

Epistle 75 (Firmilian to Cyprian)

Cyprian of Carthage

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

STROMATA 273

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INTRODUCTION

This letter is not by Cyprian but to him — the reply of Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, endorsing the African position on the rebaptism of heretics and turning a remarkably sharp tongue on Stephen, bishop of Rome. Preserved in Cyprian's correspondence and surviving in Latin translation, it is a vivid witness to how bishops of East and West argued, and quarrelled, across the third-century Church. Its candour about a sitting bishop of Rome has made it much cited in later controversy. Read it as a bracing piece of ecclesiastical polemic, one bishop writing frankly to another.

Epistle 74

Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, to Cyprian, Against the Letter of Stephen. A.D. 256.

Argument.— The Argument of This Letter is Exactly the Same as that of the Previous One, But Written with a Little More Vehemence and Acerbity Than Becomes a Bishop, _Chiefly for the Reason, as May Be Suspected, that Stephen Had Also Written Another Letter to Firmilianus, Helenus, and Other Bishops of Those Parts._

1\ to Cyprian, his brother in the Lord, greeting. We have received by Rogatian, our beloved deacon, the letter sent by you which you wrote to us, well-beloved brother; and we gave the greatest thanks to the Lord, because it has happened that we who are separated from one another in body are thus united in spirit, as if we were not only occupying one country, but inhabiting together one and the self-same house. Which also it is becoming for us to say, because, indeed, the spiritual house of God is one. For it shall come to pass in the last days, says the prophet, that the mountain of the Lord shall be manifest, and the house of God above the tops of the mountains. Isaiah 2:2 Those that come together into this house are united with gladness, according to what is asked from the Lord in the psalm, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of one's life. Whence in another place also it is made manifest, that among the saints there is great and desirous love for assembling together. Behold, he says, how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

2\ For unity and peace and concord afford the greatest pleasure not only to men who believe and know the truth, but also to heavenly angels themselves, to whom the divine word says it is a joy when one sinner repents and returns to the bond of unity. But assuredly this would not be said of the angels, who have their conversation in heaven, unless they themselves also were united to us, who rejoice at our unity; even as, on the other hand, they are assuredly saddened when they see the diverse minds and the divided wills of some, as if not only they do not together invoke one and the same God, but as if, separated and divided from one another, they can neither have a common conversation nor discourse. Except that we may in this matter give thanks to Stephen, that it has now happened through his unkindness that we receive the proof of your faith and wisdom. But although we have received the favour of this benefit on account of Stephen, certainly Stephen has not done anything deserving of kindness and thanks. For neither can Judas be thought worthy by his perfidy and treachery wherewith he wickedly dealt concerning the Saviour, as though he had been the cause of such great advantages, that through him the world and the people of the Gentiles were delivered by the Lord's passion.

3\ But let these things which were done by Stephen be passed by for the present, lest, while we remember his audacity and pride, we bring a more lasting sadness on ourselves from the things that he has wickedly done. And knowing, concerning you, that you have settled this matter, concerning which there is now a question, according to the rule of truth and the wisdom of Christ; we have exulted with great joy, and have given God thanks that we have found in brethren placed at such a distance such a unanimity of faith and truth with us. For the grace of God is mighty to associate and join together in the bond of charity and unity even those things which seem to be divided by a considerable space of earth, according to the way in which of old also the divine power associated in the bond of unanimity Ezekiel and Daniel, though later in their age, and separated from them by a long space of time, to Job and Noah, who were among the first; so that although they were separated by long periods, yet by divine inspiration they felt the same truths. And this also we now observe in you, that you who are separated from us by the most extensive regions, approve yourselves to be, nevertheless, joined with us in mind and spirit. All which arises from the divine unity. For even as the Lord who dwells in us is one and the same, He everywhere joins and couples His own people in the bond of unity, whence their sound has gone out into the whole earth, who are sent by the Lord swiftly running in the spirit of unity; as, on the other hand, it is of no advantage that some are very near and joined together bodily, if in spirit and mind they differ, since souls cannot at all be united which divide themselves from God's unity. For, lo, it says, they that are far from You shall perish. But such shall undergo the judgment of God according to their desert, as depart from His words who prays to the Father for unity, and says, Father, grant that, as You and I are one, so they also may be one in us. John 17:21

4\ But we receive those things which you have written as if they were our own; nor do we read them cursorily, but by frequent repetition have committed them to memory. Nor does it hinder saving usefulness, either to repeat the same things for the confirmation of the truth, or, moreover, to add some things for the sake of accumulating proof. But if anything has been added by us, it is not added as if there had been too little said by you; but since the divine discourse surpasses human nature, and the soul cannot conceive or grasp the whole and perfect word, therefore also the number of prophets is so great, that the divine wisdom in its multiplicity may be distributed through many. Whence also he who first speaks

in prophecy is bidden to be silent if a revelation be made to a second. For which reason it happens of necessity among us, that year by year we, the elders and prelates, assemble together to arrange those matters which are committed to our care, so that if any things are more serious they may be directed by the common counsel. Moreover, _we do this_ that some remedy may be sought for by repentance for lapsed brethren, and for those wounded by the devil after the saving layer, not as though they obtained remission of sins from us, but that by our means they may be converted to the understanding of their sins, and may be compelled to give fuller satisfaction to the Lord.

5\ But since that messenger sent by you was in haste to return to you, and the winter season was pressing, we replied what we could to your letter. And indeed, as respects what Stephen has said, as though the apostles forbade those who come from heresy to be baptized, and delivered this also to be observed by their successors, you have replied most abundantly, that no one is so foolish as to believe that the apostles delivered this, when it is even well known that these heresies themselves, execrable and detestable as they are, arose subsequently; when even Marcion the disciple of Cerdo is found to have introduced his sacrilegious tradition against God long after the apostles, and after long lapse of time from them. Apelles, also consenting to his blasphemy, added many other new and more important matters hostile to faith and truth. But also the time of Valentinus and Basilides is manifest, that they too, after the apostles, and after a long period, rebelled against the Church of God with their wicked lies. It is plain that the other heretics, also, afterwards introduced their evil sects and perverse inventions, even as every one was led by error; all of whom, it is evident, were self-condemned, and have declared against themselves an inevitable sentence before the day of judgment; and he who confirms the baptism of these, what else does he do but adjudge himself with them, and condemn himself, making himself a partaker with such?

6\ But that they who are at Rome do not observe those things in all cases which are handed down from the beginning, and vainly pretend the authority of the apostles; any one may know also from the fact, that concerning the celebration of Easter, and concerning many other sacraments of divine matters, he may see that there are some diversities among them, and that all things are not observed among them alike, which are observed at Jerusalem, just as in very many other provinces also many things are varied because of the difference of the places and names. And yet on this account there is no departure at all from the peace and unity of the Catholic Church, such as Stephen has now dared to make; breaking the peace against you, which his predecessors have always kept with you in mutual love and honour, even herein defaming Peter and Paul the blessed apostles, as if the very men delivered this who in their epistles execrated heretics, and warned us to avoid them. Whence it appears that this tradition is of men which maintains heretics, and asserts that they have baptism, which belongs to the Church alone.

7\ But, moreover, you have well answered that part where Stephen said in his letter that heretics themselves also are of one mind in respect of baptism; and that they do not baptize such as come to them from one another, but only communicate with them; as if we also ought to do this. In which place, although you have already proved that it is sufficiently ridiculous for any one to follow those that are in error, yet we add this moreover, over and above, that it is not wonderful for heretics to act thus, who, although in some lesser matters they differ, yet in that which is greatest they hold one and the same agreement to blaspheme the Creator, figuring for themselves certain dreams and phantasms of an unknown God.

Assuredly it is but natural that these should agree in having a baptism which is unreal, in the same way as they agree in repudiating the truth of the divinity. Of whom, since it is tedious to reply to their several statements, either wicked or foolish, it is sufficient shortly to say in sum, that they who do not hold the true Lord the Father cannot hold the truth either of the Son or of the Holy Spirit; according to which also they who are called Cataphrygians, and endeavour to claim to themselves new prophecies, can have neither the Father, nor the Son, _nor the Holy Spirit_, of whom, if we ask what Christ they announce, they will reply that they preach Him who sent the Spirit that speaks by Montanus and Prisca. And in these, when we observe that there has been not the spirit of truth, but of error, we know that they who maintain their false prophesying against the faith of Christ cannot have Christ. Moreover, all other heretics, if they have separated themselves from the Church of God, can have nothing of power or of grace, since all power and grace are established in the Church where the elders preside, who possess the power both of baptizing, and of imposition of hands, and of ordaining. For as a heretic may not lawfully ordain nor lay on hands, so neither may he baptize, nor do anything holily or spiritually, since he is an alien from spiritual and deifying sanctity. All which we some time back confirmed in Iconium, which is a place in Phrygia, when we were assembled together with those who had gathered from Galatia and Cilicia, and other neighbouring countries, as to be held and firmly vindicated against heretics, when there was some doubt in certain minds concerning that matter.

8\ And as Stephen and those who agree with him contend that putting away of sins and second birth may result from the baptism of heretics, among whom they themselves confess that the Holy Spirit is not; let them consider and understand that spiritual birth cannot be without the Spirit; in conformity with which also the blessed Apostle Paul baptized anew with a spiritual baptism those who had already been baptized by John before the Holy Spirit had been sent by the Lord, and so laid hands on them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. But what kind of a thing is it, that when we see that Paul, after John's baptism, baptized his disciples again, we are hesitating to baptize those who come to the Church from heresy after their unhallowed and profane dipping. Unless, perchance, Paul was inferior to the bishops of these times, so that these indeed can by imposition of hands alone give the Holy Spirit to those heretics who come (to the Church), while Paul was not fitted to give the Holy Spirit by imposition of hands to those who had been baptized by John, unless he had first baptized them also with the baptism of the Church.

9\ That, moreover, is absurd, that they do not think it is to be inquired who was the person that baptized, for the reason that he who has been baptized may have obtained grace by the invocation of the Trinity, of the names of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Then this will be the wisdom which Paul writes is in those who are perfected. But who in the Church is perfect and wise who can either defend or believe this, that this bare invocation of names is sufficient to the remission of sins and the sanctification of baptism; since these things are only then of advantage, when both he who baptizes has the Holy Spirit, and the baptism itself also is not ordained without the Spirit? But, say they, he who in any manner whatever is baptized without, may obtain the grace of baptism by his disposition and faith, which doubtless is ridiculous in itself, as if either a wicked disposition could attract to itself from heaven the sanctification of the righteous, or a false faith the truth of believers. But that not all who call on the name of Christ are heard, and that their invocation cannot obtain any grace, the Lord Himself manifests, saying, Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. Mark 13:6 Because there is no difference between a false prophet and a heretic. For as the former deceives in the name of God or Christ, so the latter deceives in the sacrament of baptism. Both strive by falsehood to deceive men's wills.

10\ But I wish to relate to you some facts concerning a circumstance which occurred among us, pertaining to this very matter. About two-and-twenty years ago, in the tithes after the Emperor Alexander, there happened in these parts many struggles and difficulties, either in general to all men, or privately to Christians. Moreover, there were many and frequent earthquakes, so that many places were overthrown throughout Cappadocia and Pontus; even certain cities, dragged into the abyss, were swallowed up by the opening of the gaping earth. So that from this also a severe persecution arose against us of the Christian name; and this after the long peace of the previous age arose suddenly, and with its unusual evils was made more terrible for the disturbance of our people. Serenianus was then governor in our province, a bitter and terrible persecutor. But the faithful being set in this state of disturbance, and fleeing here and there for fear of the persecution, and leaving their country and passing over into other regions — for there was an opportunity of passing over, for the reason that that persecution was not over the whole world, but was local — there arose among us on a sudden a certain woman, who in a state of ecstasy announced herself as a prophetess, and acted as if filled with the Holy Ghost. And

she was so moved by the impetus of the principal demons, that for a long time she made anxious and deceived the brotherhood, accomplishing certain wonderful and portentous things, and promised that she would cause the earth to be shaken. Not that the power of the demon was so great that he could prevail to shake the earth, or to disturb the elements; but that sometimes a wicked spirit, prescient, and perceiving that there will be an earthquake, pretends that he will do what he sees will happen. By these lies and boastings he had so subdued the minds of individuals, that they obeyed him and followed wherever he commanded and led. He would also make that woman walk in the keen winter with bare feet over frozen snow, and not to be troubled or hurt in any degree by that walking. Moreover, she would say that she was hurrying to Judea and to Jerusalem, feigning as if she had come thence. Here also she deceived one of the presbyters, a countryman, and another, a deacon, so that they had intercourse with that same woman, which was shortly afterwards detected. For on a sudden there appeared unto her one of the exorcists, a man approved and always of good conversation in respect of religious discipline; who, stimulated by the exhortation also of very many brethren who were themselves strong and praiseworthy in the faith, raised himself up against that wicked spirit to overcome it; which moreover, by its subtle fallacy, had predicted this a little while before, that a certain adverse and unbelieving tempter would come. Yet that exorcist, inspired by God's grace, bravely resisted, and showed that that which was before thought holy, was indeed a most wicked spirit. But that woman, who previously by wiles and deceitfulness of the demon was attempting many things for the deceiving of the faithful, among other things by which she had deceived many, also had frequently dared this; to pretend that with an invocation not to be contemned she sanctified bread and celebrated the Eucharist, and to offer sacrifice to the Lord, not without the sacrament of the accustomed utterance; and also to baptize many, making use of the usual and lawful words of interrogation, that nothing might seem to be different from the ecclesiastical rule.

11\.. What, then, shall we say about the baptism of this woman, by which a most wicked demon baptized through means of a woman? Do Stephen and they who agree with him approve of this also especially when neither the symbol of the Trinity nor the legitimate and ecclesiastical interrogatory were wanting to her? Can it be believed that either remission of sins was given, or the regeneration of the saving layer duly completed, when all things, although after the image of truth, yet were done by a demon? Unless, perchance, they who defend the baptism of heretics contend that the demon also conferred the grace of baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Among them, no doubt, there is the same error— it is the very deceitfulness of devils, since among them the Holy Spirit is not at all.

12\.. Moreover, what is the meaning of that which Stephen would assert, that the presence and holiness of Christ is with those who are baptized among heretics? For if the apostle does not speak falsely when he says, As many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, Galatians 3:27 certainly he who has been baptized among them into Christ, has put on Christ. But if he has put on Christ, he might also receive the Holy Ghost, who was sent by Christ, and hands are vainly laid upon him who comes to us for the reception of the Spirit; unless, perhaps, he has _not_ put on the Spirit from Christ, so that Christ indeed may be with heretics, but the Holy Spirit not be with them.

13\.. But let us briefly run through the other matters also, which were spoken of by you abundantly and most fully, especially as Rogatianus, our well-beloved deacon, is hurrying to you. For it follows that

they must be asked by us, when they defend heretics, whether their baptism is carnal or spiritual. For if it is carnal, they differ in no respect from the baptism of the Jews, which they use in such a manner that in it, as if in a common and vulgar laver, only external filth is washed away. But if it is spiritual, how can baptism be spiritual among those among whom there is no Holy Spirit? And thus the water wherewith they are washed is to them only a carnal washing, not a sacrament of baptism.

14\ But if the baptism of heretics can have the regeneration of the second birth, those who are baptized among them must be counted not heretics, but children of God. For the second birth, which occurs in baptism, begets sons of God. But if the spouse of Christ is one, which is the Catholic Church, it is she herself who alone bears sons of God. For there are not many spouses of Christ, since the apostle says, I have espoused you, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ; 2 Corinthians 11:2 and, Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own people, for the King has greatly desired your beauty; and, Come with me, my spouse, from Lebanon; you shall come, and shall pass over from the source of your faith; Song of Songs 4:8 and, I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse. Song of Songs 5:1 We see that one person is everywhere set forward, because also the spouse is one. But the synagogue of heretics is not one with us, because the spouse is not an adulteress and a harlot. Whence also she cannot bear children of God; unless, as appears to Stephen, heresy indeed brings them forth and exposes them, while the Church takes them up when exposed, and nourishes those for her own whom she has not born, although she cannot be the mother of strange children. And therefore Christ our Lord, setting forth that His spouse is one, and declaring the sacrament of His unity, says, He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters. Luke 11:23 For if Christ is with us, but the heretics are not with us, certainly the heretics are in opposition to Christ; and if we gather with Christ, but the heretics do not gather with us, doubtless they scatter.

15\ But neither must we pass over what has been necessarily remarked by you, that the Church, according to the Song of Songs, is a garden enclosed, and a fountain sealed, a paradise with the fruit of apples. Song of Songs 4:12-13 They who have never entered into this garden, and have not seen the paradise planted by God the Creator, how shall they be able to afford to another the bring water of the saving lava from the fountain which is enclosed within, and sealed with a divine seal? And as the Ark of Noah was nothing else than the sacrament of the Church of Christ, which then, when all without were perishing, kept those only safe who were within the ark, we are manifestly instructed to look to the unity of the Church. Even as also the Apostle Peter laid down, saying, Thus also shall baptism in like manner make you safe; 1 Peter 3:21 showing that as they who were not in the ark with Noah not only were not purged and saved by water, but at once perished in that deluge; so now also, whoever are not in the Church with Christ will perish outside, unless they are converted by penitence to the only and saving lava of the Church.

16\ But what is the greatness of his error, and what the depth of his blindness, who says that remission of sins can be granted in the synagogues of heretics, and does not abide on the foundation of the one Church which was once based by Christ upon the rock, may be perceived from this, that Christ said to Peter alone, Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:19 And again, in the Gospel, when Christ breathed on the apostles alone, saying, Receive the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins you remit they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins you retain they are retained. Therefore the power of remitting sins was given to the apostles, and to the churches which they, sent by Christ, established, and to the bishops who succeeded to them by vicarious ordination. But the enemies of the one Catholic Church in which we are, and the adversaries of us who have succeeded the apostles, asserting for themselves, in opposition to us, unlawful priesthoods, and setting up profane altars, what else are they than Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, profane with a like wickedness, and about to suffer the same punishments which they did, as well as those who agree with them, just as their partners and abettors perished with a like death to theirs?

17\ And in this respect I am justly indignant at this so open and manifest folly of Stephen, that he who so boasts of the place of his episcopate, and contends that he holds the succession from Peter, on whom the foundations of the Church were laid, should introduce many other rocks and establish new buildings of many churches; maintaining that there is baptism in them by his authority. For they who are baptized, doubtless, fill up the number of the Church. But he who approves their baptism maintains, of those baptized, that the Church is also with them. Nor does he understand that the truth of the Christian Rock is overshadowed, and in some measure abolished, by him when he thus betrays and deserts unity. The apostle acknowledges that the Jews, although blinded by ignorance, and bound by the grossest wickedness, have yet a zeal for God. Stephen, who announces that he holds by succession the throne of Peter, is stirred with no zeal against heretics, when he concedes to them, not a moderate, but the very greatest power of grace: so far as to say and assert that, by the sacrament of baptism, the filth of the old man is washed away by them, that they pardon the former mortal sins, that they make sons of God by heavenly regeneration, and renew to eternal life by the sanctification of the divine layer. He who concedes and gives up to heretics in this way the great and heavenly gifts of the Church, what else does he do but communicate with them for whom he maintains and claims so much grace? And now he hesitates in vain to consent to them, and to be a partaker with them in other matters also, to meet together with them, and equally with them to mingle their prayers, and appoint a common altar and sacrifice.

18\ But, says he, the name of Christ is of great advantage to faith and the sanctification of baptism; so that whosoever is anywhere so-ever baptized in the name of Christ, immediately obtains the grace of Christ: although this position may be briefly met and answered, that if baptism without in the name of Christ availed for the cleansing of man; in the name of the same Christ, the imposition of hands might avail also for the reception of the Holy Spirit; and the other things also which are done among heretics will begin to seem just and lawful when they are done in the name of Christ; as you have maintained in your letter that the name of Christ could be of no avail except in the Church alone, to which alone Christ has conceded the power of heavenly grace.

19\ But with respect to the refutation of custom which they seem to oppose to the truth, who is so foolish as to prefer custom to truth, or when he sees the light, not to forsake the darkness?— unless most ancient custom in any respect avail the Jews, upon the advent of Christ, that is, the Truth, in remaining in their old usage, and forsaking the new way of truth. And this indeed you Africans are able to say against Stephen, that when you knew the truth you forsook the error of custom. But we join custom to truth, and to the Romans' custom we oppose custom, but the custom of truth; holding from the beginning that which was delivered by Christ and the apostles. Nor do we remember that this at any time began among us, since it has always been observed here, that we knew none but one Church of God, and accounted no baptism holy except that of the holy Church. Certainly, since some doubted about the baptism of those who, although they receive the new prophets, yet appear to recognise the same Father and Son with us; very many of us meeting together in Iconium very carefully examined the matter, and we decided that every baptism was altogether to be rejected which is arranged for without the Church.

20\ But to what they allege and say on behalf of the heretics, that the apostle said, Whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, Philippians 1:18 it is idle for us to reply; when it is manifest that the apostle, in his epistle wherein he said this, made mention neither of heretics nor of baptism of heretics, but spoke of brethren only, whether as perfidiously speaking in agreement with himself, or as persevering in sincere faith; nor is it needful to discuss this in a long argument, but it is sufficient to read the epistle itself, and to gather from the apostle himself what the apostle said.

21\ What then, say they, will become of those who, coming from the heretics, have been received without the baptism of the Church? If they have departed this life, they are reckoned in the number of those who have been catechumens indeed among us, but have died before they were baptized — no trifling advantage of truth and faith, to which they had attained by forsaking error, although, being prevented by death, they had not gained the consummation of grace. But they who still abide in life should be baptized with the baptism of the Church, that they may obtain remission of sins, lest by the presumption of others they remain in their old error, and die without the completion of grace. But what a crime is theirs on the one hand who receive, or on the other, theirs who are received, that their foulness not being washed away by the laver of the Church, nor their sins put away, communion being rashly seized, they touch the body and blood of the Lord, although it is written, Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord! 1 Corinthians 11:27

22\ We have judged, that those also whom they, who had formerly been bishops in the Catholic Church, and afterwards had assumed to themselves the power of clerical ordination, had baptized, are to be regarded as not baptized. And this is observed among us, that whosoever dipped by them come to us are baptized among us as strangers and having obtained nothing, with the only and true baptism of the Catholic Church, and obtain the regeneration of the laver of life. And yet there is a great difference between him who unwillingly and constrained by the necessity of persecution has given way, and him who with a profane will boldly rebels against the Church, or with impious voice blasphemes against the Father and God of Christ and the Creator of the whole world. And Stephen is not ashamed to assert

and to say that remission of sins can be granted by those who are themselves set fast in all kinds of sins, as if in the house of death there could be the layer of salvation.

23\.. What, then, is to be made of what is written, Abstain from strange water, and drink not from a strange fountain, if, leaving the sealed fountain of the Church, you take up strange water for your own, and pollute the Church with unhallowed fountains? For when you communicate with the baptism of heretics, what else do you do than drink from their slough and mud; and while you yourself are purged with the Church's sanctification, you become befouled with the contact of the filth of others? And do you not fear the judgment of God when you are giving testimony to heretics in opposition to the Church, although it is written, A false witness shall not be unpunished? But indeed you are worse than all heretics. For when many, as soon as their error is known, come over to you from them that they may receive the true light of the Church, you assist the errors of those who come, and, obscuring the light of ecclesiastical truth, you heap up the darkness of the heretical night; and although they confess that they are in sins, and have no grace, and therefore come to the Church, you take away from them remission of sins, which is given in baptism, by saying that they are already baptized and have obtained the grace of the Church outside the Church, and you do not perceive that their souls will be required at your hands when the day of judgment shall come, for having denied to the thirsting the drink of the Church, and having been the occasion of death to those that were desirous of living. And, after all this, you are indignant!

24\.. Consider with what want of judgment you dare to blame those who strive for the truth against falsehood. For who ought more justly to be indignant against the other?— whether he who supports God's enemies, or he who, in opposition to him who supports God's enemies, unites with us on behalf of the truth of the Church? — except that it is plain that the ignorant are also excited and angry, because by the want of counsel and discourse they are easily turned to wrath; so that of none more than of you does divine Scripture say, A wrathful man stirs up strifes, and a furious man heaps up sins. Proverbs 29:22 For what strifes and dissensions have you stirred up throughout the churches of the whole world! Moreover, how great sin have you heaped up for yourself, when you cut yourself off from so many flocks! For it is yourself that you have cut off. Do not deceive yourself, since he is really the schismatic who has made himself an apostate from the communion of ecclesiastical unity. For while you think that all may be excommunicated by you, you have excommunicated yourself alone from all; and not even the precepts of an apostle have been able to mould you to the rule of truth and peace, although he warned, and said, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.

25\.. How carefully has Stephen fulfilled these salutary commands and warnings of the apostle, keeping in the first place lowliness of mind and meekness! For what is more lowly or meek than to have disagreed with so many bishops throughout the whole world, breaking peace with each one of them in various kinds of discord: at one time with the eastern churches, as we are sure you know; at another time with yon who are in the south, from whom he received bishops as messengers sufficiently patiently and meekly not to receive them even to the speech of an ordinary conference; and even more, so mindful of love and charity as to command the entire fraternity, that no one should receive them into his house, so that not only peace and communion, but also a shelter and entertainment, were denied to them when they came! This is to have kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, to cut himself off from the unity of love, and to make himself a stranger in all respects from his brethren, and to rebel against the sacrament and the faith with the madness of contumacious discord! With such a man can there be one Spirit and one body, in whom perchance there is not even one mind, so slippery, and shifting, and uncertain is it?

26\.. But as far as he is concerned, let us leave him; let us rather deal with that concerning which there is the greatest question. They who contend that persons baptized among the heretics ought to be received as if they had obtained the grace of lawful baptism, say that baptism is one and the same to them and to us, and differs in no respect. But what says the Apostle Paul? One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. Ephesians 4:5-6 If the baptism of heretics be one and the same with ours, without doubt their faith also is one; but if our faith is one, assuredly also we have one Lord: if there is one Lord, it follows that we say that He is one. But if this unity which cannot be separated and divided at all, is itself also among heretics, why do we contend any more? Why do we call them heretics and not Christians? Moreover, since we and heretics have not one God, nor one Lord, nor one Church, nor one faith, nor even one Spirit, nor one body, it is manifest that neither can baptism be common to us with heretics, since between us there is nothing at all in common. And yet Stephen is not ashamed to afford patronage to such in opposition to the Church, and for the sake of maintaining heretics to divide the brotherhood and in addition, to call Cyprian a false Christ and a false apostle, and a deceitful worker. And he, conscious that all these characters are in himself, has been in advance of you, by falsely objecting to another those things which he himself ought deservedly to hear. We all bid you, for all our sakes, with all the bishops who are in Africa, and all the clergy, and all the brotherhood, farewell; that, constantly of one mind, and thinking the same thing, we may find you united with us even though afar off.

Source: Translated by Robert Ernest Wallis.

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