also need our allies, a spirit of mortification and sobriety. If we practice these virtues and look to the Lord, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and prudence will be the joyous harvest.

Truly, the Lord has revealed to us through the prophets that he has no need of holocausts, burnt offerings, or oblations. He said: “Your endless sacrifices, what are they to me? says the Lord. I have had my fill of holocausts; I do not want the fat of your lambs, nor the blood of your bulls and goats, nor your presence in my sight. Indeed, who has made these demands of you? No more will you trample my courts. Your sacrifices of fine flour are in vain; your incense is loathsome to me; I cannot bear your feasts of the new moon, nor your Sabbaths” (Is 1:11-13).

The New Law was implanted by our Lord.

God has abolished the sacrifices of the Old Law so that the New Law of our Lord Jesus Christ might have an offering not made by man. This New Law does not bind by compulsion, as you do with slaves, but by love, as children. On another occasion, God said to the Jews: “When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt, I gave them no commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices. I said not a word about them. What I did command was this: ‘Do not contrive any evil against one another, and do not love perjury.’”

We are not stupid; surely we ought to understand our Father’s kindly purpose in this. He speaks to us because he does not want us to go

astray as the Jews did; he tells us how we are to approach him. Here is what he says to us: “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken heart; the fragrance pleasing to the Lord is a soul that gives glory to its Maker” (Ps 50:19).

You see, my brothers, we must carefully seek after our own salvation; otherwise, the Evil One, who is bent on deceiving us, will sneak himself in and push us away from the path that leads to life.

The New Law is not satisfied with the externals; it requires an inner conversion of the heart.

3 Once again God reproaches the Jews:

Look, you quarrel and squabble when you fast
and strike the poor man with your fist.
Fasting like yours today
will never make your voice heard on high.
Is that the sort of fast that pleases me,
a truly penitential day for men?

Hanging your head like a reed,
lying down on sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call fasting,
a day acceptable to Yahweh?

But to us he says:

Is it not this that I demand of you as a fast:
Loose the fetters of injustice,
untie the knots of all contracts that involve extortion,
set free those who have been crushed,
tear up every unjust agreement.
Share your food with the starving;
when you meet a naked man, give him clothing;
welcome the homeless into your house;
do not look down on a humble man (cf. Is 58:4-10).

4 We must be wise and seek what can save us. We must go away from every sort of injustice, or else, injustice will overcome us. We must hate the errors of the present time; thus, we will be loved in the time to come. We must not slacken in our struggle and associate with sinners and corrupted men; we will become like them. So, let us watch out for the judgment to come. The whole time we believed will profit us nothing, unless we resist the temptations to come, as children of God should. Thus, the Dark One will not be able to steal in upon us.

No one is assured of salvation; everyone is responsible for his actions.

Accordingly, we must flee from all vanity and show an utter hatred for the deeds of the evil way. Do not retire and live apart by yourselves as though already assured of salvation; come together and seek the common good. For, as Scripture says: “Shame on those who are wise in their own judgment and think themselves clever” (Is 5:21). Rather, let us have a supernatural outlook; let us be a perfect dwelling place for God. As far as we can, we should exercise ourselves in the fear of God and strive to keep his commandments; thus, we shall rejoice in obeying God’s Will.

The Lord will “judge the world without respect to persons;” everyone will receive according to his deeds. If he has been good, his good works will go before him; if wicked, the wages of sin will lie in wait for him. We must never slacken in our struggle as though our mission were already accomplished. Let us never fall asleep in a state of sin, lest the Prince of wickedness gain power over us and snatch us away from the Kingdom of the Lord.

My brothers, grasp this further point: The Israelites were rejected, even after the many signs and wonders worked among them; let us be wise so that what the Scripture says will not apply to us: “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

The letter proclaims the divine nature of Christ; he existed before creation with God the Father. Christ became man to save mankind; he suffered for our salvation.

5 The Lord was willing to hand over his Body for destruction and to shed his Blood so that we might be made holy through the remission of our sins. What was written about Jesus also refers to both Israel and us: “He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised by our iniquities; by his wounds we are healed. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, like a lamb that is dumb before its shearer” (Is 53:5.7).

What a debt of gratitude, then, do we owe the Lord; he has made known to us the meaning of the past; he has instructed us about the present; he has not left us in ignorance about the future. In the words of Scripture: “Not unjustly are nets spread for birds” (Prov 1:17). This means that a man will be justly condemned if he knows the right way, yet keeps on heading into the way of darkness.

The Lord was ready to undergo suffering for our souls’ sake, even though he is Lord of the whole earth. He is the One to whom God said at the foundation of the world: “Let us make man in our own image and likeness” (Gen 1:26). But, in that case, my brothers, how did he allow himself to suffer at the hands of men? This is the explanation. The prophets inspired by his grace foretold what he would do; he allowed himself to suffer, to be seen as a man vulnerable in his flesh, in order that he might destroy the power of death and manifest the resurrection from the dead. In this way, he would carry out the promises made to our forefathers, and while still on earth, prepare for himself a new people. He would also show that, after the resurrection, he will be our Judge.

Furthermore, by teaching Israel and working such great signs and wonders, he proclaimed the good news and showed the depths of his love for the people. When Jesus chose his apostles to preach the Gospel—utterly sinful and lawless as they were—he showed himself to be the Son of God, who had come not to call the just, but the sinners.

If he had not come in the flesh, as a man, how could men be saved by looking and imitating him? For men cannot look straight into the rays of the sun, even though it is just God’s work and doomed to destruction.

Baptism makes man a son of God; it stamps on man’s soul the image and likeness of God.

6 Having thus renewed us by forgiving our sins, God refashioned us; he gave us the souls of children, as though he were creating us again. The

Scripture refers to us when the Father says to the Son: “Let us make man according to our own image and likeness; and let him rule over the beasts on the earth and the birds in the air and the fish in the sea” (Gen 1:26). The Lord saw the beauty of our creation and added: “Increase and multiply and fill the earth.”

All this God said to his Son. But let me now point out to you how he also refers to us. The Lord made a second creation in these last days; thus, he says: “Behold, I am making the last things like the first” (Mt 20:16). The prophet had this in mind when he said: “Enter into a land flowing with milk and honey, and rule over it” (Ex 33:1.3). It is true, you see, that we have been completely recreated; we are a new product. God means this by the words of another prophet: “Behold, says the Lord, I will take the stony hearts out of this people,” that is, the people whom the Spirit of the Lord foreknew, “and put hearts of flesh into them” (cf. Ez 11:19; 36:26). For he willed to appear in the flesh and live among us.

And so, my brothers, the dwelling place of our hearts is a temple sacred to the Lord. Again, the Lord says: “Let me give thanks to you in the assembly of my brethren” (Ps 21:23). We, then, are the ones whom God brought into the good land.

The Way of Light, leading toward God, is described in detail.

19 Consider now the Way of Light; any man who wants to reach his appointed goal must be very careful in all he does. Now these are the directions that we have received for this journey: Love your Creator; have a filial fear for your Maker; give glory to him who redeemed you when you were dead in sin. Be simple at heart but rich in spiritual treasure. Avoid those who travel down death’s highway. Hate whatever is not pleasing to God; detest all hypocritical pretense; do not abandon God’s commandments. Do not exalt yourself, but be humble in all circumstances; claim no glory for yourself. Plot no evil against your neighbor, and do not give pride an entrance into your heart.

Do not commit fornication or adultery; do not corrupt young people. Do not go together with the impure. Do not discriminate against any person in correcting a fault. Be meek; be discreet; keep the instructions you have

received from God. Do not harbor ill feelings against your brother, but trust him. Do not harbor doubts of faith. Do not take the Name of God in vain.

Love your neighbor more than your own life. Do not kill an unborn child through abortion, nor do away with him after birth. Do not refrain from chastising son or daughter, but bring them up from childhood in the fear of the Lord. Do not set your heart on what belongs to your neighbor and do not give in to greed. Do not associate with the arrogant, but cultivate friendship with those who are humble and virtuous.

Accept as a blessing whatever comes your way; nothing ever happens without God's permission. Avoid duplicity in thought or in word, avoid gossiping, and do not be quick to proclaim your opinion; such deceptions are deadly snares. Obey the legitimate authorities; they are in the place of God. Do not give orders to your subordinates with bitterness, for all of you hope in the same God; they may cease to fear God, who is above you both. God did not call us because of our qualities, but just because he wanted to.

Share with your neighbor whatever you have, and do not say of anything, this is mine. If you both share an imperishable treasure, how much more must you share what is perishable. Do not be hasty in speech; the mouth is a deadly snare. For your soul's good, make every effort to live a chaste life. Do not hold out your hand for what you can get, only to withdraw it when it comes to giving. Cherish as the apple of your eye anyone who speaks to you of the word of the Lord.

Night and day you will bear in mind the hour of judgment; every day you will seek out the company of God's faithful, either by conversing with them, correcting them, instructing them, or else by serving them with your hands to make reparation for your past sins.

Never hesitate to give, and when you do give, never grumble; then you will know how good is the Paymaster who will repay you. Preserve the traditions you have received, adding nothing and taking nothing away. Hate the Evil One thoroughly. Be fair in your judgments. Never stir up dissension, but act as peacemaker and reconcile those who quarrel. Confess your sins; do not begin your prayer with a guilty conscience.

Such then is the Way of Light.

Children of love and peace, may you win salvation. May the Lord of glory and of all grace be always with you.

The Second Epistle of St Clement to the Corinthians

(AD 150)

*The so-called **Second Epistle** is not an epistle but a homily. It was attributed to St Clement because it was found in ancient manuscripts together with his Epistle to the Corinthians, but no firm evidence confirms his authorship.*

This work is nevertheless of great value to us. Written about the year 150, this homily is the oldest Christian sermon extant.

Christ's divine and human natures are clearly asserted in the opening lines. Jesus Christ endured great sufferings for our sake.

1 Brothers, we should contemplate Jesus Christ. He is God and the Judge of the living and the dead. Thus, we should not take our Savior lightly. If we take him lightly, we may hope to obtain but little. And those who regard matters of salvation as irrelevant commit sin. They seem to ignore from where and by whom we were called; and for what mission we are destined. These do not consider what sufferings Jesus Christ had to endure for our sake.

How can we, then, pay him back? What return can we make to him? What fruit can we offer to him equivalent to the gift he has given us? How many acts of service do we owe him?

He has given us the light of our eyes. He has spoken to us as a father to his son; he has saved us when we were perishing. How can we praise him adequately? What payment in return for what we have received?

Blinded, we bowed our heads to chunks of gold, silver, and brass; and our whole life was nothing else but death. We were covered with darkness, and our sight was obscured with mist. But then, by his Will we recovered our vision; the cloud that shrouded us vanished.

Jesus had compassion for us, he saved us, when we were drifting without direction, wrecked without hope of recovery. Only he could save us. And he called us when we were not; out of nothing we came to be.

*We find here the first non-scriptural reference to the Church as **Mother**, even though the author does not use this word. Struggling for sanctity is the response to Christ's love. Christian life is incompatible with worldly behavior.*

In the reference to Mk 2:17, we find the first recorded instance –outside the Bible– of the New Testament quoted as “Scripture.”

2 “Rejoice, you barren woman who bore no children! Break into shouts of joy and gladness, you who have never been in labor! For there are more children of the forsaken one than children of the wedded wife” (Is 54:1).

When God said “Rejoice, you barren woman, who bore no children,” he was referring to us, for the Church was barren before being given children.

By saying “Break into shouts of joy and gladness, you who have never been in labor,” he was encouraging us to pray to God with simplicity and not to grow weary like women in labor.

By saying “There are more children of the forsaken one than children of the wedded wife,” he meant that our people seemed to be abandoned by God, but now, having believed, we have become more numerous than those who lived without paying attention to God.

Another passage of the Scripture says, “I did not come to call the just, but the sinners” (Mk 2:17). This means that all those perishing should be saved. It is a great and wonderful feat to sustain, not the things that are standing, but those that are falling. Thus, Christ willed to save those who were perishing; he came and called us. Our troubles are not yet over.

3 Jesus Christ said, “He who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32). Heaven, then, is our reward, if we acknowledge our Savior before men. But how do we acknowledge him? By doing what he says, and not disobeying his commandments; by honoring him not only with our lips but “with all our heart, and all our mind.”

4 He also says in Isaiah: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” Thus, we should not merely call him Lord, for this will not save us. He also says, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall be saved, but he who does the Will of my Father.” So, then, let us acknowledge him with our works by loving one another, by not committing adultery, nor speaking against one another, by not being envious, but by being mortified, kind, and honest; we should be happy with the good fortune of the others, without being greedy. By these works we acknowledge him, and not by doing the opposite.

We must not fear men rather than God. For this reason, he said: “If you are gathered with me in my bosom and yet do not fulfill my commandments, I will cast you off and will say to you: ‘Depart from me; I do not know from where you come, you workers of iniquity.’”

5 Therefore, brothers, let us set aside sinful life-styles and live as wayfarers in this world. Let us do the Will of him who called us, and let us not be afraid of being different from the world. The Lord said: “You shall be as lambs in the midst of wolves.” And Peter asked, “What if the wolves tear the lambs?” Jesus said to Peter: “After they die, the lambs are no longer afraid of the wolves. And so with you. Do not fear those who kill you and can do nothing more to you. Fear him who after your death has power over soul and body, to cast them into hell fire.”#1

Understand, brothers, that our sojourn in this world is short and transient; Christ’s promise of eternal life in the Kingdom to come is firm, great, and wonderful.

What shall we do to attain this reward? To conduct ourselves with purity and justice, to consider these life-styles of the world as foreign to us and not desire them. The desire of these compensations leads us away from the path of sanctity.

6 The Lord says: “No servant can serve two masters” (Lk 16:13). Thus, we sin if we desire to serve both God and Mammon. “For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?”(Mt 16:26). This world and the future world are two enemies. This world chimes in with adultery, corruption, love of money, and deceit; but it must say farewell to all these things.

We cannot be friends of both, this world and the future world. We must say farewell to this one before we can possess the other. Thus, we should not be attached to the things that are here, for they are trivial, passing, and perishable; and love the things that are there, things perfect and imperishable.

If we do the Will of Christ, we shall find peace; if not, if we neglect his commandments, nothing will rescue us from eternal punishment.

The Scripture says that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job arise, they will not be able to save their children (cf. Ez 14:14,18,20). Alone, even such holy men cannot rescue their children. How can we be sure of entering the palace of God, if we do not keep ourselves pure and unspotted? Who shall be our patron if we are found empty of holy and honorable deeds?

*Christian life is compared with athletic games. Taken from athletic games, the figures of speech in these lines hint that this homily was preached at Corinth, were the famous Isthmian Games were held. The sacrament of baptism is called the **seal** (**sphragis**), which must be kept inviolate.*

7 Let us then, my brothers, enter the contest. Right now, an important contest is going to take place in this city, we know. Many people are coming by ship to take part in these ephemeral games. But not all will win a crown of laurel, only those who have struggled hard and done well in the contest.

So, too, we should run a straight path in our immortal contest. We, too, should come by ship in great numbers and compete for the crown. And if we cannot all be crowned, at least we should come close to the victory.

Remember that whoever takes part in these worldly games should abide by the rules. If one cheats, he is punished, disqualified, and thrown off the course. Likewise in the eternal games. What do you think? What shall the punishment be for those who cheat in the eternal games? You remember the promises we made when we received the seal in baptism: to reject Satan, all his works and his empty promises, and to follow Jesus always. Well, the Lord has said of those who have not kept the promises:

Their worm will not die
nor their fire go out;
they will be loathsome to all mankind (Is 66:24; Mk 9:44).

This part of the sermon contains a direct testimony to the penance for sins committed after baptism. Christians are exhorted to confess their sins and continue fighting for sanctity.

8 Repent then, while we can do so. We are now like clay in the hand of the potter. If a vessel in a potter's hands goes out of shape, or cracks, the workman molds it all over again as long as the clay is fresh. But if he has gone so far as to put it into his heated oven, there is nothing more he can do for it.

So, too, with us. While we are still in this world, we should repent with our whole heart of all the evil things we have done in the flesh, so that we may be saved by the Lord while we still have time to repent. Once we have left the world, we can no longer make our confession or repent.

So, my brothers, if we do the Father's Will, observe the Lord's commandments, and keep our flesh pure, we shall obtain everlasting life. The Lord says in the Gospel, "If you do not mind what is small, who will give you what is great? For I say to you, he who is faithful in the little things is faithful also in what is great" (Lk 16:10,12). And this is what he means: Keep the flesh pure, and fulfill your baptismal promises; you will receive eternal life.

9 Do not say, "This body is not judged or does not rise again." Just think: In what state were you saved, and how did you recover your sight? Was it not with your body and soul? Thus, guard your body as the temple of God. Just as you were called in body and soul, so, too, you shall arrive in body and soul. As the Lord, being originally pure spirit, became man with body and soul, so, too, will those who are faithful receive their reward in body and soul.

Love one another, that we may all arrive in the Kingdom of God. While we have time to be healed, let us give ourselves to God our Healer, giving him something in exchange. But what can we offer him? Repentance, contrition from a sincere heart. He knows everything and knows what is in our heart. Let us give, then, eternal praise, not only from our mouth, but also from our heart; he will receive us as sons. For he had said, "Those who do the Will of my Father are my brothers" (Mt 12:50).

10 Let us do the Will of the Father who called us to life; let us seek virtue and abandon vice as the forerunner of our sins. Let us flee from indecency to avoid punishment. If we strive to do good, peace will come upon us. A man cannot find peace when he is full of human concerns and prefers the pleasures of the present, rather than the promises of the future. The pleasures of this world always bring great torture; the promises of the future bring great joy.

Worldly people are like a plague, impossible to keep within limits, always perverting others. If only they did the sinful things in private, it could still be suffered. But they continue teaching evil to innocent souls, not knowing that they incur a double condemnation, for themselves and their followers.

Faith in God's promises. The aim of Christian life is sanctity.

11 Serve God with a pure heart and seek sanctity. If we do not abandon ourselves in God and serve him, we shall be miserable. Consider these prophetic words: "Miserable are those who question their faith and doubt in their heart saying: 'We have heard all these things in our fathers' time. We waited day after day, and nothing came to be.' O foolish men! Compare yourselves to a grapevine. First it sheds its leaves, then comes a bud, after this, a sour berry, then, the bunch of sweet ripe grapes. So also my people had to undergo hardships and pain, but afterwards they shall receive only joys."

Therefore, my brothers, do not admit voluntary doubts about our faith. Keep up your hope with patience, that you may gain your reward. For God is faithful to his promises and will pay to each the wages of his works. If we perform good deeds before God, we shall have access into his Kingdom and receive the reward which "ear has not heard, nor eye seen, nor has it entered into the heart of men."

13 Brothers, repent now without delay. Let us guard our senses, for we are full of so much madness and malice. Let us wipe off from ourselves our past sins. We will be saved if we repent with all our hearts. Let us not be pleasers of men, nor seek to please ourselves alone. Rather, by our sanctity of

life, let us try to bring in those who are outside. Thus, we will not cause scandal and they will not have motive to defame God's Holy Name.

The description of the Church that we find in this homily is interesting. The Church was prepared and foreshadowed before the creation of the sun and the moon. But she was invisible, spiritual, barren. Now she is a living reality. She is the Body of Christ; she is the Spouse, and we are her children. Through prayer and apostolate, we bring people to salvation.

14 Brothers, if we do the Will of God, our Father, we shall be joining the original Church, which was spiritually established even before the sun and the moon. But if we do not do the Will of God, we shall be setting up what the Scripture describes: "My house has become a den of thieves."

Belong to the living Church, that you may be saved. I am sure you know that the living Church is the Body of Christ. For the Scripture says: "God made them male and female." The male is Christ, the female is the Church.

Moreover, the Sacred Books and the apostles declare that the Church is not merely of the present time, but was prepared from the beginning. When the world was made, the Church was present in figure or as a spirit, as also was Jesus foreknown. Jesus has become man in our time to save us, as also the Church has become a reality in the Body of Christ.

15 Do not neglect the advice I have given you concerning self-control and mortification. You will never regret having followed it; you will save both yourself and me, who advised you. For whoever converts a straying and perishing soul and brings it to salvation will receive no small reward. Indeed, this is the least one can do for God, who created us.

Conversion is possible if both, the one who speaks and the one who listens, act with faith and charity. Moreover, I encourage you to remain firm and uncompromising in the content of faith.

Pray to God with confidence, for he says: "Ask and I will answer you. And while you are still asking, I will say: Here I am " (Is 58:9). This is a fact: The Lord is more eager to give than man is to ask. If such is God's goodness, we should not be slow in asking. These words are a motive of joy

for those who pray with confidence, but contain also a warning for those who do not pray.

The sermon is very clear on the necessity of good works for salvation. The author encourages all to think of the Last Judgment, to be faithful and persevere in good works.

16 So, brothers, we are given an opportunity to repent, let us turn to God who called us, while there is still time. God our Father is waiting for us. If we cut off ourselves from the pleasures of this world and reject the evil desires of our soul, if we constantly refuse to carry them out, Jesus will look at us with compassion. You know that the day of judgment is now coming, it will burn like a furnace. Even the stars of heaven will be dissolved, and the entire earth will be as lead melting in the fire. Then, the secret and public deeds of men will be known.

Almsgiving and detachment from material things are good as penance for sins. Fasting and mortification of the senses are better than reciting prayers; giving oneself is the best. Charity makes up for a multitude of sins; prayer from a good conscience delivers from eternal death. Blessed is the man who is found full of these things, for by giving ourselves to the others, we remove the burden of our sins.

17 Let us have contrition for our sins, and no one of us will fall astray as we tread along the way. If our duty is to snatch men away from idols, from religious ignorance, and to instruct them, how much more critical is that one of us who already knows God should not be lost? We should help one another to persevere. We should guide a brother who has grown lukewarm to continue in the straight path. We should encourage one another to have contrition and to get closer to God, so that we may all be saved.

I know you are now paying attention to my words and want to be faithful; be steadfast in your resolution. Keep in mind your duties toward the Lord also when you return home, and do not be carried away by worldly concerns.

Try to be constant in your attendance in these gatherings where you advance in the knowledge of your duties toward God, so that we will all keep the same mind and be gathered together in eternal life.

The Lord says, “I come to gather together all nations, tribes, and languages.” By this he means that he will come again on the last day to reward each according to his works. And those who were consistent with their faith shall see his glory and might. They shall be astounded when they look upon the power given to Jesus over the world.

Some shall say: “Woe to us, for you passed by, and we did not acknowledge you and did not believe you. We were disobedient to your priests who told us about salvation.”

On that day of judgment, we shall discover who were the unfaithful ones, and who did not live a life consistent with the commandments of Jesus Christ. These shall be made a spectacle to the world. They shall be thrown into hell, where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

The just will see those who have sinned, who have denied Jesus by their words or by their deeds, being punished with terrible tortures and unquenchable fire. They who have fought to be faithful, have endured tortures, and hated the illicit pleasures of life will give glory to God saying: “Have hope, a great reward is awaiting those who have served God with all their heart.”

18 Join the army of those who will be giving thanks, who had served God—not the company of those wicked men who are condemned. I myself am altogether sinful; I am far from being free of temptation. I am still under the attack of the devil, though I strive to pursue God’s way. How I would love to reach the end of it, for I fear the judgment to come.

19 And so, my brothers and sisters, following the God of truth, I am reading to you this appeal. Observe what I have written; you will save yourselves and him who is reading to you. Do me a favor; have repentance and contrition for your sins with your whole heart and attain salvation and life. By doing this, we shall also set a goal for all the young ones who wish to join this work of God.

We should not be annoyed or upset –fools that we are– when someone corrects us and brings us back to the straight path. For sometimes we do evil unknowingly, because of our lukewarmness and lack of fidelity. Our mind becomes darkened by vain desires.

Be faithful, to be saved in the end. Blessed are those who obey these instructions. Although we may suffer in this world for a short while, we

shall reap the immortal fruit of the resurrection. Do not be sad if trials come; a time of immense happiness awaits us. We shall live again with our elders and rejoice in an eternity without sorrow.

20 Do not be disturbed if you see that the wicked are wealthy and the servants of God in difficult circumstances. Have faith!, my brothers and sisters. We are now engaged in a battle, fighting for the living God in this life, to win the crown in the life to come. Nobody has ever won his reward at once; one must always work and wait for it. If God were to reward anyone right away, that will look more like a business transaction, not like a fight for sanctity. We would give the impression of being good and loving God, while really going after personal profit.

This is the reason why God punishes the egoistic spirit and enchains it.

To the One, invisible God, the Father of Truth, who sent us the Savior, the Prince of Immortality, through whom he has revealed to us the truth and supernatural life, to him be glory forever. Amen.

Footnote:

1. The source of the quotation is unknown, possibly an apocryphal Gospel. The main ideas are found in the canonical Gospels: Lk 10:3; Mt 10:16; Mt 10:28; and Lk 12:4.5

Part III

The Age of Persecutions

During the first three centuries, the Church had to make her way through dangers and difficulties of every kind. She had, on one hand, to endure the persecutions of the Roman political power, and, on the other, to assert the doctrine received from the apostles. To tackle the later task, some scholars defended the Christian message against its detractors; these scholars are called apologists (defenders).

In addition to the anthology of texts from the Apostolic Fathers, the reader will find in this third part some texts that will help him better understand the environment in which the word of God was first planted by our Lord. These are:

- Texts from an early apologist, the unknown author of the *Letter to Diognetus*.
- Four writings about the circumstances of the martyrdom suffered by early Christians.
- A short inscription from a tombstone –an epitaph– that reveals the transcendental truths the primitive Church possessed.

Letter to Diognetus

(circa year 124)

*The **Letter to Diognetus** is a defense of Christianity composed in the form of a letter addressed to a certain Diognetus. He seems to be a high-ranking pagan, or the emperor himself (his name means “known by Zeus”).*

This letter has been attributed to Quadratus, a Greek from Athens, who met St Paul and St John there. If so, this could be the lost letter he sent to Emperor Hadrian (117-138) arguing in favor of Christianity.

1 Excellent Diognetus!

I see that you are most eager to learn about the religion of the Christians, raising sharp and careful questions about their beliefs. “Who is the God in whom they trust,” you inquire, “and what kind of cult is theirs.” You say, “I am puzzled. This God enables them, one and all, to despise the world and to have no fear of death; to ignore the gods adored by the Greeks and to keep away from the fastidious observances on food and rituals practiced by the Jews.”

You want to know, too, what is the secret of that strong love they have for one another, and why this new people, or new way of life, has just come into the world we now live in, and not before.

I praise your eagerness to know, and I pray that God, who grants us power both to speak and to listen, may enable me to speak in such a way that you may derive the greatest possible benefit from hearing, and enable you to listen in such a way that I may rejoice for your attention.

The author attacks the foolish idolatry of the pagans and the external formalism of the worship of the Jews.

2 Look at what you call and consider gods; look at them not only with your eyes, but with your mind. What substance do they really have? Aren’t they made of stone, like the pavement under your feet, and that one of bronze,

no better than the pots and pans of daily use? Is not that third one made of wood and already rotten, and that fourth one of silver and in need of a custodian, lest it be stolen?

You call these things gods; you serve them; you bow before them; and in the end, you become no better than they are.

3 If the pagans show their folly in making offerings to gods that can neither see nor hear, the Jews, in making the same offering to God, should think this ridiculous, rather than religious. God is not in need of such offerings. They offer God sacrifices with blood, fat, and burnt animals, and try to honor God with them; they differ in nothing –it seems to me– from those who show the same devotion to deaf idols.

And is it not an offense to God to take some things that He created for our use and food, and to reject others? Are not all created by God?

Is it not ridiculous to boast of a mutilation of the flesh, as a sign of the chosen people? Does this mutilation make them particularly loved by God?

The best part of the letter is the account which the author gives of the life of a Christian in the middle of the world. The author criticizes some vices common among the pagans; this criticism gives us an idea of the state of morality then.

5 Christians are indistinguishable from other men because of their nationality, language, or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some eccentric way of life.

Their teaching is not invented by man, or based upon the ideas or talent of some inquisitive human mind. Unlike some other people, they do not champion any doctrine of purely human origin. With regard to dress, food, and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it be Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them even their homeland is a foreign country.

Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not abandon the babies that are born. They share their meals, but not their wives. They

live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law.

Christians love all men, yet all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, yet enrich many. They are defamed, and in their defamation find their glory. They are calumniated, and are vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult.

For the good they do, they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred.

The relations between Christians and the world are compared to that of the soul with the human body. Christians are the soul of the world. They maintain the world alive and united. Every Christian participates in this mission; thus, he cannot turn away from it.

6 The Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so are Christians found in all the cities of the world, but are not identified with the world. As the visible body contains the invisible soul, so are Christians seen living in the world, but their religious life remains unnoticed.

The body hates the soul and makes war against it, not because of any injury the soul has done it, but because of the restriction the soul places on its pleasures. Similarly, the world hates the Christians, not because they have done it any wrong, but because they are opposed to its enjoyments.

Christians love those who hate them just as the soul loves the body and all its members despite the body's hatred. It is by the soul, enclosed within the body, that the body is held together. Similarly, it is by the Christians, detained in the world as in a prison, that the world is held together.

The soul, though immortal, has a mortal dwelling place; and Christians also live for a time amid things that are not permanent, while they look forward to the freedom from change and decay that will be theirs in heaven. As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians increase daily more and more under persecution.

Such is the Christians' lofty mission, assigned to them by God; thus, it is wrong for a Christian to run away from his vocation.

God has a universal plan of salvation; it is accomplished through his Son. The divinity of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

7 God is truly the Almighty, the Creator of all, the Invisible. He himself revealed to men the Truth from heaven and sent the holy and incomprehensible Word. He engraved it in man's heart. Contrary to what one may guess, he did not accomplish this by sending some subject, messenger or assistant, some earthly prince or celestial creature. No, he sent the very Architect and Creator of the universe himself, through whom all was made.

Did he send him, one may ask, to act like a tyrant, in fear and terror? Not so. In gentleness and compassion he sent him, as a king sending his son. He sent him as King; God and man. He sent him to men.

He sent him to persuade us and to save us, not to do violence on us. Violence, you see, is not an attribute of God.

8 No man has ever seen God or known him, but God has revealed himself to us through faith, by which alone it is possible to see him. God, the Lord and maker of all things, who created the world and set it in order, not only loved man but was also patient with him. So he has always been, is, and will be: kind, good, free from anger, truthful; indeed, he and he alone is good.

He devised a plan, a great and wonderful plan, and shared it only with his Son. For long he preserved this secrecy and kept his own wise counsel. He seemed to be neglecting us, to have no concern for us. But when through his beloved Son he revealed and made public what he had prepared from the very beginning, he gave us all at once gifts such as we could never have dreamt of. He even gave us sight and knowledge of himself.

Man should cooperate in this divine plan of salvation by using the grace Jesus won for us.

9 When God had made all his plans in consultation with his Son, he waited until a later time, allowing us to follow our own whim. Thus, we were swept along by our unruly passions, led astray by pleasure and desire. Not

that he was pleased by our sins: he only tolerated them. Not that he approved of that age of sin: he was planning this era of holiness.

When we had been shown to be undeserving of life, his goodness made us worthy of it. When it became clear to us that we could not enter God's kingdom by our own power, we were enabled to do so by the power of God.

When our sins had reached their highest point, it became clear that punishment was at hand in the shape of suffering and death. The time then came for God to make known his compassion and power. How immeasurable is God's generosity and love!

God did not show hatred for us, reject us, or take vengeance. Instead, he was patient with us, put up with us, and in compassion took our sins upon himself. He gave his own Son as the price of our redemption. The Holy One became the ransom for the wicked, the sinless One for the sinners, the just One for the unjust. The incorruptible One became the price for the corrupt, the immortal One for the mortals.

For what else could have buried our sins but his sinlessness? Where else could we –wicked and sinful as we were– have found the means of sanctity except in the Son of God alone?

What a wonderful substitution, what a mysterious plan, what an inconceivable blessing! The wickedness of the many is buried in the Holy One, and the holiness of One sanctifies many sinners.

In return for God's love, man must become God's image.

10 If you desire to have faith, first learn about God the Father. God loved man; he made the world for man. God subjected to man everything that is on earth. He endowed man with intelligence and reason, so that he would raise his gaze and contemplate Him. He made man to his image, and sent him his only begotten Son. God promised man his kingdom in heaven. Think, therefore, what shall God finally give to those who correspond to his love.

Now that you know about God the Father and his love for us, shouldn't you be filled with joy? And how will you love Him who loved you so much before you existed?

If you love Him, you shall be an imitator of his goodness. Do not be astonished that man could imitate God. If God wants so, man can.

You cannot find happiness in having power over your neighbor, being above the weak, or becoming rich by oppressing the poor. No, it is impossible to imitate God in so doing; for it is the opposite of his majesty.

To imitate God, you must take upon yourself your neighbor's burden; you should be ready to render some service to a subordinate precisely in what you are superior. Give help to a person in need; you will become God's image for those who receive from your hand.

In so doing and while still on earth, you should be contemplating God, who rules from heaven; you will be able to talk about the mysteries of God. Then, you will start admiring and loving those sentenced to death for refusing to deny God.

The world is full of deceit and drifting nowhere. You should react and unmask the decay behind worldly life-styles, when you get to know about true life in heaven. Then you will despise what people call death; for real death is that reserved for the damned in the eternal fire, a fire always giving torment to those thrown in. When you get to know about that fire, you will admire and congratulate those who suffer –out of love of God– this momentary fire.

Acts of the Martyrdom of St Justin and his companion saints (year 165)

The saints were seized and brought before the prefect of Rome, whose name was Rusticus. As they stood before the judgment seat, Rusticus the prefect said to Justin, "Above all, declare your faith in the gods and obey the command of the emperor." Justin said, "We cannot be accused or condemned for obeying the commands of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

Rusticus said, "What system of teaching do you profess?" Justin said, "I have tried to learn about every system, but I have accepted the true doctrines of the Christians; these are not accepted by those obstinate in error."

The prefect Rusticus said, "Do you believe these doctrines, wretch that you are?" Justin said, "Yes, and I follow them with their correct interpretation."

The prefect Rusticus said, "What sort of doctrine is that?" Justin said, "To adore the God of the Christians. We believe that He is from the beginning the One Creator and Maker of the whole creation, of things seen and unseen. We worship also the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He was foretold by the prophets as the future herald of salvation for the human race and the Teacher of distinguished disciples. For myself, I am just a human being; what I say is insignificant in comparison with his infinite majesty. I acknowledge the existence of a prophetic Spirit; for the Son of God was announced by prophecies. I know that the prophets were inspired from above when they spoke of his coming among men."

Rusticus said, "Are you a Christian, then?" Justin said, "Yes, I am a Christian."

The prefect said to Justin, "They say you are a learned man, and you declare to know what is the true doctrine. Listen; if you were scourged and beheaded, would you be convinced that you shall go up to heaven?" Justin said, "I hope that I shall enter God's house if I suffer in that way. For I know that God's grace is bestowed on all who follow him, and this, until the end of the world."

The prefect Rusticus said, “Do you have an idea that you will go up to heaven to receive some sort of reward?” Justin said, “It is not an idea that I have; I am convinced of it; it is something I know well and hold to be most certain.”

The prefect Rusticus ordered to all the accused, “Now let us go to the point at issue, which is necessary and urgent. Gather together, then, and without more discussion, offer sacrifice to the gods.” Justin said, “No one in his right mind throws himself down from the true worship to false worship.”

The prefect Rusticus said, “If you do not do as you are commanded, you will be tortured without mercy.” Justin said, “We hope to suffer torment for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so be saved. This will bring us salvation; and so, we will stand with confidence in the more terrible and universal judgment of our Lord and Savior.”

In the same way, the other martyrs also said, “Do what you will; we are Christians; we do not offer sacrifice to idols.”

The prefect Rusticus pronounced sentence, saying, “Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to obey the command of the emperor be scourged and led away to suffer capital punishment according to the ruling of the laws.”

Glorifying God, the holy martyrs went out to the accustomed place. They were beheaded, and so accomplished their mission in martyrdom, confessing their faith in their Savior.

The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs

(July 17, 180)

From the transcripts of the court proceedings leading to the sentence, we know about the earliest martyrdom of Christians. This document describes the trial of twelve Christians of Scillium, in North Africa, on July 17, AD 180.

On July 17, when Calusian and Praesens were consuls, the latter for a second time, the following were arraigned in the court at Carthage: Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Secunda, and Vestia.

Saturninus, the proconsul, said:

– If you come to your senses, you will gain the pardon of our Lord the Emperor.

Speratus said:

– We have never hurt anyone. We have never committed any crime. We have never spoken evil of anyone. Rather, when we were mistreated, we showed our gratitude; we obey our emperor.

Saturninus, the proconsul, said:

– We Romans are also a religious people. Our religion is very simple; we swear by the *genius* of our Lord the emperor and pray for his well-being. This is what you also ought to do.

Speratus said:

– If you only did listen to me peacefully, I would explain to you the mystery of a simple belief.

The proconsul said:

– Do you want to initiate me by making a mockery of our sacred ceremonies? I will not listen to you! Swear, instead, by the *genius* of our Lord the emperor.

Speratus:

– I do not recognize any power of this world in eternal matters; I serve God whom no one has seen or can see. On the other hand, I have never stolen, and I pay the taxes on everything I buy. And this because I recognize my Lord, the King of kings and Emperor of all mankind.

Saturninus, the proconsul, said to the others:

– Cease to adhere to this persuasion.

Speratus:

– A bad persuasion would teach that we should commit murder and bear false witness –that would be evil.

The proconsul:

– Aren't you afraid of the consequences? Take no part in this business –it is madness.

Cittinus:

– The only one we fear is the Lord, God, who is in heaven.

Donata:

– We respect Caesar as Caesar, but fear only God.

Vestia said:

– I am a Christian.

Secunda:

– I want to be nothing else than what I am.

Saturninus, the proconsul, to Speratus:

– Do you persist in remaining a Christian?

Speratus:

– I am a Christian.

(And all the rest repeated the same assertion)

Saturninus, the proconsul:

– Why don't you take your time and think it over?

Speratus:

– It is absolutely clear; there is nothing to think over.

Saturninus, the proconsul:

– What do you keep in that box?

Speratus:

– Books and some letters of a holy man called Paul.

Saturninus, the proconsul, said:

– I give you thirty days to think this over.

Speratus again said:

– I am a Christian.

(And all the others joined him in this affirmation.)

 Saturninus, the proconsul, then read out the sentence from his tablet:

– Whereas Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda, and the others, have admitted that they live in accordance with the rites of the Christians; whereas they have persevered in their stubbornness even after given the opportunity to return to the Roman religion, I hereby decree that they should die by the sword.

Speratus:

– We give thanks to God.

Nartzalus:

– Today we shall be in heaven as martyrs. Thank God!

The proconsul Saturninus ordered the following proclamation to be read by his herald:

– I have ordered the execution of Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Veturius, Felix, Aquilinus, Laetantius, Januaria, Generosa, Vestia, Donata, and Secunda.

All said:

– Thank God!

All of them were beheaded for the Name of Christ; all crowned with martyrdom together, and now reign with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

Proconsular Acts of the Martyrdom of Saint Cyprian, Bishop (September 14, 258)

St Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage was executed on September 14, 258, under Emperors Valerian and Gallienus. Having manifested his being a Christian, Cyprian was condemned to death.

On the morning of the fourteenth of September, a great crowd gathered at Villa Sexti, in accordance with the order of the governor Galerius Maximus. That same day, the governor commanded that Bishop Cyprian be brought before him for trial in the court of Sauciolum.

After Cyprian was brought in, the governor asked him: "Are you Thascius Cyprian?" And the bishop replied: "Yes, I am." The governor Galerius Maximus said: "Have you posed as the pontiff of a sacrilegious group?" The bishop answered: "I have." Then the governor said: "Our most venerable emperors have commanded you to perform the religious rites." Bishop Cyprian replied: "I will not do so." Galerius Maximus said: "Consider your position." Cyprian replied: "Follow your orders. In such a just cause, there is no need for deliberation."

Then Galerius Maximus, after consulting with his council, reluctantly issued the following judgment: "You have long lived with your sacrilegious convictions, and you have gathered about yourself many others in a vicious conspiracy. You have set yourself up as an enemy of the gods of Rome and our religious practices. The pious and venerable emperors: the Augusti, Valerian and Gallienus, and Valerian, the most noble of Caesars, have been unable to draw you back to the observance of their holy ceremonies. Since you have been discovered as the author and leader of these heinous crimes, you will consequently be held forth as an example for all those who have followed you in your crime. By your blood the law shall be confirmed."

Next he read the sentence from a tablet: "It is decided that Thascius Cyprian should die by the sword." Cyprian responded: "Thanks be to God!"

After the sentence was passed, a crowd of his fellow Christians said: "We should also be killed with him!" There arose an uproar among the Christians,

and a great mob followed after him.

Cyprian was then brought out to the grounds of the Villa Sexti, where, taking off his outer cloak and kneeling on the ground, he fell before the Lord in prayer. He removed his dalmatic and gave it to the deacons, and then stood erect while waiting for the executioner.

When the executioner arrived, Cyprian told his friends to give the man twenty-five gold pieces. Cloths and napkins were being spread out in front of him by the brethren. Then the blessed Cyprian put on the blindfold with his own hands, but since he was not able to tie the ends by himself, the priest Julian and the subdeacon Julian fastened them for him.

In this way the blessed Cyprian suffered, and his body was laid out at a nearby place to satisfy the curiosity of the pagans. During the night, Cyprian's body was triumphantly borne away in a procession of Christians who praying and bearing tapers and torches, carried the body to the cemetery of the governor Macrobius Candidianus, which lies on the Mappalian Way near the fish ponds. Not many days later, the governor Galerius Maximus died.

The most blessed martyr Cyprian suffered on the fourteenth of September under the emperors Valerian and Gallienus, in the reign of our true Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong honor and glory for ever. Amen.

The Martyrdom of Sts Perpetua and Felicity

(year 203)

Vibia Perpetua, twenty-two years old, was a young matron from a good family; Felicity, of the same age, was her personal slave-girl. Both suffered martyrdom. Felicity, pregnant at the time of her arrest, gave birth before her execution.

Two other young people, named Saturninus and Secundulus, a slave named Revocatus, and another young catechumen, named Saturus, who gave himself up voluntarily, accompanied them in their last trial.

Shortly after their martyrdom in AD 203, this beautiful account was composed by an eyewitness, probably Tertullian himself.

The ancient stories about the faith were a proof of God's care for his children; they achieved the spiritual strengthening of man as well. These stories were set forth to honor God and to reassure man by reading about the past.

Why then should not recent examples be set down to contribute equally to both ends? Well, past and recent examples will become old; both examples will be useful for generations to come, even though the recent ones enjoy less prestige now.

Consider the gifts of the Holy Spirit intended for the advantage of the entire Church. These are bestowed on each person according to God's Wisdom; all are for the glory of God. Well, then, even if someone may have a weak faith or tendency to despair, no one should think that supernatural grace was given only to the early Christians, who suffered martyrdom and had revelations. God always achieves what he decides –this is a testimony for the unbeliever and a consolation for the faithful.

1 Some young catechumens were arrested, Revocatus and his fellow slave Felicity, Saturninus and Secundulus, and Vibia Perpetua, twenty-two years old, a recently married matron of a respectable family and good education. Her mother and father were living, and of her two brothers, one was a catechumen like herself. She had a baby son.

Perpetua wrote some impressions on her sufferings before she passed away. This is how she described her ordeal.

“I was, at the time,” she said, “under arrest, and my father out of love for me was trying to persuade me to break my resolution. ‘Father,’ I said, ‘do you see this vase here, or jar, or whatever?’

“‘Yes,’ he said.

“And I told him, ‘Could it be called by any other name than what it is?’

“‘No,’ he said.

“‘Well, so too, I cannot but say what I am, a Christian.’

“My father was so angered when he heard the word ‘Christian,’ that he moved toward me to pluck my eyes out. But he left it at that and departed, defeated with his diabolic arguments.

“For a few days, I gave thanks to the Lord that I was separated from my father; I was comforted with his absence. During these few days, I received baptism; the Spirit inspired me to ask no other grace after the water, but physical perseverance.

“A few days later, I was moved to another prison. I was terrified; I have never been before in such a dark dungeon. It was quite hard! The heat was stifling because of the crowd, and the soldiers blackmailed us. To crown everything, I was tortured by worry over my baby.

“Tertius and Pomponius –those blessed deacons who took care of us– gave some money to the soldiers; we were allowed to go to a better section of the prison and refresh ourselves for a few hours. After leaving the dungeon, I nursed my baby, who was faint with hunger. I spoke to my mother anxiously about the child, encouraged my brother, and gave my child to their charge. I suffered because I saw them suffering.

“These were the trials I endured for many days. I got permission for my baby to stay with me in prison; I recovered my health at once, relieved of worry over the child. My prison had suddenly become a palace, and I preferred to stay there rather than anywhere else.

4 “One day, my bother told me, ‘You have God’s grace, why don’t you ask him whether you are going to be condemned or released?’

“I faithfully promised him that I would; I knew I could talk to the Lord, who was sending me so many blessings. And I said, ‘I will tell you tomorrow.’

“I asked our Lord, and this is the vision I had.

“I saw a stairway made of bronze of tremendous height, reaching all the way to the heavens, but so narrow that only one person could climb at a time. On the sides of the stairs, there were protruding all sorts of weapons: There were swords, spears, hooks, daggers, and spikes. If anyone went up carelessly, he would be mangled and his flesh torn by the weapons.

“Underneath the stairway, there was a dragon of enormous size; it was ready to attack any who wanted to climb. Satorus went up first; he had given himself up voluntarily. All the while, he had been giving us strength, although he was not with us when we were arrested. And he reached the top of the staircase, turned around, and said to me, ‘Perpetua, I am waiting for you. Be careful, the dragon may bite you.’

“And I said, ‘It shall not harm me, in the Name of Jesus Christ.’

“And from under the stairs, the dragon slowly stuck its head out as if afraid of me. And, using it as a first step, I trod on its head and went up.

“And I saw an immense garden; there was a tall, gray-haired man in a shepherd’s garb milking the sheep. Standing around him were many thousands of people clad in white. He raised his head, looked at me, and said, ‘I am glad you have come, my daughter.’

“He called me over and gave me milk to drink. I took it into my cupped hands and drank. And all those around said, ‘Amen!’

“At the sound of this word, I woke up with the taste of something sweet still in my mouth. At once I told this to my brother; we realized that we would have to suffer. From then on, we had no more hope in this life.

“A few days later, the story went about that a hearing was to take place for us. My father arrived from the city, worn with worry, with the idea of persuading me.

“‘Daughter,’ he said, ‘have compassion on my gray hairs. Have pity on your father –if I deserved to be called your father, if I have favored you beyond all your brothers, if I have nurtured you to reach this prime of life. Don’t abandon me. Consider your brothers, consider your mother and your aunt, consider your baby, who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride. Do not be the ruin of us all –for none of us will feel free to speak again if anything should happen to you!’

“This is what my father spoke in his love for me, while kissing my hands and casting himself at my feet. With tears in his eyes, he no longer

addressed me as his daughter, but as a woman. I felt sorry for my father; he alone, of all my family, would not be happy in my suffering.

“I tried to comfort him, saying, ‘It will all happen as God wills; you see, we are in his hands and not in our own.’

“And he left me in great sorrow.

“On another day, when we were having our meal, we were suddenly called for a hearing. We went to the court of justice, and soon the rumor went around the neighborhood; a huge crowd was gathered. We mounted the platform; each, when questioned, admitted being a Christian. My turn came, and there my father appeared with my son, he dragged me from the platform, and said, ‘Perform the sacrifice. Have pity on your baby.’

“Hilarianus, the governor, with power of life and death, said to me, ‘Have pity on your father’s gray hairs. Have pity on your baby son. Offer sacrifice for the genius of the emperor.’

“‘I will not,’ I replied.

“‘Are you a Christian?’ Hilarianus asked.

“And I said, ‘I am.’

“When my father tried to convince me, Hilarianus ordered him to be thrown to the ground and struck with a rod. I was sorry for my father; it was almost as if I myself had been struck. I was so grieved for his pathetic old age.

“Then the governor passed sentence on all of us: we were condemned to the wild beasts. And we went back to prison in great spirits. Meanwhile, my baby had gotten used to being nursed at my breast and to staying in prison with me; immediately after the trial, I sent the deacon Pomponius to my father to ask for the baby. But my father refused to give him over. Thank God that the baby had no further desire for the breast, nor did I suffer any inflammation; I was relieved of my anxiety for the child and of any physical discomfort.

7 “A few days later, we were all at prayer, and all of a sudden, in the midst of the prayer, I spoke out and uttered the name of Dinocrates. I was surprised, for I seldom remembered him. At once I realized that I was allowed to make a petition for him. On the same night, I had the following vision. I saw Dinocrates coming out of a dark place, in which there were many others, feverish and very thirsty, pale of countenance, and dirty. And on his face was the wound that he had when he died.

“Dinocrates was my brother; he had died of cancer of the face when he was seven years old, and his death was a source of loathing to everyone. I prayed for him. There was an enormous gulf between us, so neither could get close to the other.

“There was a pool full of water in the spot where Dinocrates was. Its edge was higher than the child, so he could not drink. And I woke up realizing that my brother was in difficulty. But I was confident that I could help him in his trouble; I prayed for him every day until we were transferred to the military prison. For we were supposed to fight with the wild beasts in the military games on the occasion of emperor Geta’s birthday. I prayed for my brother night and day with tears and sobs, so that he might be relieved from torment.

“One day, while we were kept with chains, I had another vision. I saw the same place I had seen before; Dinocrates was there all clean, well dressed, and refreshed. I saw a scar where there had been a wound; I saw the same pool, but its rim was now at the level of the child’s waist. He kept on drinking from it. Above, there was a golden bowl filling the pool with water. When Dinocrates had drunk enough, he began to play as children do. I awoke, and then I realized that he had been released from his punishment.

“A few days later, a military adjutant called Pudens, in charge of the prison, began to show us great esteem, realizing that we possessed some mysterious power within us. And he began to admit visitors to see and comfort us.

“The day of the contest was approaching, and my father came to see me; he was overcome with sorrow. He began to tear the hairs from his beard and to cast them to the ground; he threw himself to the ground and began to curse his years; he said so many things, enough to move all creation. I was sorry for his unhappy old age.

10 “On the day before we were to fight, I saw the following vision. The deacon Pomponius came to the gate of the prison and knocked violently. I went out and opened the door for him; he was dressed in a white tunic without a cincture and wore very fancy sandals.

“And he said to me, ‘Come, Perpetua, we are waiting for you.’

“He took my hand and we began to walk through a rough and winding terrain. At last we arrived with difficulty at the amphitheater, out of breath; he led me to the center of the arena.

“He told me, ‘Don’t be afraid. I am here with you, struggling with you.’ And he disappeared.

“I looked at the huge crowd, who were watching in astonishment. I knew I was condemned to die by the beasts, but I was surprised that no beasts were on sight. And out came an Egyptian, foul of aspect, with his minions, to fight me. There also came up to me handsome young men to be my assistants and bodyguards.

“I was being prepared for the combat; the Egyptian was on the other side, rolling in the dust. Then there came forth a man of marvelous height; he was higher than the amphitheater. And he was clad in a purple tunic without a belt, with two stripes running down the middle of his chest, one on either side. His sandals were wondrously made of gold and silver. And he carried a wand, like a trainer, and a green branch on which there were golden apples.

“When silence was made, the tall man said, ‘If this Egyptian defeats her, he will slay her with the sword; but if she defeats him, she will receive this branch.’ And he withdrew.

“The combat started, we came close to each other and began using our fists. My opponent wanted to get hold of my feet, but I kept on striking him on the face with my heels. I was lifted up in the air, and began to rain blows on him without, as it were, touching the ground. When there was a lull, with my hands clasped, I got hold of his head; I pulled him down, his face touching the ground; and I stepped upon his head.

“The crowd began to shout, and my assistants began to sing psalms. I came forward to the tall man and received the branch. He kissed me and said, ‘Peace be with you, my daughter.’

“I began to walk in triumph toward the gate of Life. And I awoke. Then I realized that I would not fight against wild animals, but against the devil; but I knew I would win.

“This is what happened before the time of the contest. Somebody else may wish to write about what will happen at the contest.”

14 These were the visions of the blessed Perpetua, written by her own hand. Secundulus –by God’s grace– was called to depart from this world earlier, without having to face the animals. His flesh, if not his spirit, knew the sword.

Felicity, too, enjoyed a special favor with the Lord. She was pregnant at the time of her arrest; now she was in her eighth month. As the

day of the spectacle approached, she was growing worried about her pregnancy; her martyrdom might be put off, for it was illegal to execute a pregnant woman. Thus, she might have to shed her clean, innocent blood afterward, among criminals.

Her fellow martyrs were also saddened; they were afraid of leaving behind such a good companion and fellow traveler, of leaving her alone on the way to the same hope. In an avalanche of common concern, they all prayed together to the Lord for this intention, two days before the contest.

Immediately after this prayer, Felicity went into birth pains. It was a painful childbirth because of the natural difficulty of an eight months' delivery. One of the prison guards told her, "You're suffering so much now; what will happen when you're tossed to the wild beasts? You thought little of them when you refused to sacrifice."

Felicity replied, "What I am suffering now, I suffer by myself. But another will be inside of me, who will suffer for me, because I am to suffer for Him."

She gave birth to a girl; one of her sisters brought her up as her own daughter.

16 The military tribune treated them with unusual severity, because, on the information of some foolish people, he was afraid that they would be spirited out of the prison by some magic spell.

Perpetua spoke to him directly, "Why don't you even allow us to live decently? Don't you know that we are the most distinguished convicts; that we belong to the emperor, and that we are going to fight on his very birthday? Won't it be to your credit if we appear on that day in healthier condition?"

The officer was disturbed and grew red; he gave the order that we should be treated more humanly, and allowed relatives to visit us. By this time, the head of the prison was himself a believer.

18 The day of the martyrs' victory dawned. They marched from their cells into the amphitheater, as if into heaven, with cheerful looks and graceful bearing. If they trembled, it was for joy and not for fear.

Perpetua was the first to be thrown down to the arena. They selected an unusual beast, a mad heifer. Perpetua was hit by the cow and fell on her back. Sitting down, she pulled her torn tunic from her side to cover

her body, thinking more of her modesty than of her suffering. Next she fastened her disheveled hair; it was not right that a martyr should die with her hair in disorder; she may seem to be in mourning in her hour of victory.

After a while, she got up and, seeing that Felicity was also lying down, bruised, went over, gave her a hand, and raised her up. Both stood up together for some time.

The people's cruelty was now appeased; the shouts of the crowd subsided; they were ordered to the gate called Life-giving (*Sanavivaria*). There Perpetua was welcomed by a catechumen called Rusticus. Rousing herself as if from sleep –she had been in deep spiritual ecstasy– she began to look around. To everyone's amazement, she said, "When are we going to be led to the wild beasts?" When she heard that it had already happened, she did not at first believe it, until she saw the marks of violence on her body and her clothing. Then she beckoned her brother and the catechumen to come, and told them, "Stand firm in faith, love one another, and do not slacken because of our sufferings."

21 Satorus, too, in another gate, encouraged the soldier Pudens, saying, "Here I am; just as I thought and foretold, I have not yet felt any wild beast. Now believe this: I will go there and be killed by a leopard in one bite." And right there, as the spectacle was coming to a close, he was thrown to a leopard; he was, in fact, covered with so much blood from the first bite that the people cried out to him, "Wash and save yourself, wash and save yourself!" Without knowing, they were giving evidence of Satorus's second baptism; he was clearly saved after being washed in blood.

Then Satorus said to the soldier Pudens, "Good-bye, keep your faith as I have done; these things should not frighten you; they should strengthen you." At the same time, he asked for the little ring from Pudens's finger. After dipping it into his wound, he handed it back to Pudens as a legacy, leaving him a pledge and a remembrance of his bloodshed.

Half dead, Satorus was thrown along with the others in the usual secluded place to have his throat cut. The people, however, demanded that the martyrs be led to the middle of the amphitheater. They wanted to see the sword thrust into the victims' bodies, to share in the slaughter. Without being asked, they went where the people wanted them to go, but first they kissed one another, to complete their testimony with the customary kiss of peace.

The others stood motionless and received the deathblow in silence, especially Saturus, who had gone up first and was the first to die. Once more, he was waiting for Perpetua. But Perpetua had to experience the pain more deeply; she screamed as the gladiator struck on the bone. She then took the shaking hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat. It was as though such a great woman –one before whom the unclean spirit trembled– could not be killed unless she herself were willing.

Bravest and happiest martyrs! You were called and chosen for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Epitaph of Abercius

(circa AD 180/200)

Abercius, the composer of his own funeral inscription, was bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia in the latter part of the second century. Written in a highly symbolic language, the epitaph declares that Abercius is a Christian, and requests prayers for his soul.

The tombstone with the inscription is kept in the Lateran Museum of Rome.

Citizen of an eminent city,#1
 I erected this [tomb] in my lifetime,#2
 To have a resting place for my body.#3
 Abercius is my name,
 I am a disciple of a chaste Shepherd,#4
 Who feeds his sheep on mountains and plains,#5
 Who has great eyes that see everywhere,#6
 He taught me faithful [...] writings.#7
 He sent me to Rome to contemplate a kingdom,
 To see a Queen with a golden robe and golden sandals.#8
 There I saw a people bearing the resplendent Seal.#9
 And I saw the plain of Syria, and all the cities, even Nisibis,#10 beyond the
 Euphrates.
 And everywhere I had colleagues.#11
 Having Paul as my companion,#12
 Everywhere I went, my faith led the way;
 Everywhere, it offered me as food a Fish from the spring,
 Mighty and pure, caught by an immaculate Virgin.#13
 And she gives it constantly as nourishment for her own dear ones;
 She also has an excellent wine,
 Which she gives together with the bread.#14
 I, Abercius, dictated all these words and ordered them to be inscribed;
 I was, then, seventy-two years old.
 Let any brother who understands these lines pray for Abercius.#15

NOTES

1. The author declares himself to be a Christian, a member of the Church, a citizen of the People of God.

2. A reference, perhaps, to his being a Christian, to “being alive” with the life of grace given in baptism.

3. It implies the existence of the soul, which is not in the tomb.

4. The Shepherd is Jesus Christ.

5. Jesus Christ gives us supernatural life.

6. A reference to early portraits of Christ, and also to God’s perfections; He is all-knowing, and all-present, and nothing is hidden from God.

7. A few words were lost here. It denotes the revelation of God, brought to completion with Jesus Christ.

8. It suggests the higher dignity of the church of Rome.

9. In Rome, the author met the Christians, people with the Seal –the character– of baptism.

10. Nisibis, a major city under the Seleucids, became an important Christian center in Mesopotamia.

11. Abercius is a witness of the universality of the Church.

12. Some word may be missing here. The reference points to St Paul the apostle, that is, to the faith reflected in his epistles.

13. The imagery refers both to Mother Church, who gives Jesus Christ in the sacraments, and to Christ’s own Mother, the Virgin Mary, who conceived our Savior. The intermingling of the two figures is very common in the writings of the early Church (cf. Apoc 12.1 ff.).

14. Christ is the Fish, in Greek ΙΧΘΥΣ, which is also an acronym for Jesus Christ, the Savior, Son of God. The real presence of our Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist is indicated. Abercius is given Jesus in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment for the soul under the appearances of bread and wine.

15. An early testimony of Christian prayer for the deceased.