Letter 93 (A.D. 408)

*To Vincentius, My Brother Dearly Beloved, Augustine Sends Greeting.*

Chapter 1

1. I have received a letter which I [believe](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) to be from you to me: at least I have not thought this incredible, for the person who brought it is one whom I [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) to be a [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm), and who, I think, would not dare to impose upon me. But even though the letter may perchance not be from you, I have considered it necessary to write a reply to the author, whoever he may be. You [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) me now to be more desirous of rest, and earnest in seeking it, than when you [knew](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) me in my earlier years at [Carthage](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03385a.htm), in the lifetime of your immediate predecessor Rogatus. But we are precluded from this rest by the [Donatists](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05121a.htm), the repression and correction of whom, by the powers which are ordained of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), appears to me to be labour not in vain. For we already [rejoice](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07131b.htm) in the correction of many who hold and defend the [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) unity with such sincerity, and are so glad to have been delivered from their former [error](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05525a.htm), that we admire them with great thankfulness and pleasure. Yet these same [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm), under some indescribable bondage of custom, would in no way have thought of being changed to a better condition, had they not, under the shock of this alarm, directed their minds earnestly to the study of the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm); fearing lest, if without profit, and in vain, they suffered hard things at the hands of [men](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm), for the sake not of righteousness, but of their own obstinacy and presumption, they should afterwards receive nothing else at the hand of God than the punishment due to [wicked](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) men who despised the admonition which He so gently gave and His paternal correction; and being by such reflection made teachable, they found not in mischievous or frivolous [human](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm)fables, but in the promises of the divine books, that universal Church which they saw extending according to the promise throughout all nations: just as, on the testimony of [prophecy](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12473a.htm) in the same Scriptures, they [believed](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) without hesitation that [Christ](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm) is exalted above the heavens, though He is not seen by them in His [glory](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06585a.htm). Was it my duty to be displeased at the [salvation](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm) of these men, and to call back my colleagues from a fatherly diligence of this kind, the result of which has been, that we see many blaming their former blindness? For they see that they were blind who [believed](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) Christ to have been exalted above the heavens although they saw Him not, and yet denied that His [glory](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06585a.htm) is spread over all the earth although they saw it; whereas the [prophet](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm) has with so great plainness included both in one sentence, Be exalted, O [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), above the heavens, and Your [glory](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06585a.htm) above all the earth.

2. Wherefore, if we were so to overlook and forbear with those cruel enemies who seriously disturb our peace and quietness by manifold and grievous forms of [violence](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15446a.htm) and treachery, as that nothing at all should be contrived and done by us with a view to alarm and correct them, [truly](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) we would be rendering [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) for [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm). For if any one saw his enemy running headlong to destroy himself when he had become delirious through a dangerous fever, would he not in that case be much more [truly](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) rendering [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) for [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) if he permitted him to run on thus, than if he took measures to have him seized and bound? And yet he would at that moment appear to the other to be most vexatious, and most like an enemy, when, in [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), he had [proved](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm) himself most useful and most compassionate; although, doubtless, when health was recovered, would he express to him his gratitude with a warmth proportioned to the measure in which he had felt his refusal to indulge him in his time of phrenzy. Oh, if I could but show you how many we have even from the Circumcelliones, who are now approved [Catholics](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm), and condemn their former life, and the wretched delusion under which they [believed](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) that they were doing in behalf of the [Church of God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) whatever they did under the promptings of a restless temerity, who nevertheless would not have been brought to this soundness of judgment had they not been, as [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm) beside themselves, bound with the cords of those [laws](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm) which are distasteful to you! As to another form of most serious distemper, — that, namely, of those who had not, indeed, a boldness leading to acts of [violence](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15446a.htm), but were pressed down by a kind of inveterate sluggishness of [mind](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10321a.htm), and would say to us: What you affirm is [true](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), nothing can be said against it; but it is hard for us to leave off what we have received, by tradition from our fathers,— why should not such [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm) be shaken up in a beneficial way by a law bringing upon them inconvenience in worldly things, in order that they might rise from their lethargic sleep, and awake to the [salvation](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm) which is to be found in the unity of the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm)? How many of them, now rejoicing with us, speak bitterly of the weight with which their ruinous course formerly oppressed them, and confess that it was our duty to inflict annoyance upon them, in order to prevent them from perishing under the disease of lethargic habit, as under a fatal sleep!

3. You will say that to some these remedies are of no service. Is the art of healing, therefore, to be abandoned, because the malady of some is incurable? You look only to the case of those who are so obdurate that they refuse even such correction. Of such it is written, In vain have I smitten your children: they received no correction:[Jeremiah 2:30](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/jer002.htm#verse30) and yet I suppose that those of whom the [prophet](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm) speaks were smitten in [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm), not from [hatred](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07149b.htm). But you ought to consider also the very large number over whose [salvation](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm) we [rejoice](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07131b.htm). For if they were only made afraid, and not instructed, this might appear to be a kind of inexcusable tyranny. Again, if they were instructed only, and not made afraid, they would be with more difficulty persuaded to embrace the way of [salvation](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm), having become hardened through the inveteracy of custom: whereas many whom we [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) well, when arguments had been brought before them, and the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) made apparent by testimonies from the word of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), answered us that they desired to pass into the communion of the [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm), but were in [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) of the [violence](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15446a.htm) of worthless men, whose enmity they would incur; which [violence](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15446a.htm) they ought indeed by all means to despise when it was to be borne for righteousness' sake, and for the sake of [eternal](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05551b.htm) life. Nevertheless the weakness of such men ought not to be regarded as hopeless, but to be supported until they gain more strength. Nor may we forget what the Lord Himself said to Peter when he was yet weak: You can not follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterwards. [John 13:36](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/joh013.htm#verse36) When, however, wholesome instruction is added to means of inspiring salutary [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm), so that not only the light of [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) may dispel the darkness of [error](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05525a.htm), but the force of [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) may at the same time break the bonds of [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) custom, we are made glad, as I have said, by the [salvation](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13407a.htm) of many, who with us bless [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), and render thanks to Him, because by the fulfilment of His covenant, in which He promised that the kings of the earth should serve Christ, He has thus cured the diseased and restored health to the weak.

Chapter 2

4. Not every one who is indulgent is a friend; nor is every one an enemy who smites. Better are the wounds of a friend than the proffered kisses of an enemy. [Proverbs 27:6](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/pro027.htm#verse6) It is better with severity to [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm), than with gentleness to deceive. More good is done by taking away food from one who is hungry, if, through freedom from care as to his food, he is forgetful of righteousness, than by providing bread for one who is hungry, in order that, being thereby [bribed](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02778c.htm), he may consent to unrighteousness. He who binds the man who is in a phrenzy, and he who stirs up the man who is in a lethargy, are alike vexatious to both, and are in both cases alike prompted by [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm) for the patient. Who can [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm) us more than God does? And yet He not only give us sweet instruction, but also quickens us by salutary [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm), and this unceasingly. Often adding to the soothing remedies by which He comforts men the sharp medicine of tribulation, He afflicts with famine even the [pious](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748a.htm) and devout patriarchs, disquiets a rebellious people by more severe chastisements, and refuses, though thrice besought, to take away the thorn in the flesh of the apostle, that He may make His strength perfect in weakness. [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/2co012.htm#verse7) Let us by all means [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm) even our enemies, for this is right, and God commands us so to do, in order that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven, who makes His sun to rise on the [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) and on the [good](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06636b.htm), and sends rain on the just and on the [unjust](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08010c.htm). [Matthew 5:45](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat005.htm#verse45) But as we praise these His gifts, lets us in like manner ponder His correction of those whom He loves.

5. You are of opinion that no one should be compelled to follow righteousness; and yet you read that the householder said to his servants, Whomsoever you shall find, compel them to come in. [Luke 14:23](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/luk014.htm#verse23) You also read how he who was at first Saul, and afterwards [Paul](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11567b.htm), was compelled, by the great [violence](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15446a.htm) with which Christ coerced him, to [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) and to embrace the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm); for you cannot but think that the light which your eyes enjoy is more precious to men than money or any other possession. This light, lost suddenly by him when he was cast to the ground by the heavenly voice, he did not recover until he became a member of the Holy Church. You are also of opinion that no coercion is to be used with any man in order to his deliverance from the fatal consequences of [error](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05525a.htm); and yet you see that, in examples which cannot be disputed, this is done by [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), who loves us with more real regard for our profit than any other can; and you hear Christ saying, No man can come to me except the Father draw him, [John 6:44](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/joh006.htm#verse44) which is done in the hearts of all those who, through [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) of the [wrath](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01489a.htm) of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), betake themselves to Him. You [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) also that sometimes the thief scatters food before the flock that he may lead them astray, and sometimes the shepherd brings wandering sheep back to the flock with his rod.

6. Did not Sarah, when she had the power, choose rather to afflict the insolent bondwoman? And [truly](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) she did not cruelly [hate](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07149b.htm) her whom she had formerly by an act of her own kindness made a mother; but she put a wholesome restraint upon her [pride](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12405a.htm). [Genesis 16:5](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/gen016.htm#verse5) Moreover, as you well [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm), these two [women](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15687b.htm), Sarah and Hagar, and their two sons Isaac and Ishmael, are figures representing spiritual and carnal [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm). And although we read that the bondwoman and her son suffered great hardships from Sarah, nevertheless the [Apostle Paul](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11567b.htm) says that Isaac suffered [persecution](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) from Ishmael: But as then he that was born after the flesh [persecuted](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) him that was born after the [Spirit](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07409a.htm), even so it is now; [Galatians 4:29](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/gal004.htm#verse29) whence those who have understanding may perceive that it is rather the [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) which suffers [persecution](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) through the [pride](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12405a.htm) and impiety of those carnal men whom it endeavours to correct by afflictions and terrors of a temporal kind. Whatever therefore the [true](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) and rightful Mother does, even when something severe and bitter is felt by her children at her hands, she is not rendering [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) for [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm), but is applying the benefit of discipline to counteract the [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) of [sin](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm), not with the [hatred](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07149b.htm) which seeks to harm, but with the [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm) which seeks to heal. When good and bad do the same actions and suffer the same afflictions, they are to be distinguished not by what they do or suffer, but by the causes of each: *e.g.* [Pharaoh](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11788c.htm) oppressed the people of God by hard bondage; [Moses](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10596a.htm) afflicted the same people by severe correction when they were guilty of impiety: their actions were alike; but they were not alike in the motive of regard to the people's welfare — the one being inflated by the [lust](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09438a.htm) of power, the other inflamed by [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm). [Jezebel](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08404a.htm) slew [prophets](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm), Elijah slew [false prophets](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07698b.htm); [1 Kings 18:4, 40](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/1ki018.htm#verse4) I suppose that the [desert](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04749a.htm) of the actors and of the sufferers respectively in the two cases was wholly diverse.

7. Look also to the [New Testament](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14530a.htm) times, in which the essential gentleness of [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm) was to be not only kept in the heart, but also manifested openly: in these the sword of Peter is called back into its sheath by Christ, and we are taught that it ought not to be taken from its sheath even in Christ's defense. [Matthew 26:52](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat026.htm#verse52) We read, however, not only that the [Jews](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08399a.htm) beat the [Apostle Paul](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11567b.htm), but also that the Greeks beat Sosthenes, a Jew, on account of the [Apostle Paul](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11567b.htm). Does not the similarity of the events apparently join both; and, at the same time, does not the dissimilarity of the causes make a real difference? Again, God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. [Romans 8:32](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/rom008.htm#verse32) Of the Son also it is said, who loved me, and gave Himself for me; [Galatians 2:20](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/gal002.htm#verse20) and it is also said of Judas that [Satan](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm) entered into him that he might betray Christ. [John 13:2](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/joh013.htm#verse2) Seeing, therefore, that the Father delivered up His Son, and Christ delivered up His own body, and Judas delivered up his Master, wherefore is God [holy](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm) and man guilty in this delivering up of [Christ](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm), unless that in the one action which both did, the reason for which they did it was not the same? Three crosses stood in one place: on one was the thief who was to be saved; on the second, the thief who was to be condemned; on the third, between them, was Christ, who was about to save the one thief and condemn the other. What could be more similar than these crosses? What more unlike than the [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm) who were suspended on them? [Paul](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11567b.htm) was given up to be imprisoned and bound, [Acts 21:23-24](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/act021.htm#verse23) but [Satan](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm) is unquestionably worse than any jailer: yet to him [Paul](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11567b.htm) himself gave up one man for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the [Lord Jesus](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm). [1 Corinthians 5:5](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/1co005.htm#verse5) And what say we to this? Behold, both deliver a man to bondage; but he that is cruel consigns his prisoner to one less severe, while he that is compassionate consigns his to one who is more cruel. Let us learn, my brother, in actions which are similar to distinguish the intentions of the agents; and let us not, shutting our eyes, deal in groundless reproaches, and accuse those who seek men's welfare as if they did them wrong. In like manner, when the same apostle says that he had delivered certain [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm) unto [Satan](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm), that they might learn not to [blaspheme](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02595a.htm), [1 Timothy 1:20](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/1ti001.htm#verse20) did he render to these men [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) for [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm), or did he not rather esteem it a good work to correct [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) men by means of the [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) one?

8. If to suffer [persecution](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) were in all cases a praiseworthy thing, it would have sufficed for the Lord to say, Blessed are they which are [persecuted](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm), without adding for righteousness' sake. [Matthew 5:10](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat005.htm#verse10) Moreover, if to inflict [persecution](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) were in all cases blameworthy, it would not have been written in the sacred books, Whoever privily [slanders](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14035b.htm) his neighbour, him will I [persecute](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) [cut off, E.V.]. In some cases, therefore, both he that suffers [persecution](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) is in the wrong, and he that inflicts it is in the right. But the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) is, that always both the bad have persecuted the [good](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06636b.htm), and the good have [persecuted](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11703a.htm) the bad: the former doing harm by their unrighteousness, the latter seeking to do good by the administration of discipline; the former with cruelty, the latter with moderation; the former impelled by [lust](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09438a.htm), the latter under the constraint of [love](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm). For he whose aim is to kill is not careful how he wounds, but he whose aim is to cure is cautious with his lancet; for the one seeks to destroy what is sound, the other that which is decaying. The [wicked](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) put [prophets](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm) to death; [prophets](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm) also put the [wicked](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) to death. The [Jews](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08399a.htm) scourged Christ; Christ also scourged the [Jews](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08399a.htm). The [apostles](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01626c.htm) were given up by men to the civil powers; the [apostles](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01626c.htm) themselves gave men up to the power of [Satan](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04764a.htm). In all these cases, what is important to attend to but this: who were on the side of [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), and who on the side of iniquity; who acted from a desire to injure, and who from a desire to correct what was amiss?

Chapter 3

9. You say that no example is found in the writings of [evangelists](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05645a.htm) and [apostles](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01626c.htm), of any petition presented on behalf of the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) to the kings of the earth against her enemies. Who denies this? None such is found. But at that time the [prophecy](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12473a.htm), Be wise now, therefore, O you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth: serve the Lord with [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm), was not yet fulfilled. Up to that time the words which we find at the beginning of the same Psalm were receiving their fulfilment, Why do the [heathen](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11388a.htm) rage, and the people [imagine](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07672a.htm) a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His Anointed. Truly, if past events recorded in the prophetic books were figures of the future, there was given under King [Nebuchadnezzar](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10666c.htm) a figure both of the time which the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) had under the [apostles](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01626c.htm), and of that which she has now. In the age of the [apostles](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01626c.htm) and [martyrs](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09736b.htm), that was fulfilled which was prefigured when the aforesaid king compelled [pious](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748a.htm) and just men to bow down to his image, and cast into the flames all who refused. Now, however, is fulfilled that which was prefigured soon after in the same king, when, being converted to the worship of the [true](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), he made a decree throughout his empire, that whosoever should speak against the [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm) of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, should suffer the penalty which their crime deserved. The earlier time of that king represented the former age of emperors who did not [believe](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) in [Christ](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm), at whose hands the [Christians](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) suffered because of the [wicked](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm); but the later time of that king represented the age of the successors to the imperial throne, now believing in [Christ](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm), at whose hands the [wicked](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) suffer because of the [Christians](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm).

10. It is manifest, however, that moderate severity, or rather clemency, is carefully observed towards those who, under the [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) name, have been led astray by perverse men, in the measures used to prevent them who are Christ's sheep from wandering, and to bring them back to the flock, when by punishments, such as exile and fines, they are admonished to consider what they suffer, and wherefore, and are taught to prefer the [Scriptures](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/index.html) which they read to [human](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm) legends and [calumnies](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03190c.htm). For which of us, yea, which of you, does not speak well of the [laws](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm) issued by the emperors against [heathen](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11388a.htm) [sacrifices](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13309a.htm)? In these, assuredly, a penalty much more severe has been appointed, for the punishment of that impiety is death. But in repressing and restraining you, the thing aimed at has been rather that you should be admonished to depart from [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm), than that you should be punished for a crime. For perhaps what the apostle said of the [Jews](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08399a.htm) may be said of you: bear them record that they have a [zeal](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15753a.htm) of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), but not according to [knowledge](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm): for, being [ignorant](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm) of the righteousness of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm). [Romans 10:2-3](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/rom010.htm#verse2) For what else than your own righteousness are you desiring to establish, when you say that none are justified but those who may have had the opportunity of being [baptized](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm) by you? In regard to this statement made by the apostle concerning the [Jews](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08399a.htm), you differ from those to whom it originally applied in this, that you have the [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) [sacraments](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm), of which they are still destitute. But in regard to the words, being [ignorant](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm) of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, and they have a [zeal](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15753a.htm) of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), but not according to [knowledge](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm), you are exactly like them, excepting only those among you who [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) what is the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), and who in the wilfulness of their perversity continue to fight against [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) which is perfectly well known to them. The impiety of these men is perhaps even a greater [sin](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm) than [idolatry](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07636a.htm). Since, however, they cannot be easily convicted of this (for it is a [sin](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm) which lies concealed in the [mind](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10321a.htm)), you are all alike restrained with a comparatively gentle severity, as being not so far alienated from us. And this I may say, both concerning all [heretics](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm) without distinction, who, while retaining the [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) [sacraments](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm), are dissenters from the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) and unity of [Christ](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm), and concerning all [Donatists](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05121a.htm) without exception.

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Chapter 4

12. As to the obtaining or putting in force of edicts of the powers of this world against schismatics and [heretics](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm), those from whom you separated yourselves were very active in this matter, both against you, so far as we have heard, and against the followers of Maximianus, as we prove by the indisputable evidence of their own Records; but you had not yet separated yourselves from them at the time when in their petition they said to the Emperor Julian that nothing but righteousness found a place with him,— a man whom all the while they [knew](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) to be an [apostate](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01624b.htm), and whom they saw to be so given over to [idolatry](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07636a.htm), that they must either admit [idolatry](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07636a.htm) to be righteousness, or be unable to deny that they had wickedly lied when they said that nothing but righteousness had a place with him with whom they saw that [idolatry](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07636a.htm) had so large a place. Grant, however, that that was a mistake in the use of words, what say you as to the deed itself? If not even that which is just is to be sought by appeal to an emperor, why was that which was by you supposed to be just sought from Julian?

13. Do you reply that it is lawful to petition the Emperor in order to recover what is one's own, but not lawful to accuse another in order that he may be coerced by the Emperor? I may remark, in passing, that in even petitioning for the recovery of what is one's own, the ground covered by apostolic example is abandoned, because no apostle is found to have ever done this. But apart from this, when your predecessors brought before the Emperor Constantine, by means of the proconsul Anulinus, their accusations against Cæcilianus, who was then [bishop](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm) of [Carthage](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03385a.htm), with whom as a guilty person they refused to have communion, they were not endeavouring to recover something of their own which they had lost, but were by [calumnies](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03190c.htm) assailing one who was, as we think, and as the issue of the judicial proceedings showed, an innocent man; and what more heinous crime could have been perpetrated by them than this? If, however, as you erroneously suppose, they did in his case deliver up to the judgment of the civil powers a man who was indeed guilty, why do you object to our doing that which your own party first presumed to do, and for doing which we would not find fault with them, if they had done it not with an [envious](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08326b.htm) desire to do harm, but with the intention of reproving and correcting what was wrong. But we have no hesitation in finding fault with you, who think that we are criminal in bringing any complaint before a [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) emperor against the enemies of our communion, seeing that a document given by your predecessors to Anulinus the proconsul, to be forwarded by him to the Emperor Constantine, bore this superscription: Libellus Ecclesiæ [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm)æ, criminum Cæciliani, traditus a parte Majorini. We find fault, moreover, with them more particularly, because when they had of their own accord gone to the Emperor with accusations against Cæcilianus, which they ought by all means to have in the first place [proved](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm) before those who were his colleagues beyond the sea, and when the Emperor, acting in a much more orderly way than they had done, referred to [bishops](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm) the decision of this case pertaining to [bishops](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm) which had been brought before him, they, even when defeated by a decision against them, would not come to peace with their brethren. Instead of this, they next accused at the bar of the temporal sovereign, not Cæcilianus only, but also the [bishops](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm)who had been appointed judges; and finally, from a second episcopal tribunal they appealed to the Emperor again. Nor did they consider it their duty to yield either to [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) or to peace when he himself inquired into the case and gave his decision.

14. Now what else could Constantine have decreed against Cæcilianus and his friends, if they had been defeated when your predecessors accused them, than the things decreed against the very men who, having of their own accord brought the accusations, and having failed to prove what they alleged, refused even when defeated to acquiesce in the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm)? The Emperor, as you [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm), in that case decreed for the first time that the property of those who were convicted of [schism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13529a.htm) and obstinately resisted the unity of the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) should be confiscated. If, however, the issue had been that your predecessors who brought the accusations had gained their case, and the Emperor had made some such decree against the communion to which Cæcilianus belonged, you would have wished the emperors to be called the friends of the Church's interests, and the guardians of her peace and unity. But when such things are decreed by emperors against the parties who, having of their own accord brought forward accusations, were unable to substantiate them, and who, when a welcome back to the bosom of peace was offered to them on condition of their amendment, refused the terms, an outcry is raised that this is an unworthy wrong, and it is maintained that no one ought to be coerced to unity, and that [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) should not be requited for [evil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) to any one. What else is this than what one of yourselves wrote: What we wish is [holy](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm)? And in view of these things, it was not a great or difficult thing for you to reflect and discover how the decree and sentence of Constantine, which was published against you on the occasion of your predecessors so frequently bringing before the Emperor charges which they could not make good, should be in force against you; and how all succeeding emperors, especially those who are [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) [Christians](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm), necessarily act according to it as often as the exigencies of your obstinacy make it necessary for them to take any measures in regard to you.

15. It was an easy thing for you to have reflected on these things, and perhaps some time to have said to yourselves: Seeing that Cæcilianus either was innocent, or at least could not be [proved](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm) guilty, what [sin](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm) has the [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) Church spread so far and wide through the world committed in this matter? On what ground could it be unlawful for the [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) world to remain [ignorant](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm) of that which even those who made it matter of accusation against others could not prove? Why should those whom Christ has sown in His field, that is, in this world, and has commanded to grow alongside of the tares until the harvest, [Matthew 13:24-30](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat013.htm#verse24) — those many thousands of [believers](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05769a.htm) in all nations, whose multitude the Lord compared to the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea, to whom He promised of old, and has now given, the blessing in the seed of [Abraham](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01051a.htm) — why, I ask, should the name of [Christians](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) be denied to all these, because, forsooth, in regard to this case, in the discussion of which they took no part, they preferred to [believe](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) the judges, who under grave responsibility gave their decision, rather than the plaintiffs, against whom the decision was given? Surely no man's crime can stain with guilt another who does not [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) of its commission. How could the [faithful](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05769a.htm), scattered throughout the world, be cognisant of the crime of surrendering the sacred books as committed by [men](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580c.htm), whose guilt their accusers, even if they [knew](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) it, were at least unable to prove? Unquestionably this one fact of [ignorance](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm) on their part most easily demonstrates that they had no share in the guilt of this crime. Why then should the innocent be charged with crimes which they never committed, because of their being [ignorant](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm) of crimes which, [justly](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08571c.htm) or [unjustly](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08010c.htm), are laid to the charge of others? What room is left for innocence, if it is criminal for one to be [ignorant](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm) of the crimes of others? Moreover, if the mere fact of their [ignorance](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm) proves, as has been said, the innocence of the people in so many nations, how great is the crime of separation from the communion of these innocent people! For the [deeds](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01115a.htm) of guilty parties which either cannot be [proved](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm) to those who are innocent, or cannot be [believed](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) by them, bring no stain upon any one, since, even when [known](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm), they are borne with in order to preserve fellowship with those who are innocent. For the good are not to be deserted for the sake of the [wicked](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm), but the [wicked](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm) are to be borne with for the sake of the good; as the [prophets](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm)bore with those against whom they delivered such testimonies, and did not cease to take part in the [sacraments](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm) of the Jewish people; as also our Lord bore with guilty Judas, even until he met the end which he deserved, and permitted him to take part in the sacred supper along with the innocent [disciples](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05029a.htm); as the [apostles](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01626c.htm) bore with those who preached Christ through [envy](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08326b.htm) — a [sin](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm) peculiarly satanic; as Cyprian bore with colleagues guilty of [avarice](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02148b.htm), which, after the example of the apostle, [Colossians 3:5](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/col003.htm#verse5) he calls [idolatry](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07636a.htm). In fine, whatever was done at that time among these [bishops](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm), although perhaps it was [known](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) by some of them, is, unless there be respect of [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm) in judgment, unknown to all: why, then, is not peace loved by all? These thoughts might easily occur to you; perhaps you already entertain them. But it would be better for you to be devoted to earthly possessions, through [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) of losing which you might be [proved](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm) to consent to [known](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), than to be devoted to that worthless vainglory which you think you will by such consent forfeit in the estimation of men.

Chapter 5

16. You now see therefore, I suppose, that the thing to be considered when any one is coerced, is not the mere fact of the coercion, but the [nature](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10715a.htm) of that to which he is coerced, whether it be good or bad: not that any one can be good in spite of his own will, but that, through [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) of suffering what he does not desire, he either renounces his hostile prejudices, or is compelled to examine [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) of which he had been contentedly [ignorant](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm); and under the influence of this [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) repudiates the [error](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05525a.htm) which he was wont to defend, or seeks the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) of which he formerly [knew](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) nothing, and now willingly holds what he formerly rejected. Perhaps it would be utterly useless to assert this in words, if it were not demonstrated by so many examples. We see not a few men here and there, but many cities, once [Donatist](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05121a.htm), now [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm), vehemently detesting the diabolical [schism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13529a.htm), and ardently loving the unity of the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm); and these became [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) under the influence of that [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) which is to you so offensive by the [laws](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm) of emperors, from Constantine, before whom your party of their own accord impeached Cæcilianus, down to the emperors of our own time, who most [justly](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08571c.htm) decree that the decision of the judge whom your own party chose, and whom they preferred to a tribunal of [bishops](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm), should be maintained in force against you.

17. I have therefore yielded to the evidence afforded by these instances which my colleagues have laid before me. For originally my opinion was, that no one should be coerced into the unity of [Christ](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374c.htm), that we must act only by words, fight only by arguments, and prevail by force of reason, lest we should have those whom we [knew](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) as avowed [heretics](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm) feigning themselves to be [Catholics](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm). But this opinion of mine was overcome not by the words of those who controverted it, but by the conclusive instances to which they could point. For, in the first place, there was set over against my opinion my own town, which, although it was once wholly on the side of Donatus, was brought over to the [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) unity by [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) of the imperial edicts, but which we now see filled with such detestation of your ruinous perversity, that it would scarcely be [believed](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) that it had ever been involved in your [error](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05525a.htm). There were so many others which were mentioned to me by name, that, from facts themselves, I was made to own that to this matter the word of Scripture might be understood as applying: Give opportunity to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser.[Proverbs 9:9](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/pro009.htm#verse9) For how many were already, as we assuredly [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm), willing to be [Catholics](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm), being moved by the indisputable plainness of [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), but daily putting off their avowal of this through [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) of offending their own party! How many were bound, not by [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm)— for you never pretended to that as yours — but by the heavy chains of inveterate custom, so that in them was fulfilled the divine saying: A servant (who is hardened) will not be corrected by words; for though he understand, he will not answer! [Proverbs 29:19](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/pro029.htm#verse19) How many supposed the [sect](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13674a.htm) of Donatus to be the [true](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) Church, merely because ease had made them too listless, or conceited, or sluggish, to take pains to examine [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm)! How many would have entered earlier had not the [calumnies](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03190c.htm) of slanderers, who declared that we offered something else than we do upon the altar of [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), shut them out! How many, believing that it mattered not to which party a [Christian](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03712a.htm) might belong, remained in the [schism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13529a.htm) of Donatus only because they had been born in it, and no one was compelling them to forsake it and pass over into the [Catholic](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03449a.htm) [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm)!

18. To all these classes of [persons](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm) the dread of those [laws](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm) in the promulgation of which kings serve the Lord in [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm)has been so useful, that now some say we were willing for this some time ago; but thanks be to [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm), who has given us occasion for doing it at once, and has cut off the hesitancy of procrastination! Others say: We already [knew](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) this to be [true](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm), but we were held prisoners by the force of old custom: thanks be to the Lord, who has broken these bonds asunder, and has brought us into the bond of peace! Others say: We [knew](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) not that the [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) was here, and we had no wish to learn it; but [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) made us become earnest to examine it when we became alarmed, lest, without any gain in things [eternal](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05551b.htm), we should be smitten with loss in temporal things: thanks be to the Lord, who has by the stimulus of [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) startled us from our negligence, that now being disquieted we might inquire into those things which, when at ease, we did not care to [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm)! Others say: We were prevented from entering the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) by false reports, which we could not [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) to be false unless we entered it; and we would not enter unless we were compelled: thanks be to the Lord, who by His scourge took away our timid hesitation, and taught us to find out for ourselves how vain and absurd were the lies which rumour had spread abroad against His Church: by this we are persuaded that there is no [truth](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) in the accusations made by the authors of this [heresy](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm), since the more serious charges which their followers have invented are without foundation. Others say: We thought, indeed, that it mattered not in what communion we held the [faith](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm) of Christ; but thanks to the Lord, who has gathered us in from a state of [schism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13529a.htm), and has taught us that it is fitting that the [one God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10499a.htm) be worshipped in unity.

19. Could I therefore maintain opposition to my colleagues, and by resisting them stand in the way of such conquests of the Lord, and prevent the sheep of Christ which were wandering on your mountains and hills — that is, on the swellings of your [pride](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12405a.htm)— from being gathered into the fold of peace, in which there is one flock and one Shepherd? [John 10:16](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/joh010.htm#verse16) Was it my duty to obstruct these measures, in order, forsooth, that you might not lose what you call your own, and might without [fear](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021a.htm) rob Christ of what is His: that you might frame your testaments according to Roman law, and might by [calumnious](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03190c.htm) accusations break the Testament made with the sanction of Divine law to the fathers, in which it was written, In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed: [Genesis 26:4](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/gen026.htm#verse4) that you might have freedom in your transactions in the way of buying and selling, and might be emboldened to divide and claim as your own that which Christ bought by giving Himself as its price: that any gift made over by one of you to another might remain unchallenged, and that the gift which the [God](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608a.htm) of gods has bestowed upon His children, called from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, might become invalid: that you might not be sent into exile from the land of your natural birth, and that you might labour to banish Christ from the kingdom bought with His blood, which extends from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth? Nay verily; let the kings of the earth serve Christ by making [laws](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09053a.htm) for Him and for His [cause](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03459a.htm). Your predecessors exposed Cæcilianus and his companions to be punished by the kings of the earth for crimes with which they were [falsely](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05781a.htm) charged: let the lions now be turned to break in pieces the bones of the [calumniators](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03190c.htm), and let no intercession for them be made by Daniel when he has been [proved](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm) innocent, and set free from the den in which they meet their doom; [Daniel 6:23-24](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/dan006.htm#verse23) for he that prepares a pit for his neighbour shall himself most [justly](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08571c.htm) fall into it. [Proverbs 26:27](https://www.newadvent.org/bible/pro026.htm#verse27)