

OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

St Cyprian

Treatise V: On the Unity of the Church

TRANSLATED BY J. F. T. PRINCE

TO Peter, these things spake the Lord in prophecy and command: Thou art Peter and upon this Rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it: Feed thou my sheep: As my Father sent me, so I send you. Thus upon Unity, was the beginning made and the words fulfilled of the Song of Songs where, in the Person of Christ, the Holy Spirit declared: My Dove, my spotless one is but one. She is the only child of her Mother, the Chosen of her that bare her.

If a man, then, stands not by this Unity of the Church, thinks he to hold the Faith? Can he who strives against the Church be yet within it? Even so taught the Apostle Paul: There is One Body and One Spirit even as ye are called in One Hope of your calling: One Lord, One Faith. Let none then deceive the Brotherhood by falsehood, nor corrupt the integrity of our Faith by treachery and faithlessness. For the Church is One though she be spread abroad, ever increasing with the multitude of her children. As the sun hath many rays but one light; as the tree hath boughs divers and many, yet one strength from its root; or as a hundred streams abound with the waters of a single source, so is the Church One. Cut off a ray of the Sun, and the ray is no more, a branch from the tree and it perisheth; shut off the river from its source and the remnant is rank and must even dry up; so too the Church with divine light puts forth her beams over all places, yet loses not the unity of the flame. To all she gives, and all manner are her gifts; yet she is the One Mother abundant in her fruit.

For it is of her womb that we are born, of her milk that we are nourished, and with her breath are we quickened. She cannot be adulterate, for she is the Spouse of Christ. She is chaste and hath but one home; guarded is the sanctity of her chamber. She is the

Warden of our souls; she it is who appoints unto the kingdom the children she hath borne. He who chooses another, chooses an adulteress; he is estranged from the promise of his home. He who leaves the One Church is an outcast and an alien. He cannot have God for his Father who refuses the Church for his Mother; and moreover if anyone break the peace and the concord of his home which is with Christ, he is the enemy of Christ. 'I and the the Father are One: He who is not with me is against me'. He who gathers elsewhere but in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ.

Of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost it is written: 'These three are one. Does any man then dare to think that such unity, proceeding from the immutable oneness of God, cohering in heavenly sacrament, can admit of sundering in the Church; that the very Bride can be rent asunder by the mere warring of men's wills?

Of the Coat of Christ what saith the Scriptures? 'But for the coat because it was not sewed, but woven from the top throughout, they said one to another: Let us not rend it, but let us cast lots as to whose it shall be.' How much then is it certified that the Body of Christ cannot be severed, though it be mocked and crucified. He cannot wear Christ's garments who would divide the Church: he cannot be of the true Body, if the oneness of that body he own not. And lest it be beyond the frailty of human understanding to believe a thing so marvellous, Christ himself hath prophesied, 'And there shall be one Flock and one Shepherd'. Thus too the Apostle Paul exhorted the brethren that they be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment: forbearing one another in love: endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of Peace. And the blessed Apostle John says of them that deserted: 'They went forth from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, surely they would not have left us'. For it is the hollow tree that the wind and the storms overthrow, and the chaff that flies hither and thither and being worthless is accounted no loss. Nevertheless, these things are permitted that the power of choice be proven, and the will of man be shown to be free. But the discrimination of truth is the test of our hearts.