

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382  
71 (2), pp. 141-163, 2017

# The Unity of the Church according to St. Cyprian of Carthage

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## Abstract

St. Cyprian of Carthage (200/210-258), an eminent bishop, proving a state of the art ecclesiastic personality, was never nailed down by pagans, heretics or schismatic characters. All his life was a continuous struggle for the Unity of the Church as his most valuable asset, emerging from his inner strength in fulfilling his ideal. The Holy Father brings forth the bishop's centripetal role in keeping the ecclesial unity altogether. Whoever is not in communion with the bishop will definitely miss the communion with the Church of Christ. Meanwhile, the bishop who makes his way out from the harmony and communion with fellow bishops, he will be left aside the unity of the Church. Bishops should be entangled in the law of love, understanding and fellowship.

Local Churches are the branches belonging to one and the same tree, the Church universal. Same as the sunrays are many but the light is one, or the branches of a tree are many but the power holding them together is one, same as the rivers flowing from one spring are many but the source or mother spring is one, the same the local or regional Churches are many but they build together the Church universal, the Body of Christ. St. Cyprian of Carthage compares the universal Church to the nonwoven robe of Christ. There is no redemption besides the Church of Christ, mother of all of us. One can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.

According to St. Cyprian of Carthage, the Church lies on several fundamentals:

Christological, where the Church is the Body of Christ; Pneumatological, where the unity of Church relies in the Holy Spirit; Trinitarian, where the oneness of the Persons of the Holy Trinity shapes the model of the ecclesial unity; Eucharistic where the holy communion is the main liaison to the Church oneness; episcopal, where the communion and fellowship among bishops belonging to local Churches confers the universal Church unity and not least, the love and harmony among the Church members.

### Keywords

God, St. Cyprian of Carthage, Church, bishop, Church unity, heresy, schism, apostasy

## I. Introduction

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed symbol, where the whole dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church is concentrated, heralds the main traits or attributes of the Church: unity, holiness, catholicity or universality, and apostolicity<sup>1</sup>. Within the present study we will attempt to emphasize the first attribute of the Church in St. Cyprian of Carthage's vision, namely its unity. While in ancient times the declared enemies of Christianity, polytheism and persecutions, storming throughout the Roman Empire, had no success in bringing the Church down to pieces, Its insider enemies, disguised in heresies and schisms, corroded Its unity, making Christ the Savior's words come true: "For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Messiah!" and they will lead many astray" (Matthew 24, 5-12), sowing havoc among Christians.

Both Holy Scripture as well as the Holy Fathers bring forth the importance of the Church unity, insisting in keeping it altogether. "It has been demonstrated the oneness of the Church unity, meaning one true Church rising in the ocean of settlements. Besides, the Church is unitary, for It builds an organic whole inside its essence and structure."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Claude Larchet, *Biserica, Trupul lui Hristos. Natura și structura Bisericii*, vol. I, trad. Marinela Bojin, Editura Sophia, București, 2013, p. 25. These attributes proved essential for the Church as Vladimir Lossky remarks: "we understand or at least softly feel in profoundness the fact that if we deprive the Church of any of these attributes, name it would cease to exist being a Church" and "only these four traits consent confessed in the *Creed* express Its fulness in its being" (Vladimir Lossky, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 163).

<sup>2</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Isidor Todoran, *Unitatea Bisericii în perspectiva ecumenistă*, în "Ortodoxia", nr. 3/1973, p. 339.

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As St. Cyprian of Carthage remarks, Church is a universal living oneness that will never be torn apart by schisms of Christian severance<sup>3</sup>, therefore, would be more appropriate to speak about the disruption of the seen unity of the Church, the Christian unity.<sup>4</sup>

**II. The Unity of the Church in the New Testament**

Jesus Christ the Savior requires from all brethren who wish to enter “His Church” (Matthew 18, 20) to deny themselves, to take their cross and follow Him (Luke 9, 23). Aware of human nature weakness, Lord Jesus Christ asks from His Father in the hierarchal prayer “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in Me and I am in You, may they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given Me I have given them, so that they may be one, as We are One” (John 17, 21-22).

St. Paul the Apostle substantiated the oneness of the Church on the oneness of the body of Christ, the “oneness of the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 4, 5-6). The oneness of the body of Christ rests in His members, the Christians. (Ephesians 5, 20; Romans 12, 5; I Corinthians 6, 15.12.27). Facing the dissensions inside the Church of Corinth, St. Paul the Apostle brings forth the idea that Lord Christ is inseparable:

“Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in consent and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, «I belong to Paul», or «I belong to Apollos», or «I belong to Cephas», or «I belong to Christ” (I Corinthians 1, 10-13).

The Church cannot be divided because is the Body of Christ, as Christ is One inseparable body, so is the Church, the mystic Body of Christ.<sup>5</sup> St.

<sup>3</sup> Diac. Ion Bria, *Aspecte dogmatice ale unirii Bisericii creștine*, în “Studii Teologice”, nr. 1-2/1968, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> I. Todoran, *Unitatea Bisericii ...*, p. 342.

<sup>5</sup> St. Justin Popovich writes in this matter: “According to her theanthropic nature, the Church is one and unique, just as Christ the God-man is one and unique. Hence, a division, a splitting up of the Church is ontologically and essentially impossible. A

Paul the Apostle reiterates crystal clear in his *Epistle I to Corinthians* that the unity of the Church has a Christological fundament and a Pnevmatological one as well:

“And there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (I Corinthians 12, 5-13)

We depict from the above text the transparency of the Christologic and pnevmatologic tight dependence. Furthermore, we dare to speak about a Trinitarian layer, as the person of the Father is mentioned too and the inundating spirit at work in the Church Christians is shared with the persons of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Apostles applied this principles through their love and prayers, this way staying in oneness by helping each other, building the foundation of primordial Christianity where the oneness of the Church radiated in the oneness of faith and cult, evidencing the main Unitarian canonic structure.<sup>6</sup>

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division within the Church has never occurred, nor indeed can one take place, while apostasy from the Church has and will continue to occur after the manner of those voluntarily fruitless branches which, having withered, fall away from the eternally living theanthropic Vine, the Lord Christ. From time to time, heretics and schismatics have cut themselves off and have fallen away from the one and indivisible Church of Christ, whereby they ceased to be members of the Church and parts of her theanthropic body.” (Archimandrite Iustin Popovici, *Dogmatique de l’Eglise orthodoxe*, t. IV, *L’Eglise commen mystere du Christ*, Lausanne, 1997, p. 181).

<sup>6</sup> I. Todoran, *Unitatea Bisericii...*, p. 339.

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It was difficult in those times to preserve the oneness of the Spirit and the bond of love, many believers finding easier to deal with the refinement of human wisdom, so facile and attractive. The Church found itself suddenly in position of retaliating to these lost heretics, deciding to excommunicate them as unworthy.

The Apostolic Fathers and the apologists of the Church, among whom St. Cyprian of Carthage occupies an important position, made impressive efforts to convince their believers of truth in Christianity, protecting them from falling into heresy and schism, this being the only way of keeping the unity of the Church altogether.

*Didachia*, also known as the “*Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*”, confesses the oneness of the Church: “As this over mountains scattered broken bread when gathered, is assembled into one piece, so bring Thy Church from the corners of the world in Thy Kingdom.”<sup>7</sup> The oneness of the Church is preserved through the Eucharistic communion from the same Chalice.

St. Clement of Rome wrote the *Epistle I to Corinthians* to put an end to the enmities radiating from this local Church generated by a group of teenagers, not willing to submit the canonic hierarchy. Young Corinthians' lack of discipline and rebellion left a strong print on the community and unity of the Corinthian Church.<sup>8</sup> The Holy Father admonishes the Corinthians for their quarrels, angers, enmities and fights with each other, saying: “Have we not one God, one Christ and one Spirit of grace that was shed upon us? And is there not one calling in Christ? Wherefore do we tear and rend asunder the members of Christ, and stir up factions against our own body, and reach such a pitch of folly, as to forget that we are members one of another? (...) Your division hath perverted many; it hath

<sup>7</sup> *Învățătură a celor Doisprezece Apostoli*, IX, in “*Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*”, col. “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești” (abr. PSB), vol. I, trad. Pr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1979, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Drd. Teodor-Daniil Stoienescu, *Aspecte dogmatice în gândirea Părinților Apostolici*, in “*Studia Doctoralia*”, anul 1, nr. 1, 2016, Editura Universității “Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, p. 276.

brought many to despair, many to doubting, and all of us to sorrow. And your sedition still continue.”<sup>9</sup>

St. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, an apostolic man known as Ignatius Teophorus, is also a central figure in respect to the teaching on the unity of the Church. He sets forth an original ecclesiological doctrine which influenced the whole patristic ecclesiology. He is also responsible for using the first time the Greek word *katholikos* (καθολικός), meaning “universal”, “complete” and “whole” to describe the “Church universal”<sup>10</sup>. St. Ignatius Teophorus advises Christians from Asia Minor to stay close to the Church, next to their bishops, around one Altar, warning those following the one who tear and rend asunder the Church, that they will never inherit the Kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> The unity of the Church is fulfilled both through hierarchy and the Eucharistic communion. “Therefore give heed to keep one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup unto union with His blood. There is one altar, as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants; that whatsoever you do, you may do according unto God.”<sup>12</sup>

In St. Ignatius’ concept, the Body and the Eucharistic Blood, sharing from the same Chalice, along with the hierarchy confers the Church complete unity. Church implies Oneness because God is One and His Oneness is the symbol that rules in the Church.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the oneness of the Holy Trinity is a model for the oneness of the Church.

Church oneness was essential to the apostolic Fathers, but it turned vital for the Fathers and scribes of the Church to follow, facing a tide of heresies and schisms threatening the tranquility and unity of the Church of Christ. In the text to follow, we will bring forth the important role St. Justin the Martyr, St. Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Clement of Alexandria, the Church scribe, played for the unity of the Church.

St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher (100-165) let us know that the high Church bears no other name than Christ’s name, while the heretics and schismatics, even if they come up in the name of Christ, they carry with them the names of their teachers, initiators of heresies: Marcians, Valentines, Basilidians and Saturnilians. The Holy Father tells us that only

<sup>9</sup> Sfântul Clement Romanul, *Epistola către Corinteni*, XLVI, in col. PSB, vol. I, p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Teodor-Daniil Stoienescu, *Aspecte dogmatice...*, p. 284.

<sup>11</sup> Sfântul Ignatie Teoforul, *Epistola către Efeseni*, V, în col. PSB, vol. I, p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> Sfântul Ignatie Teoforul, *Epistola către Filadelfieni*, IV, în col. PSB, vol. I, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie*, vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1984, p. 144.

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the Church of Christ was able to keep the purity in God's teaching, and for this reason Christian believers should stay away from those preaching teachings where heresy and schism rule.

“We, the disciples of the true and pure doctrine of Jesus Christ, will be more faithful and steadfast in the hope announced by Him. For what things He predicted would take place in His name, these we do see being actually accomplished in our sight. For he said, «Many shall come in My name, clothed outwardly in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves» (Matthew 7, 15). And, «there shall be schisms and heresies» (I Corinthians 11, 18-19). And, «Beware of false prophets, who shall come to you clothed outwardly in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves» (Mark 13, 22). And, «Many false christs and false apostles shall arise, and shall deceive many of the faithful.» There are, therefore, and there were many, my friends, who, coming forward in the name of Jesus, taught both to speak and act impious and blasphemous things; and these are called by us after the name of the men from whom each doctrine and opinion had its origin. (For some in one way, others in another, teach to blaspheme the Maker of all things, and Christ, who was foretold by Him as coming, and the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, with whom we have nothing in common, since we know them to be atheists, impious, unrighteous, and sinful, and confessors of Jesus in name only, instead of worshippers of Him. Yet they style themselves Christians, just as certain among the Gentiles inscribe the name of God upon the works of their own hands, and partake in nefarious and impious rites). Some are called Marcians, and some Valentinians, and some Basilidians, and some Saturnilians, and others by other names; each called after the originator of the individual opinion, just as each one of those who consider themselves philosophers, as I said before, thinks he must bear the name of the philosophy which he follows, from the name of the father of the particular doctrine way.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sfântul Iustin Martirul și Filozoful, *Dialog cu iudeul Trifon*, 35, în col. PSB, vol II, trad. Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Pr. Prof. Olimp Căciulă, Pr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1980, pp. 129-130.

St. Irinaeus of Lyons (130/140-202) is another great fighter for the unity of Christ's Church. Next to St. Ignatius Theophorus and St. Cyprian of Carthage he is considered the Church unity's theologian, struggling for peace and cohesion among Christians. Due to his firm attitude to keep the Church together, he was called the "peace maker", as Eusebius of Caesarea, historian of the Church, tells us.<sup>15</sup> St. Irinaeus of Lyons, considered as the most important theologian of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, is the "father of the Orthodox dogmatics"<sup>16</sup>, he dominantly insists on oneness of the Spirit, Tradition and faith, advising believers to listen to the Church priests as the followers of the Holy Apostles. Wherever the Church is, the Holy Spirit of God is present. The Church is the guardian angel of believer's faith spreading it worldwide. The Holy Father reiterates that the worldwide spread Churches differentiated in traditions and languages stay in one Church, the Church where the Holy Apostles confess one and the same faith, keeping its flame alive through the apostolic tradition transcending the complexity of traditions. St. Irinaeus of Lyons say:

"Once the Church has received this teaching and faith, even if spread around the world, carefully kept it in one piece under one roof. The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common (Acts 4, 32). The Church preaches in harmony with the Holy Apostles in one voice. Even if languages are mixed around the world, Tradition of the Church is one and the same. Even the German Churches have no other faith or Tradition, nor the Iberians, Easter, Egyptian or Libyan Churches, nor even other Churches found on mid continents. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1,5) so is the truth spreading around the world, enlightening everyone who comes in the world (John 1,9) to come to the knowledge of truth (I Timothy 2, 4). Not even the most skilled Church Foresitter in preaching the word of God will ever deviate from

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<sup>15</sup> Eusebius de Caesarea, *Istoria bisericească*, cartea a cincea, XXIV, 18, în col. PSB, vol. XIII, trad. Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 516.

<sup>16</sup> Berthold Altaner, *Precis de Patrologie*, trad. Marcel Grandeloudon, Mulhouse, 1941, p. 115.



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this teaching, for a disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master (Matthew 10, 24), nor the one weak in God's word will be able to take from Tradition's richness. Faith being one and the same, he one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little (II Corinthians 8, 15; Exodus 16, 18).<sup>17</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) focuses on the same idea of unity of the Church. In his concept, one of the Church's main basic principles is the oneness of faith, because only in one faith Christians can be one with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Clement of Alexandria writes:

"It is my view that the true Church, that which is really ancient, is one (...). For from the very reason that God is one, and the Lord is one, that which is in the highest degree honorable is praised as a result of its oneness, for it is an imitation of the one first principle. In the nature of the One, then, the one Church is one (...). Therefore, in substance and idea, in origin, in preeminence, we say that the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, gathering as it does into the unity of the one faith (Ephesians 4, 13)."<sup>18</sup>

In the chapter of *Stromate*, where St. Clement of Alexandria speaks of sects and heresies, he brings in favor of unity of the Church the Oneness of God. Therefore,

"from the very reason that God is one, and the Lord one, that which is in the highest degree honorable is lauded in consequence of its singleness, being an imitation of the on first principle. In the nature of the One, then, is associated in a joint heritage the one Church, which they strive to cut asunder into many sects."<sup>19</sup>

Clement of Alexandria describes the unity of the Church as the image of the Trinitarian Oneness. There is One Father, One Word, One Virgin Mary that "I would like to name One Church".<sup>20</sup> He envisions the Christian oneness as a "spiritual symphony".<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Sfântul Irineu de Lyon, *Adversus haereses*, 3, 224, Migne, P.G. VII, col. 966 C.

<sup>18</sup> Clement Alexandrinul, *Stromates*, VII, 17, 5, SC 428, pp. 320-322.

<sup>19</sup> Clement Alexandrinul, *Stromates*, VII, 17, 4, SC 428, p. 320.

<sup>20</sup> Clement Alexandrinul, *Pedagogul*, 1, 6, 42, 1, Migne, P.G. VIII, col. 300 B-C.

<sup>21</sup> Clement Alexandrinul, *Cuvânt îndemnător către greci (Protreptic)*, 88, 2, 3; 120, 4 Migne P.G. VIII, col. 200; 241B.

### III. The Unity of the Church in St. Cyprian of Carthage' concept

#### III.1. The Unity of the Church: the central idea of St. Cyprian of Carthage's ecclesiology

The Unity of the Church is the most valuable asset of St. Cyprian of Carthage (200/210-258), breathing through the power of his theology, therefore dominating by its presence even nowadays.<sup>22</sup>

“This subject marked his whole life and struggle as bishop, plunging deep into the Biblical concept, shaping in his personal manner the ideas of his predecessors, absorbing his mind and heart in passion, crowning his death as a martyr. Besides the deep dissensions in his own Church, St. Cyprian of Carthage had to face, from the very beginning of his episcopate, the dissensions in the big Church of the West, having the wisdom, love and necessary courage to come through it. Placing himself in the middle of dismantling controversies, St. Cyprian became the defender of Church's oneness. Even if many of his adepts abandoned him, he affirmed himself as the strongest Christian leader from this side of the world. Everything he has written about the bishop, the seen symbol of the Church' oneness, was translated in reality through his death, the last chapter of his teaching where he brought himself as sacrifice in the midst of his sheep for their sake.”<sup>23</sup>

The Unity of the Church is the core of St. Cyprian of Carthage theological thinking. In a pagan world invaded by incertitude, where Christianity had a rapid spread, St. Cyprian envisions the Church as the only secure place for the mankind haunted by evil. He makes a difference between the real Church, God's fortress, a place of holiness and the deceiving sects, the terrible destructive forces of evil.<sup>24</sup>

Following his enthronement as bishop of Carthage he tried to impose "to the Church the discipline and the sobriety of presbyters and deacons,"<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie*, Sfânta Mănăstire Dervent, 1999, p. 64.

<sup>23</sup> Arhid. Prof. Dr. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei și unitatea Bisericii*, in "Altarul Banatului", nr. 10-12/1992, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> C. Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>25</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea*, 12, 1, în volumul "Scrisori", traducere Prof. Ion Diaconescu și Prof. Dr. Ovidiu Pop, Editura Sophia, București, 2011, p. 65.

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considering a sin the insubordination to the bishops one has to submit.<sup>26</sup> The Holy Father proved high appreciation on the rank of a bishop, subordination applying not only to priests, but to all the believers.<sup>27</sup> St. Cyprian considered that he was called to episcopate through the will of God, conferring him an enormous authority. As followers of the Holy Apostles, the bishops hold their authority through the iconomy of God and Christ,<sup>28</sup> and not by the free votes of their believers. His authority was contested by those five priests<sup>29</sup> opposing his anointing as a bishop, bringing with them the first schism in the Church of Carthage, followed by dissensions between those fallen and those steadfast in their belief and finally, the Pope Stephen dispute in the matter of re-baptizing the heretics.<sup>30</sup>

St. Cyprian's ecclesiology main elements root deep in his concepts about Baptism, Eucharist, penitence and priesthood, as well as in his relations with laics, clergy and fellow bishops, described in his main epistles.<sup>31</sup> We may definitely assert that his ecclesiology has an episcopalian tendency, the local Church building on the unity between the believers and their bishop who is representative for one Church only.<sup>32</sup>

According to St. Cyprian of Carthage, the Church is the heir of the Hebrew tradition, the new kingdom of God. It is the only keeper of Jesus Christ's ministry, the only tabernacle of His grace,<sup>33</sup> therefore who is not part of it, he cannot expect the promises from above to drop on him. The Church means not only clerics but laics<sup>34</sup> too, a visible universal society circumscribing both the saints and the sinners on earth.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the Church is made of "bishop, clergy and those steady in faith".<sup>36</sup> It is something one can see, real, the bishop beings Its leader who knows Its members; in Church abides the Holy Spirit, giving power to it.

<sup>26</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea*, 65, 3, p. 301.

<sup>27</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea*, 10, 8, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea*, 40, 3, p. 155.

<sup>30</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 6, 2, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 71, 1, p. 362.

<sup>34</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 27, 1, p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 51, 3, p. 186.

<sup>36</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 27, 1, p. 109.

The ones who find themselves outside the Church cannot provide the Holy Spirit for the simple reason they do not have it.<sup>37</sup> The Holy Spirit speaking through prophets descended at Pentecost over the disciples “fulfilling the grace covenant” of God.<sup>38</sup> The Church rulers use the Holy Spirit’ sword to strike the rascals when needed.<sup>39</sup>

“The true bishop has indwelt the Holy Spirit and he can offer It to the others because he is in the true Church. Therefore, he has to remain confined within the corporative Church reality and the power of the Holy Spirit, because this power only can hold one harmless against sin, evil and death, and the bishop is the catalyst of this work.”<sup>40</sup>

The essential character of the Church relies in Its unity, persistently revealed in most of St. Cyprian’s works. Therefore, according to him, “the one catholic Church is built by God in its oneness”<sup>41</sup> and “those who want to escape from the destruction of the world should gather in one home, meaning one Church.”<sup>42</sup> When speaking about the oneness of the Church and the duty of bishops to defend it, St. Cyprian places this idea among the duties of love. The oneness of the Church springs from the oneness of the Holy Trinity. For the Holy Father indeed is a continuation and a copy of the Trinitarian oneness. The Lord says: “The Father and I are one” (John 10, 30) and about the Father and the Holy Spirit is written: and This Three agree (John 5, 7). Who will believe then that the oneness emerging from divine stronghold along with the divine mysteries could be torn apart and divided by the enmity of divergent wills? The one who will not keep tight to this oneness, will not keep the law of God, the faith in the Father and Son, life and redemption”.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the Church is one as the Holy Trinity

<sup>37</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 69, 10, p. 337.

<sup>38</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre rugăciunea Domnească (De Dominica Oratio)*, 34 în col. PSB, vol. 3, trad. Prof. Nicolae Chițescu, Eliodor Constantinescu, Paul Papadopol și Prof. David Popescu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1981, p. 485.

<sup>39</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 62, 3-4, p. 276.

<sup>40</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>41</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 64, 5, p. 297.

<sup>42</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 69, 4, p. 331.

<sup>43</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice (De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate)*, 6, în col. PSB, vol. 3, pp. 438-439. Jean-Claude Larchet points out that God cannot be confessed without love, because God Himself is love. The Oneness of Trinitarian Persons relies on their common being or nature, as well as on the

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is One. Holy Apostle Paul insists on this oneness similar to the Oneness of God (Ephesians 4, 4-5). With this oneness in heart, Holy Apostle Paul teaches us: "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose" (I Corinthians 1, 10). Adding to this he says: "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4, 2-3).<sup>44</sup> The unity, peace and love are bond together in the harmony of peace and love practiced among Christians.<sup>45</sup>

St. Cyprian of Carthage envisions the episcopate function not only in its practice but also as a symbol of unity, a bond of love. It is a personal relation with its believers, reflected in Peter who received the commandment of guiding the sheep flock of Christ. This is not pure emotionalism in Peter's attitude. To love the flock of Christ and leading it means to guide and teach besides the material assistance. Believers should see in this leadership the commandments of belief emerging from love. Love is a disciplined action with no compromise, similar to the love of Christ towards the rich young man.<sup>46</sup>

When he speaks on the bishop's unity in the Holy Spirit, "magnetized in mutual harmony in the bond of unity"<sup>47</sup> this remembers us of the wording used in Ephesians 4, 2-3 where the apostle of nations brings forth the virtues preserving the unity of the Church: "By all humility and kindness, long patience in bearing each other, using every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."<sup>48</sup> This is not about a juridical but concept but the love of God flooding in abundance, strong enough to keep the prolific life of the Church altogether.

Peace and unity are two birds of a feather, flocking together in St. Cyprian of Carthage's writings. The Savior Itself has sown the peace and

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mutual love inbetween the Trinitarian Persons. The Holy Trinity reveals to us in respect to this matter as the supreme model of unity of the Church. (Jean-Claude Larchet, *Biserica, Trupul lui Hristos. Natura și structura Bisericii*, vol. I, p.32).

<sup>44</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice (De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate)*, 8, în col. PSB, vol. 3, p. 440.

<sup>45</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea 3*, p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 43.

unity in the hearts of His apostles asking from them “love and unity” at the same time.<sup>49</sup> Being happy to welcome the return of the deceived people in the heart of the Church, the Holy Father invites them to do it in “unity and peace”.<sup>50</sup> Peace goes hand in hand with love, almost the same thing for St. Cyprian of Carthage. He praises the confessors that “by peace of the Lord they obeyed the law of love and concord”.<sup>51</sup>

On many times the unity is doubled by unanimity. Christ “commanded us to have the same heart and spirit, to keep the love and affection bond uncorrupted”<sup>52</sup>, for our unity and harmony should never be torn apart whatever may come”.<sup>53</sup> The sacrifice of Christ shows us that “Christian’s unanimity is united through indissoluble tight bonds”.<sup>54</sup> Oneness, concord and unanimity are words breathing in all St. Cyprian’s letters and treaties. “Being in the same spirit and full of strength, you have given to the other brethren a high example of unanimity and patience (...). Showing how undefeated the strong hold concord could be”.<sup>55</sup>

Looking at all his work, nothing comes forth so frequently than the need, of concord between shepherds and believers or the shepherds in between them. St. Cyprian tells a Christian who dared to criticize the Church of Carthage administration, the following words:

“You should know already, that the bishop is within the Church and the Church is within the Bishop, and whoever is not with the bishop is not in the Church either and in vain praise those who are not at peace with God’s bishops, sneaking and considering themselves in unity with each other, while the one catholic (universal) Church is not divided not torn apart, but united and cemented through the bond between its bishops.”<sup>56</sup>

The unity of bishops is very important for the flock of Christ and its fulfillment. St. Cyprian appeals to the mutual benevolence of bishops. Therefore, he tells Pope Stephen the following words:

<sup>49</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 12, p. 443.

<sup>50</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 51, 4, p. 186.

<sup>51</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 51, 1, p. 185.

<sup>52</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 14, p. 444.

<sup>53</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 44, 1, p. 167.

<sup>54</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 69, 5, p. 333.

<sup>55</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 13, 2, p. 68.

<sup>56</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 69, 8, p. 335.

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“This is why, most holy brother, the numerous congregation of bishops is hold together by the cement of mutual harmony and the bond of unity, for whenever one of our college would dare to bring a heresy and separate or desolate the flock of Christ, the others come into assistance to bring, as useful and merciful shepherds, the sheep of God back in the flock.”<sup>57</sup>

To explain the mystery of the Church unity, meaning the bond between the local Churches and the Church universal, the Holy Father imagines a series of ingenuous similarities, inspired from Scripture and the reality of nature.

“Church is One, expanding in its development by encompassing the throng of believers. As many rays, there is one light, as many branches of a tree, the power is one, grounded in its roots. From one spring pours many rivers and even if they are many their origin is still there. Try to take away a ray from the sun and you will never make it, because its light is one. Tear up a branch from a tree and it will dry soon because torn apart from its tree will dry soon enough. Separate a river from its spring and will drain out too. The same is the Church of the Lord, spreading light it shrouds in Its rays all the earth, Its teachings flowing far away, but It has one head and one spring, as one mother whose spiritual sons keep on breeding. We are born from the Church, feeding with Its milk, our souls are in Its soul.”<sup>58</sup>

**III.2. The Unity of the Church and the bishop**

The unity of Church universal is based on the episcopal office one, enjoyed in the same manner by the other bishops. And, if the Church is within the bishop as the bishop is within the Church, it owes to bishop's position as the central unit of the Church's power and life. In this case, the variety of Church's life does not circumscribe its oneness, for what is derived from an origin it always keeps contact with it, hanging in its existence and consistency from its spring, the origin, always resuming to it.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea 3*, p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 5, p. 438.

<sup>59</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 45

Same as the Church, the bishop is one and inseparable. All bishops should watch over unity, for they are part of the common episcopate. "The episcopate is one, each part of which is held by each one for the whole."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the solidarity of the Church universal is based on Its bishops building Its so called senate. Bishops are followers of the apostles, former bishops themselves. "God Itself chose the apostles, the bishops and forsitters of the Church."<sup>61</sup> The Church is built on bishops, therefore St. Cyprian of Carthage interprets "You are Peter" in the following manner: "Our Lord speaks to us the in His Gospel about the commandments we have to follow and fulfil, defining the dignity of the bishop and the Church's ordinance... As all these are ordained through the divine law, I wonder how some of them insolently dared to write me in the name of the Church, as the Church is made of bishop, clergy and all those steady in faith."<sup>62</sup>

In principle, St. Cyprian of Carthage pleads for the equality of all bishops: all enjoy the same rights because all of them are successors of the apostles, all even among them. The other apostles were what Peter was, meaning they enjoyed an even share of honor and power. To St. Cyprian all foresitters belonging to local communities are "fellows", co-bishops.<sup>63</sup>

St. Cyprian confers to the bishop an independent authority in his area, except the responsibility of his ministry before God. So they write to Pope Cornelius that "it has been given to all shepherds a part of the flock to lead, in responsibility to God for their way of action".<sup>64</sup> More than this, at the Synod of Carthage of September 256, St. Cyprian utters harsh words in retaliation, standing up against Rome: "none of us can stand as the bishop of bishops, nor can he compel or terrorize his fellows to listen to him."<sup>65</sup>

Even if St. Cyprian leveraged this independence on the bishops and the episcopal synods, he tried to maintain the unity with the clergy and all believers. St. Cyprian made from the very beginning a law to take no decision without the believers found effectively in community with the Church. "I have decided (writing to priests and deacons) not to take any

<sup>60</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, p. 438.

<sup>61</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 65, 3, p. 301.

<sup>62</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 27, 1, p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 59, 14, p. 257.

<sup>65</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *De haereticorum baptisate*, Migne P.L III, col. 1092A.



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step further without your advice and consent of the people, whatever my opinion is.”<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, to preserve and consolidate the unity in the Church, the believers may interfere in judgment of those guilty, in choosing of bishops, in one word, in all the decisions of whatever importance.<sup>67</sup>

**III.3. The Oneness of the Church and the Eucharist**

The oneness of the Church manifests and spreads through the Holy Mystery of Eucharist. Looking at the Eucharist from the perspective of sacrifice, one needs the elements prefigured by Christ, the bread and the wine transfiguring in his Blood and Body. In St. Cyprian of Carthage times, some African bishops had the idea to perform the Eucharist merely pouring plain water in the chalice. The Holy Father stands up against this deviation from “the truth of Gospel and the Lord’s tradition”<sup>68</sup>.

St. Cyprian is against the habit of those sharing the Holy Communion at supper closing the doors, when it was not possible to bring together the people to participate at the Eucharist, in conformity with its truth before all fraternity<sup>69</sup>, for this cannot replace the sharing the believers need. The mixture of water and wine represents for St. Cyprian the symbol of the whole ritual in brief: the intimate insoluble unity in heart of the faithful people of God with Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>70</sup> Sharing the Holy Communion, the Church becomes what it has to be: a compact oneness in Christ,<sup>71</sup> the Eucharist becoming the Holy Mystery of believers’ embodiment in Christ, the nourishment and symbol of Oneness, the fundamental sacrament and the source of mysteries. On the other side, the Church is built through the Holy Sacraments, this is the reason the Eucharistic settlement represents and renews the Church itself: on the holy disc is symbolized the seen and the unseen Church in full. The Eucharist is named in the patristic Latin literature, as wells as by St. Cyprian of Carthage, the mystery or the sacrament of the Christian Oneness.

<sup>66</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 5, 4, p. 39.

<sup>67</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 11, 1, p. 48.

<sup>68</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 63, 1, p. 278.

<sup>69</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 13, p. 288.

<sup>70</sup> Arhid. Prof. Dr. Constantin Voicu, *Patrologie*, vol. I, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2009, p. 265.

<sup>71</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 63, 10, p. 285.

“When the Lord names his body the bread made up by the many grains bundled together, He means by this words the unity of the whole Christian nation circumscribed in Himself, and when he names it His blood, the wine mirroring in one drink from the many grapes, He means the flock made out of persons who have retrieved their unity.”<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, for St. Cyprian’s of Carthage the Eucharistic Communion is the cornerstone of the Church. “Sacramentum” clothes in many senses in St. Cyprian’s of Carthage’s vision, but what comes forth is the sense of the sacred thing (mystery, teaching, commandment). For this very reason he has no restraint in redefining the oneness of the Church as “Sacramentum”.<sup>73</sup>

Holy Apostle Paul makes reference to the mystery of Oneness too, when saying: “One Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4, 5-6).

The Unity of the Church is tightly bonded with the divine mysteries, and the mystery of oneness, meaning the bond of the indivisible coherent harmony, is suggested by the nonwoven robe of Christ.<sup>74</sup> The expression “oneness mystery” is used very often in St. Cyprian of Carthage’s writings.

#### **III.4. Heresy, Schism and Apostasy - the factors tearing apart the Unity of the Church**

St. Cyprian of Carthage sees a difference between error and heresy. He believes that error is not as serious as heresy, therefore he makes distinction between Pope Stephen’s error (considering heretics need no Baptizing when turning to the true faith) and the heresy of Novatians. The Holy Father reproaches to Pope Stephen that he commits an error when he admits the Bapsim of heretics, putting in danger, but not tearing apart, the unity of the Church. St. Cyprian never took into consideration that St. Stephan should be deposed, the same as Marcian of Arles due to his Novationism.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, the Holy Father speaks on some occasions about heresy, when, in fact, according to modern norms, he should use the word schism

<sup>72</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 69, 6, p. 334.

<sup>73</sup> C. Voicu, *Patrologie*, vol I, p. 48

<sup>74</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice* 6, 7, p. 438-439.

<sup>75</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 51.

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(Novatian i.e.). It seems that he is more troubled by the schism than the error in doctrine.<sup>76</sup>

The old Church defined the schism as a breach into the unity of the Church, which is not the same with a breach into Its teaching.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the heresy spoils the purity of faith while the schism destroys the unity of the Church.<sup>78</sup> In this sense, the Romanian patrologist, Constantin Voicu, says:

“All St. Cyprian’s epistles dealing with the Baptism of heretics seem to suggest that Stephen advocates a serious error. Conversely, St. Cyprian uses with no discrimination the notion of heretic addressing to those separating from the Church, even if they wave a theological reason or not. It seems that St. Cyprian might take into consideration that he may possible find himself in a doctrinal error, even if he is not heretic. To separate from the Church, even if you share or not an error of doctrine, means to tear apart deliberately the unity of the Church.”<sup>79</sup>

Having said this, we now reach the heart of the matter regarding the unity of the Church, Its tearing apart with the causes driving to it. Under this aspect, St. Cyprian shows that: the bishop is the source of unity in his diocese; all the authority comes from him; the wider unity of Church universal derives from the joint action of the episcopal council.<sup>80</sup>

The unity of the Church is breached by heresies and schisms. The Holy Father understands by the unity of the Church the unity of Christian community from each place adding to it the believers’ communities’ solidarity against heresy and schism.<sup>81</sup> The oneness of the Church transcends from the oneness of the Holy Trinity (Ephesians 4, 4-5), because there is “one God, one Christ, one Church, one nation of believers gathered in the bond of harmony within the solid oneness of one body”<sup>82</sup> and to break this oneness is a sin.

As the Church is one, so the episcopate is one. St. Cyprian shows to his brethren that they have to keep the unity of tepiscopate and Church. “This

<sup>76</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 51.

<sup>77</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 51.

<sup>78</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 51.

<sup>80</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 51.

<sup>81</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Biserici ecumenice*, 23, p. 450.

unity we have to preserve with determination and as bishops, foresitters of the Church, to demonstrate that the episcopate itself is unitary and indivisible.”<sup>83</sup>

For someone to be part of the Church, he has to be in communion with the bishop. Bearing this in mind, the Holy Father writes in *Letter 55* to Antonianus: “You should know that the bishop is within the Church and the Church is within the bishop and the one who is not with the bishop is not in the Church either.”<sup>84</sup> But the bishop who separates from the bishops’ council, not only he finds himself aside the Church, but loses all his privileges of a bishop, same the episcopate denying faith in times of persecutions, or running a scandalous life.<sup>85</sup>

“The unity of the Church is threatened and torn apart by heresy and schism, both odious for St. Cyprian. They are breaches in one faith and in the love the unity of the Church needs. The act of separation from the Church is an awful sin, because it means separation from Its oneness. Likewise, when St. Cyprian has determined Stephen to excommunicate the Novatians from Galia, he did it because they separated from the Church. Specific to this heretic was not as much the wrong teaching (St. Cyprian doesn’t mention it) but the arrogance, the spirit of quarrel, presumption and stubbornness. St. Cyprian points out the factious and maniac spirit of heresy and schism, opposed to the humble love, the ground of the true unity.”<sup>86</sup>

St. Cyprian of Carthage combats both heresy and schism along with the schismatic characters of his time, showing that the one separating from his community and its bishop becomes their enemy. The Holy Father says: “One who has not the Church for his mother, cannot have God for his Father”<sup>87</sup> and he adds to this: One who cannot defend the unity, cannot defend the law of God, or the faith owed to the Father and Son, his life and redemption.<sup>88</sup> The way out from the unity of the Church through heresy and schism bears negative soteriological consequences for “there is no salvation outside the Church”<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>83</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 23, p. 450.

<sup>84</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea 55*, 24, p. 214.

<sup>85</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea 55*, 24, p. 214.

<sup>86</sup> C. Constantin Voicu, *Sfântul Ciprian...*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>87</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 6, p. 438.

<sup>88</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 6, p. 438.

<sup>89</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea 73*, 21, p. 373. These words of St. Cyprian of

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With respect to the origin of heresies and schisms, St. Cyprian observes the fact they are tolerated and accepted by God on first instance, just to maintain the free choice of one's own will, so when the temptation of truth is knocking at the doors of our hearts and minds, the true faith of the tempted ones to step forth into light.<sup>90</sup>

As a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit predicted the heresies and schisms through the signs of the latter times, so the believers have been warned already.

“This evil, dear brother, has its beginning in old times. Now the plague of this evil expanded and the heretic perverting poisonous perdition and falling apart began to amplify more and more and stay in a relative balance; for the same will be at the end of the world, the Holy Spirit foretelling us through His Apostle.”<sup>91</sup>

When the Holy Father wishes to point out the heresy and schism, he doesn't hesitate to bring them at the same level, qualifying them as insanity,<sup>92</sup> both clothing in satanic origin.

“The enemy (...) invented the heresies and schisms to downfall the faith, to deviate truth and break down the unity.”<sup>93</sup> There is no schism without the germ of heresy and no heresy not to be inevitable condemned by its own principle of breaking down from the Church.<sup>94</sup>

St. Cyprian of Carthage comes in with arguments demonstrating that schisms and heresies are insidious deceives of the devil trying to shape a false Church. The heresies and schisms, deceptions of the infernal snake, prove to me more dangerous than the upfront persecutions carried out by pagans. Exposed by the coming of Christ and disoriented by the spreading

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Carthage are norms for the Orthodox Church, as one bearing the fulness of redemption grace and the strength to spread it among its believers in perspective of deification. Commenting these words, father George Florovsky reveals that „all the categorical strength and point of this aphorism lies in its tautology. Outside the Church there is no salvation, because salvation is the Church.” (Georges Florovsky, *Sobornost: the Catholicity of the Church*, in “The Church of God”, p. 53, apud. Jean-Claude Larchet, *Biserica trupul lui Hristos. Relația dintre Biserici*, vol. II, trad. Marinela Bojin, Editura Sophia, București, 2013, p. 252).

<sup>90</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 10, p. 441.

<sup>91</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 16, p. 445.

<sup>92</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 8, 1, p. 46.

<sup>93</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 3, pp. 435-436.

<sup>94</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 7, 4, p. 45.

of Gospel, the enemy retakes the attack against the Church of Christ with heresies and schisms, transfiguring in the image of the angel of light, succeeding to deceive those minds not looking for the source of truth.<sup>95</sup>

The Holy Father is severe towards the heretics, impeding believers to stay in touch with them, furthermore, from participating at their sacraments. "All those who joined the schismatics will draw the same guilt and punishment on them."<sup>96</sup> He completely rejects the union with heretics which brings a false, vain and deceitful peace.<sup>97</sup> Even so, they should not be abandoned but assisted according to the Good Samaritan parable.<sup>98</sup>

The unity of the Church was troubled during St. Cyprian of Carthage times not only by heretics and schismatics, but the Laps too (those who in terror of torments passed in apostasy, denying Christ). The Holy Father considers the apostasy from Church, meaning the heresy and schism, more harmful than the apostasy of belief in Christ.

If the heretics and schismatics combated the Church and persisted in iniquities, the ones who fell in apostasy in times of persecutions were looking for and invoking the forgiveness of the Church. The apostate harms only himself while the heretic draws many to iniquities; while the apostate falling from belief sinned once only, the heretic sins on every day.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, St. Cyprian recommends rigorous severity towards schismatics and heretics and clemency towards the penitent Laps.<sup>100</sup>

#### IV. The actuality of the subject

The unity of the Church was defended intensely throughout the patristic age, but none excepting St. Cyprian of Carthage expressed it in a more plastic manner and depth the need of this principle. Beginning with historic reality of so many schisms and heresies tearing apart the Church, the Holy Father found the right path to elevate at the level of principles governing the unity of the Church.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 3, p. 436.

<sup>96</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 69, 9, p. 336.

<sup>97</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 40, 2, p. 154.

<sup>98</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 55, 19, p. 209.

<sup>99</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 19, p. 448.

<sup>100</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea* 4, 4, p. 35.

<sup>101</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie*, vol. II, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1985, p. 136.

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The matter of the Church unity is actual nowadays. The schism of Romano-Catholic Church from the heart of the Orthodox Church in 1054, followed by the separation from the Roman-Catholic Church of a considerable part in 1517 named the Protestant Church, as well as the many “churches” or better said sects, most of them of protestant and neo-protestant origin, affect more than ever the unity of Christianity nowadays.<sup>102</sup>

For almost 1800 years the words of St. Cyprian of Carthage: “one can no longer have God for his father, who he has not the Church for his mother”<sup>103</sup> represent a call of the return of all those separated from the union and community with the Church of Christ; and the words: “there is no salvation outside the Church”<sup>104</sup>, of a profound soteriological implication, could be a serious warning for all those refusing out of pride the communion and unity with the only true Church, the Orthodox Church.

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<sup>102</sup> I. G. Coman, *Patrologie*, vol. II, p. 136.

<sup>103</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, 6, p. 438.

<sup>104</sup> Sfântul Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Scrisoarea 73*, 21, p. 373.