

Letter To Cyprian of Carthage

Synopsis — *Cornelius informs Cyprian of the solemn return of the confessors to the church, and describes it.*

1. Cornelius to Cyprian his brother, greeting. In proportion to the solicitude and anxiety that we sustained in respect of those confessors who had been circumvented and almost deceived and alienated from the Church by the craft and malice of that wily and subtle man, was the joy with which we were affected, and the thanks which we gave to Almighty God and to our Lord Christ, when they, acknowledging their error, and perceiving the poisoned cunning of the malignant man, as if of a serpent, came back, as they with one heart profess, with singleness of will to the Church from which they had gone forth. And first, indeed, our brethren of approved faith, loving peace and desiring unity, announced that the swelling pride of these men was already soothed; yet there was no fitting assurance to induce us easily to believe that they were thoroughly changed. But afterwards, Urbanus and Sidonius the confessors came to our presbyters, affirming that Maximus the confessor and presbyter, equally with themselves, desired to return into the Church; but since many things had preceded this which they had contrived, of which you also have been made aware from our co-bishops and from my letters, so that faith could not hastily be reposed in them, we determined to hear from their own mouth and confession those things which they had sent by the messengers. And when they came, and were required by the presbyters to give an account of what they had done, and were charged with having very lately repeatedly sent letters full of calumnies and reproaches, in their name, through all the churches, and had disturbed nearly all the churches; they affirmed that they had been deceived, and that they had not known what was in those letters; that only through being misled they had also committed schismatical acts, and been the authors of heresy, so that they suffered hands to be imposed on him as if upon a bishop. And when these and other matters had been charged upon them, they entreated that they might be done away and altogether discharged from memory.² The whole of this transaction therefore being brought before me, I decided that the presbytery should be brought together; (for there were present five bishops, who were also present today;) so that by well-grounded counsel it might be determined with the consent of all what ought to be observed in respect of their persons. And that you may know the feeling of all, and the advice of each one, I decided also to bring to your knowledge our various opinions, which you will read subjoined. When these things were done, Maximus, Urbanus, Sidonius, and several brethren who had joined themselves to them, came to the presbytery, desiring with earnest prayers that what had been done before might fall into oblivion, and no mention might be made of it; and promising that henceforth, as though nothing had been either done or said, all things on both sides being forgiven, they would now exhibit to God a heart clean and pure, following the evangelical word which says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” What remained was, that the people should be informed of all this proceeding, that they might see those very men established in the Church whom they had long seen and mourned as wanderers and scattered. Their will being known, a great concourse of the brotherhood was assembled. There was one voice from all, giving thanks to God; all were expressing the joy of their heart by tears, embracing them as if they had this day been set free from the penalty of the dungeon. And to quote their very own words, — “We,” they say, “know that Cornelius is bishop of the most holy Catholic Church elected by Almighty God, and by Christ our Lord. We confess our error; we have suffered imposture; we were deceived by captious perfidy and loquacity. For although we seemed, as it were, to have held a kind of communion with a man who was a schismatic and a heretic, yet our mind was always sincere in the Church. For we are not ignorant that there is one God; that there is one Christ the Lord whom we have confessed, and one Holy Spirit; and that in the Catholic Church there ought to be one bishop.” Were we not rightly induced by that confession of theirs, to allow that what they had confessed before the power of the world they might approve when established in the Church? Wherefore we bade Maximus the presbyter to take his own place; the rest we received with great approbation of the people. But we remitted all things to Almighty God, in whose power all things are reserved.³ These things therefore, brother, written to you in the same hour, at the same moment, we have transmitted; and I have sent away at once Nicephorus the acolyte, hastening to descend to embarkation, that so, no delay being made, you might, as if you had been present among that clergy and in that assembly of people, give thanks to Almighty God and to Christ our Lord. But we believe — nay, we confide in it for certain — that the others also who have been ranged in this error will shortly return into the Church when they see their leaders acting with us. I think, brother, that you ought to send these letters also to the other churches, that all may know that the craft and prevarication of this schismatic and heretic are from day to day being reduced to nothing. Farewell, dearest brother.

(Cyprian of Carthage's Letters, Letter 45)

Letter To Cyprian of Carthage

Synopsis — *Cornelius gives Cyprian an account of the faction of Novatian.*

Cornelius to Cyprian his brother, greeting. That nothing might be wanting to the future punishment of this wretched man, when cast down by the powers of God, (on the expulsion by you of Maximus, and Longinus, and Machaeus;) he has risen again; and, as I intimated in my former letter which I sent to you by Augendus the confessor, I think that Nicostratus, and Novatus, and Evaristus, and Primus, and Dionysius, have already come thither. Therefore let care be taken that it be made known to all our co-bishops and brethren, that Nicostratus is accused of many crimes, and that not only has he committed frauds and plunders on his secular patroness, whose affairs he managed; but, moreover (which is reserved to him for a perpetual punishment), he has abstracted no small deposits of the Church; that Evaristus has been the author of a schism; and that Zetus has been appointed bishop in his room, and his successor to the people over whom he had previously presided. But he contrived greater and worse things by his malice and insatiable wickedness than those which he was then always practicing among his own people; so that you may know what kind of leaders and protectors that schismatic and heretic constantly had joined to his side. I bid you, dearest brother, ever heartily farewell.

(Cyprian of Carthage's Letters, Letter 47)