

MORTALITY

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CYPRIAN'S TREATISE, *Mortality*, is one of the earliest contributions to the Christian literature of consolation and the most valuable source of information on a plague which spread over the Roman Empire. In assigning a date to this work which appears in the earliest manuscripts and which is enumerated in Pontius' list of Cyprian's writings, one is aided by the words of the author. Undoubtedly, Cyprian wrote this as a sermon to be delivered to the Christians of his diocese who were alarmed over the high death rate (*Mort.* 1) and who at the same time lamented that they were thus being deprived of martyrdom (*Mort.* 17). Eutropius (60.5) and Osorius (7.21) record the fact that this plague was the only noteworthy event in the reign of Gallus and Volusianus (251–253). Furthermore, Cyprian speaks of a new army which, recruited at the time of the plague, will fight without fear of death when the battle comes (*Mort.* 15)—a reference, no doubt, to the prospect of a new persecution which is mentioned again in Epistles 57–58, and which Monceaux assigns to the year 252. Epistle 59.6 states that toward the middle of 252 a decree of Gallus ordered public sacrifices in all parts of the Empire, and that this occasioned a new persecution of the Christians. Hence, one is led to believe that *Mortality* was composed in that year.

The morale of the Christians was low. Only the year before, the Church in Africa had been agitated by the discussion over the readmission of the *lapsi* and *libellatici* who had renounced their faith during the Decian persecution. A short time later the Christians were the objects of verbal attacks on the part of the pagans who held their unwillingness to participate in the State religion responsible for the plague raging in Africa. Conditions in the plague-stricken city were appalling; no one wanted to care for the sick, relatives even exposed members of their family lest they themselves suffer from contagion, bodies lay in the street, greed was rampant.

At this period Cyprian showed himself a real leader of his people. Pontius relates (*Vita* 7–10) that before an assembly Cyprian spoke of the blessings of mercy and of the merit to be gained by helping not only the faithful but also the pagans. He went further in an effort to relieve the situation; he assigned duties to individuals in proportion to their wealth and position. Those who could not give money gave their services. To comfort the members of his flock, to strengthen them in the throes of such a calamity, to reconcile them to the will of God, and to recall to their minds the glories of paradise impelled Cyprian to write his *Mortality*.

In a work of this sort it is not surprising to find that Cyprian borrowed, consciously or not, some of the commonplace expressions employed by earlier writers, such as Cicero and Seneca. They were part of his literary heritage but he did not cite them as authorities. Not once did he refer formally to arguments or thoughts other than those derived from the Scriptures or from reason.

In developing his theme Cyprian follows the method of presentation of his other treatises, namely, that of going straight to the point by quoting from the Scriptures, by commenting on the text, and by applying it to the present circumstances. The following outline illustrates his procedure.

I. Introduction

(1) By a discourse drawn from the Scriptures the spiritual weakness of the Christians, displayed in this trial, may be overcome

II. Death is not to be feared but welcomed (2–19)

(1) The plague is not an unexpected evil, for it was prophesied as a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God with its everlasting happiness (2–3)

(2) Life is a series of contests with the forces of the devil; death is release from these cares (4–5)

(3) Reluctance to die shows a love of worldly joys and little confidence in Scripture or the providence of God (6–7)

(4) By bearing the plague with resignation a Christian will store up merit for himself (8–19)

(a) The affliction of Christians as well as pagans benefits the former by testing their faith (8–13)

(b) The pains and results of the disease have a salutary effect on the Christians, for they free the latter from the world or prepare them for glory to come (14–16)

(c) The loss of martyrdom should not cause concern; obedience and resignation to God's will are requisite for heaven (17–19)

III. There should be no mourning for the dead (20–24)

(1) Mourning reveals a lack of confidence in the promises of God (20–24)

IV. Conclusion (25–26)

(1) Death from the plague brings an earlier release from the world (25)

(2) Consider the joys of paradise.

The symptoms and effects of the plague are graphically described by Cyprian, yet it cannot be definitely identified with any of the great pestilences known to modern times. Its demoralizing effects on the populace (cf. Eusebius 7.22) are corroborated by Pontius and Dionysius who were eyewitnesses; they furnish precious information on the practical application of the principles of Christian charity at that time, even though these sources give no details as to the existence of formal Christian organization for this purpose.

Throughout this work Cyprian gives evidence of the warm sympathy and charity which aroused the admiration of St. Augustine (*De doctrina Christiana* 4.31). Vigorous and direct in his approach to practical problems he encouraged and strengthened his flock by his philosophy of Christian Stoicism.

The text used in this translation is that of W. von Hartel in the Vienna *Corpus* (3.1.297–314). In the Scriptural passages the Challoner revision of the Rheims-Douay translation of the Bible is used wherever it corresponds with the text used by Cyprian.

Chapter 1

Although in most of you, beloved brethren, there is a resolute mind and a firm faith and a devout spirit, which is not disturbed at the numbers in the present mortality,¹ but like a strong and unmoving rock breaks rather the turbulent attacks of the world and the violent waves of the age and is itself not broken, and is not vanquished but tried by temptations, yet because I observe that among the people, some either through weakness of spirit, or littleness of faith, or the charm of life in the world, or weakness of sex, or, what is worse, because of a wandering from the truth, are standing less firmly and are not revealing the divine and invincible strength of their hearts, the matter must not be ignored or passed over in silence, but, so far as our weak power suffices, with full strength, and with a discourse drawn from the Lord's text, the cowardice of a luxury-loving mind must be checked and one who has already begun to be a man of God and Christ must be considered worthy of God and Christ.

Chapter 2

For, beloved brethren, he who serves as a soldier of God, who, being stationed in the camp of heaven, already hopes for the divine things, ought to recognize himself, so that we should have no fear, no dread at the storms and whirlwinds of the world, since the Lord predicted that these things would come through the exhortation of His provident voice, instructing and teaching and preparing and strengthening the people of His church to all endurance of things to come. He foretold and prophesied that wars and famine and earthquakes and pestilence would arise in the various places, and, that an unexpected and new fear of destructive agencies might not shake us, He forewarned that adversity would increase more and more in the last times. Behold the things which were spoken of are coming to pass, and since the things which were foretold are coming to pass, there will follow also whatsoever were promised, as the Lord Himself promises, saying: 'When you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand.'¹ The kingdom of God, beloved brethren, has begun to be at hand; the reward of life and the joy of eternal salvation and perpetual happiness and the possession of paradise once lost are now coming with the passing of the world;² now the things of heaven are succeeding those of earth, and great things small, and eternal things, transitory. What place is there here for anxiety and worry? Who in the midst of these things is fearful and sad save he who lacks hope and faith? For it is for him to fear death who is unwilling to go to Christ. It is for him to be unwilling to go to Christ who does not believe that he is beginning to reign with Christ.

Chapter 3

It is written that 'the just man liveth by faith.'¹ If you are a just man and live by faith, if you truly believe [in God], why do you, who are destined to be with Christ and secure in the promise of the Lord, not rejoice that you are called to Christ and be glad that you are free from the devil?

¹ The word *mortalitas* is found only rarely in classical Latin, where it has the meaning of death (Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.10.26). In this treatise Cyprian uses it in a new sense to indicate the plague (*Mort.* 8.15–17). However, it here denotes the death rate, as in Chronogr. (Mommson 648.2).

¹ Cf. Luke 21:31.

² From the time of the fall of Jerusalem early Christian writers felt that the end of the world was approaching. Cyprian shared this view and gave frequent expression to it in his writings. (cf. *Demetr.* 5.23; *Fort.* 1; *Epist.* 58.1).

¹ Rom. 1:17.

Finally, Simeon, the just man who was truly just, who with full faith kept the commandments of God, when the answer had been given him from heaven that he would not die before he had seen Christ, and when Christ as an infant had come into the temple with His mother, knew in spirit that Christ was now born, concerning whom it had been foretold to him before, and on seeing Him he knew that he himself would quickly die. Happy, therefore, at the death that was now at hand and untroubled at the approaching summons, he took the child into his hands and blessing God, he cried out and said: ‘Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace, because my eyes have seen thy salvation,’² proving surely and bearing witness that then do the servants of God have peace, then do they have a free, then a tranquil repose, when we on being released from the storms of the world have sought the harbor of our abode and eternal security, when on this death being accomplished we have to come to immortality. For that is our peace, that our sure tranquility, that our steadfast and firm and everlasting security.

Chapter 4

For the rest, what else is waged daily in the world but a battle against the devil, but a struggle with continual onsets against his darts and weapons? With avarice, with lewdness, with anger, with ambition, we have a conflict; with the vices of the flesh, with the allurements of the world, we have a continual and stubborn fight. The mind of man besieged and surrounded on all sides by the assault of the devil with difficulty opposes these foes one by one, with difficulty resists them. If avarice is cast to the ground, lust springs up; if lust is put down, ambition takes its place; if ambition is disdained, anger provokes, pride puffs up, drunkenness invites, envy destroys harmony, jealousy severs friendships. You are forced to curse, which the divine law prohibits; you are compelled to swear, which is forbidden.

Chapter 5

So many persecutions the mind endures daily, by so many dangers is the heart beset. And does it delight to remain here long, amidst the devil’s weapons, when we should rather earnestly desire and wish to hasten to Christ aided by a death coming more speedily, since He Himself instructs us, saying: ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice: you shall be sorrowful but your sorrow shall come into joy?’¹ Who would not long to be free from sorrow? Who would not hurry to come to joy? Now when our sorrow will come to joy, our Lord Himself again tells us, saying: ‘I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you.’² Since, then, to see Christ is to rejoice, and since none of us can have joy unless he shall see Christ, what blindness or what madness it is to love the afflictions and punishments and tears of the world and not rather to hurry to the joy which can never be taken from us.

Chapter 6

But this happens, beloved brethren, because faith is lacking, because no one believes those things to be true which God promises, who is truthful and whose word is eternal and steadfast to

² Luke 2:29.

¹ John 16:20.

² John 16:22.

those who believe. If an influential and reputable man were to promise you something, you would have confidence in his promise and you would not believe that you would be deceived or cheated by the man who you knew stood by his words and actions. God is speaking to you, and do you waver faithless in your unbelieving mind? God promises immortality and eternity to you leaving this world, and do you doubt? This is not to know God at all. This is to offend Christ, the Teacher of believing, by the sin of disbelief. This is, though one is in the Church, not to have faith in the House of Faith.

Chapter 7

What an advantage it is to depart from the world Christ Himself the teacher of our salvation and welfare makes manifest, who, when His disciples were sorrowful because He said that He was now about to go away, spoke to them saying: ‘If you loved me you would indeed be glad, because I go to the Father,’¹ thus teaching and showing that there should be rejoicing rather than sorrowing when the dear ones whom we love depart from the world. And mindful of this fact, the blessed Apostle Paul sets this down in his Epistle and says: ‘To me to live is Christ; and to die is gain,’² counting it the greatest gain to be no longer held by the snares of the world, to be no longer subject to any sins and faults of the flesh, but, released from tormenting afflictions and freed from the poisoned jaws of the devil, to set out, at Christ’s summons, for the joy of eternal salvation.

Chapter 8

Now it troubles some that the infirmity of this disease carries off our people equally with the pagans, as if a Christian believes to this end, that, free from contact with evils, he may happily enjoy the world and this life, and, without having endured all adversities here, may be preserved for future happiness. It troubles some that we have this mortality in common with others. But what in this world do we not have in common with others as long as this flesh, in accordance with the law of our original birth, still remains common to us? As long as we are here in the world we are united with the human race in equality of the flesh, we are separated in spirit. And so, until this corruptible element puts on incorruptibility and this mortal element receives immortality and the spirit conducts us to God the Father, the disadvantages of the flesh, whatever they are, we have in common with the human race. Thus when the earth is barren with scanty production famine excepts no one; thus when a city has been taken by a hostile attack, bondage ruins all its inhabitants together; and when clear skies keep back the rain there is the one drought for all; and when craggy rocks destroy a ship the shipwreck is common to all on board without exception; and eye trouble and attacks of fevers and every ailment of the members we have in common with others as long as this common flesh is borne in the world.

Chapter 9

Nay, rather, if the Christian recognizes and understands under what condition, under what law he has believed, he will know that he must labor more in the world than others, as he must carry on a greater struggle against the assault of the devil. Divine Scripture teaches and forewarns,

¹ John 14:28.

² Phil. 1:21.

saying: ‘Son, when thus comest to the service of God, stand in justice, and in fear, and prepare thyself for temptation,’¹ and again: ‘in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience, for gold and silver are tried in the fire.’²

Chapter 10

Thus Job, after the losses of his property, after the deaths of his children, and after being grievously tormented also by ulcers and worms, was not vanquished but was tried, who, showing the patience of his devout mind in the very midst of his afflictions and sufferings says: ‘Naked came I out of of my mother’s womb, and naked also shall I go under the earth; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it seemeth best to the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord.’¹ And when his wife also urged him in impatience at the severity of his suffering to utter something against God in complaining and hateful language, he answered and said: ‘Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women: if we have received good things at the hand of God shall we not endure the evil? In all these things which befell him Job sinned not by his lips in the sight of the Lord.’² And, therefore, the Lord God bears witness to him, saying: ‘Hast thou noticed my servant Job? there is no one like him in the earth, a man without complaint, truthful and serving God.’³ And Tobias, after his splendid works, after the many glorious commendations of his mercy, having suffered blindness of the eyes, fearing and blessing God in his adversity, by that very affliction of his body increased in praise. And him also his wife tried to corrupt, saying: ‘Where are your acts of clemency? Behold what you are suffering!’⁴ But he steadfast and firm in his fear of God and armed for all endurance of suffering by the faith of his religion did not yield in his affliction to the temptations of his weak wife, but deserved more of God through his greater patience. And afterwards the angel Raphael praises him and says: ‘It is honorable to reveal and confess the works of God. For when Sarra and I prayed I offered the memory of your prayer before the splendor of God: and because you buried the dead, likewise, and because you did not hesitate to rise and leave your dinner and you went and buried the dead, I was sent even to tempt you. And again, God sent me to cure you and Sarra your daughter-in-law: for I am Raphael one of the seven holy angels who stand and serve before the splendor of God.’⁵

Chapter 11

This endurance the just have always had; this discipline the apostles maintained from the law of the Lord, not to murmur in adversity, but to accept bravely and patiently whatever happens in the world, since the Jewish people always offended in this, that they murmured very frequently against God, as the Lord God testifies in Numbers, saying: ‘Let their murmuring cease from me and they shall not die.’¹ We must not murmur in adversity, beloved brethren, but must patiently and bravely bear with whatever happens, since it is written: ‘A contrite and humble heart God does

¹ Eccli. 2:1.

² Eccli. 2:4, 5.

¹ Cf. Job. 1:21.

² Job. 2:10.

³ Job. 1:8. Sabatier notes that this reading occurs also in St. Augustine.

⁴ Tob. 2:14 (16). Cyprian’s quotation of this passage is similar to the Greek.

⁵ Tob. 12:11–15.

¹ Num. 17:25 (10).

not despise.’² In Deuteronomy also the Holy Spirit through Moses admonishes us, saying: ‘The Lord God shall afflict thee and cast famine on thee and shall examine in thy heart if thou hast kept his precepts well or not,’³ and again: ‘The Lord your God tempts you to know if you love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole mind.’⁴

Chapter 12

Thus Abraham pleased God because, in order to please God, he neither feared to lose his son nor refused to commit parricide. You cannot lose your son by the law and the chance of mortality, what would you do if you were ordered to kill your son? The fear of God and faith ought to make you ready for all things. Though it should be the loss of private property, though it should be the constant and violent affliction of the members by wasting diseases, though it should be the mournful and sorrowful tearing away from wife, from children, from departing dear ones, let not such things be stumbling blocks for you, but battles; nor let them weaken or crush the faith of the Christian, but rather let them reveal his valor in the contest, since every injury arising from present evils should be made light of through confidence in the blessings to come. Unless a battle has gone before there cannot be a victory; when a victory has been won in the conflict of battle, then a crown also is given to the victors. The pilot is recognized in the storm, in the battle-line the soldier is tested. Light is the boast when there is no danger; conflict in adversity is the trial of truth. The tree which is firmly held by a deep root is not shaken by onrushing winds, and the ship which has been framed with strong joints is beaten by the waves but is not staved in; and when the threshing floor treads out the harvest the strong hard grain scorn the winds; the empty straw is whirled and carried away by the breeze.

Chapter 13

Thus also the Apostle Paul, after shipwrecks, after scourgings, after many grievous tortures of the flesh and body, says that he was not harassed but was corrected by adversity, in order that while he was the more heavily afflicted he might the more truly be tried. There was given to me, he says, a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me lest I be exalted. For which thing thrice I besought the Lord, that it might depart from me. And He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity.’¹ When, therefore, some infirmity and weakness and desolation attacks us, then is our power made perfect, then our faith is crowned, if though tempted it has stood firm, as it is written: ‘The furnace trieth the potter’s vessels, and the trial of affliction just men.’² This finally is the difference between us and the others who do not know God, that they complain and murmur in adversity, while adversity does not turn us from the truth of virtue and faith, but proves us in suffering.

Chapter 14

² Ps. 50:19.

³ Deut. 8:2.

⁴ Deut. 13:3.

¹ 2 Cor. 12:7–9.

² Eccli. 27:5 (6).

That now the bowels loosened into a flux exhaust the strength of the body, that a fever contracted in the very marrow of the bones breaks out into ulcers of the throat, that the intestines are shaken by continual vomiting, that the blood-shot eyes burn, that the feet of some or certain parts of their members are cut away by the infection of diseased putrefaction, that, by a weakness developing through the losses and injuries of the body, either the gait is enfeebled, or the hearing impaired, or the sight blinded, all this contributes to the proof of faith.’¹ What greatness of soul it is to fight with the powers of the mind unshaken against so many attacks of devastation and death, what sublimity to stand erect amidst the ruins of the human race and not to lie prostrate with those who have no hope in God, and to rejoice rather and embrace the gift of the occasion, which, while we are firmly expressing our faith, and having endured sufferings, are advancing to Christ by the narrow way of Christ, we should receive as the reward of His way and faith, He himself being our judge! Let him certainly be afraid to die who, not having been reborn of water and the spirit is delivered up to the fires of hell. Let him be afraid to die who is not listed under the cross and passion of Christ. Let him be afraid to die who will pass from this death to a second death. Let him be afraid to die whom, on departing from the world, the eternal flame will torment with everlasting punishments. Let him be afraid to die to whom this is granted by a longer delay, that his tortures and groans meanwhile may be deferred.

Chapter 15

Many of us are dying in this mortality, that is many of us are being freed from the world. This mortality is a bane to the Jews and pagans and enemies of Christ; to the servants of God it is a salutary departure. As to the fact that, without any discrimination in the human race, the just also are dying with the unjust, it is not for you to think that the destruction is a common one for both the evil and the good. The just are called to refreshment, the unjust are carried off to torture; protection is more quickly given to the faithful; punishment to the faithless. We are improvident, beloved brethren, and ungrateful for divine favors and we do not recognize what is being granted us. Behold the virgins are departing in peace, going safely with their glory, not fearing the threats of the antichrist and his corruptions and his brothels. Boys are escaping the danger of their unsettled age; they are coming happily to the reward of their continency and innocence. No longer does the delicate matron dread the racks, having by a speedy death gained escape from the fear of persecution and the hands and tortures of the hangman. Through their panic at the mortality and the occasion the fearful are aroused, the negligent are contrained, the slothful are stimulated, the deserters are compelled to return, the pagans are forced to believe, the old members of the faithful are called to rest, for the battle a fresh and numerous army of greater strength is being gathered, which, entering service in the time of the mortality, will fight without fear of death when the battle comes.

Chapter 16

What a significance, beloved brethren, all this has! How suitable, how necessary it is that this plague and pestilence, which seems horrible and deadly, searches out the justice of each and every one and examines the minds of the human race; whether the well care for the sick, whether relatives

¹ Despite this vivid description of the effects of the plague, the plague itself cannot be definitely identified with any of the great pestilences known to modern times.

dutifully love their kinsmen as they should, whether masters show compassion to their ailing slaves, whether physicians do not desert the afflicted begging their help, whether the violent repress their violence, whether the greedy, even through the fear of death, quench the ever insatiable fire of their raging avarice, whether the proud bend their necks, whether the shameless soften their affrontry, whether the rich, even when their dear ones are perishing and they are about to die without heirs, bestow and give something! Although this mortality has contributed nothing else, it has especially accomplished this for Christians and servants of God, that we have begun gladly to seek martyrdom while we are learning not to fear death. These are trying exercises for us, not deaths; they give to the mind the glory of fortitude; by contempt of death they prepare for the crown.¹

Chapter 17

But perhaps someone may object and say: ‘Now in the present mortality this is a source of sorrow to me that I who had been prepared for confession and had dedicated myself with my whole heart and with all my courage to the endurance of suffering, am deprived of my martyrdom,¹ since I am being forestalled by death.’ In the first place, martyrdom is not in your power but in the giving of God, and you cannot say that you have lost what you do not know whether you deserved to receive. Then, secondly, God is a searcher of the reins and heart and the observer and judge of hidden things; He sees and praises and approves you. And He who perceives that your virtue ready will give a reward for virtue. Had Gain already killed his brother when he was offering his gift to God? And yet God in His foresight condemned beforehand the murder contemplated in his mind. Just as in that instance the evil thought and pernicious design was foreseen by a provident God, so also in the case of the servants of God among whom confession is contemplated and martyrdom is conceived in the mind, the intention dedicated to good is crowned, with God as judge. It is one thing for the intention to be lacking for martyrdom; it is another thing for martyrdom to have been lacking for the intention. Such as the Lord finds you when He summons, such likewise also does He judge you, since He himself bears witness and says: ‘and all the churches shall know that I am the searcher of reins and heart.’² For God does not ask for our blood but our faith; for neither Abraham nor Isaac nor Jacob was put to death, but, nevertheless, honored for the merits of their faith and righteousness, they have deserved to be first among the patriarchs, and to their feast is gathered whosoever is found faithful and just and praiseworthy.

Chapter 18

We should remember that we ought to do not our will but God’s will, in accordance with the prayer which the Lord has ordered us to say daily. How absurd it is and how perverse that, while we ask that the will of God be done, when God calls us and summons us from this world, we do not at once obey the command of His will! We struggle in opposition and resist and in the manner of obstinate slaves we are brought with sadness and grief to the sight of God, departing from here under the bond of necessity, not in obedience to our will, and we wish to be honored with the rewards of heaven by Him to whom we are coming unwilling. Why then do we pray and entreat

¹ This picture of conditions in Carthage during the plague is repeated by Cyprian in *Demetr.* 10, and by Pontius, *Vita* 9.

¹ Cf. *Epist.* 10.5 and 12.1 for similar expressions of comfort for those who had been denied martyrdom.

² *Apoc.* 2:23.

that the kingdom of heaven may come, if earthly captivity delights us? Why in our often repeated prayers do we ask and beseech that the day of His kingdom may come quickly, if there are greater longings and stronger desires to serve the devil here than to reign with Christ?

Chapter 19

Finally, in order that the signs of divine providence might become more clearly manifest that the Lord, foreknowing the future, looks to the true salvation of His own, when one of our colleagues and fellow priests, exhausted by illness and alarmed in the face of approaching death, prayed for a respite for himself, there stood beside him, as he prayed and was now almost dying, a young man venerable in honor and majesty, noble in stature, shining in aspect, and upon whom as he stood before it the human sight could scarcely look with the eyes of the flesh, except that on the point of departing from the world it could already regard such a one. And he, not without a certain indignation of mind and voice, spoke angrily and said: ‘You are afraid to suffer, you do not wish to depart, what shall I do with you?’—the voice of one rebuking and warning, who, anxious at the thought of presecution but untroubled at the summons of death, does not yield to the present longing but looks to the future. Our brother and colleague who was about to die heard what he was to say to others. For he who heard this at the point of death heard it to the end that he should say it; he did not hear it for himself, but for us. For what could he learn now as he was about to depart? Nay rather he learned it for us who remain that, through knowing that the priest who prayed for a respite was rebuked, we might know what is of benefit to all.

Chapter 20

How often it has been revealed to us ourself also, the least and the last, how frequently and manifestly have I been commanded, through God’s vouchsaying, that I should bear witness constantly, that I should preach publicly that our brethren who have been freed from the world by the summons of the Lord should not be mourned, since we know that they are not lost but sent before; that in departing they lead the way; that as travellers, as voyagers are wont to be, they should be longed for, not lamented; and that dark clothing should not be worn here, inasmuch as they have already assumed white garments there; and that no occasion should be given to the pagans to censure us deservedly and justly, on the ground that we grieve for those who we say are living with God, as if entirely destroyed and lost, and that we do not show by the testimony of the heart and breast the faith which we declare in speech and word! We are prevaricators of our hope and faith, if what we say seems pretended, feigned, falsified. It profits nothing to show forth virtue in words and destroy truth in deeds.

Chapter 21

Finally, the Apostle Paul censures, rebukes, and blames any who are sorrowful at the death of their dear ones. ‘We will not,’ he says, ‘have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them who have slept through Jesus, will God bring with him.’¹ He says that they are sorrowful at the death of their dear ones who have no hope. But we who live in

¹ Thess. 4:13.

hope and believe in God and have faith that Christ suffered for us and rose again, abiding in Christ and rising again through Him and in Him, why are we ourselves either unwilling to depart hence from this world, or why do we mourn and grieve for our departing ones as if they were lost, since Christ our Lord and our God himself admonishes us and says: 'I am the resurrection: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live: And everyone that liveth and believeth in me, shall not die forever'?² If we believe in Christ let us have faith in His words and promises, that we who are not to die forever may come in joyful security to Christ with whom we are to conquer and reign for eternity.

Chapter 22

As to the fact that meanwhile we die, we pass by death to immortality, nor can eternal life succeed unless it has befallen us to depart from here. This is not an end, but a passage and, the journey of time being traversed, a crossing over to eternity. We would not hasten to better things? Who would not pray to be more quickly changed and reformed to the image of Christ and to the dignity of heavenly grace, since the Apostle Paul declares: But our conversation, he says, is in heaven: from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowliness, made like to the body of his glory?¹ Christ the Lord also promises that we shall be such, since He prays to His Father for us that we may be with Him and may rejoice with Him in the eternal abodes and heavenly kingdom saying: Father, I will that where I am, they also to whom thou has given me may be with me and may see my glory which thou hast given me before the world was made. He who is to come to the abode of Christ, to the glory of the heavenly kingdom, ought not to grieve and mourn, but rather, in accordance with the promise of the Lord, in accordance with faith in the truth, to rejoice in this his departure and translation.

Chapter 23

Thus, finally, we find that Enoch also, who pleased God, was transported, as divine Scripture testifies in Genesis and says: 'And Enoch pleased God and was not seen later because God took him.'¹ This was to have been pleasing in the sight of God: to have merited being transported from this contagion of the world. But the Holy Spirit teaches also through Solomon that those who please God are taken from here earlier and more quickly set free, lest, while they are tarrying too long in this world, they be defiled by contacts with the world. 'He was taken away lest wickedness should deter his understanding, for his soul pleased God; therefore he hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquity.'² Thus also in the psalms the soul devoted to its God in spiritual faith hastens to God, as it is written: 'How lovely are thy dwellings, O God of hosts. My soul longs for and hastens to the courts of God.'³

Chapter 24

² John 11:25.

¹ Phil. 3:20, 21.

¹ Gen. 5:24.

² Wisd. 4:11.

³ John 2:15.

It is for him to wish to remain long in the world whom the world delights, whom the world allures by blandishing and deceiving with the enticements of worldly pleasure. Furthermore, since the world hates a Christian, why do you love that which hates you and not rather follow Christ who has redeemed and loves you? John in his Epistle cries out and tells us and exhorts us, lest in our pursuit of carnal pleasures we should love the world. 'Love not the world,' he says, 'nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the ambition of the world, which is not of the Father but is of the concupiscence of the world. And the world will pass away, and the concupiscence thereof; but he that does the will of God abideth forever even as God also abideth forever.'¹ Rather, beloved brethren, with sound mind, with firm faith, with rugged virtue, let us be ready for every manifestation of God's will; freed from the terror of death, let us think of the immortality which follows. Let us show that this is what we believe, so that we may not mourn the death even of our dear ones and, when the day of our own summons comes, without hesitation but with gladness we may come to the Lord at His call.

Chapter 25

While the servants of God have always had to do this, they ought to do it all the more quickly, now with the world falling and oppressed by the storms of attacking evils, so that we who perceive that grievous things have already begun and know that more grievous things are imminent should count it the greatest gain if we should speedily depart from here. If the walls of your house were tottering from decay, if the roof above were shaking, if the house now worn out, now weary, were threatening imminent ruin with its framework collapsing through age, would you not leave with all speed? If, while you were sailing, a wind and furious storm with waves violently agitated were presaging future shipwreck, would you not more quickly seek port? Behold, the world is tottering and collapsing and is bearing witness to its ruin, not now through age, but through the end of things;¹ and you are not thanking God, you are not congratulating yourself that, rescued by an earlier departure, you are being freed from ruin and shipwrecks and threatening disasters!

Chapter 26

We should consider, beloved brethren, and we should reflect constantly that we have renounced the world and as strangers and foreigners we sojourn here for a time. Let us embrace the day which assigns each of us to his dwelling, which on our being rescued from here and released from the snares of the world, restores us to paradise and the kingdom. What man, after having been abroad, would not hasten to return to his native land? Who, when hurrying to sail to his family, would not more eagerly long for a favorable wind that he might more quickly embrace his dear ones? We account paradise our country, we have already begun to look upon the patriarchs as our parents. Why do we not hasten and run, so that we can see our country, so that we can greet our parents? A great number of our dear ones there await us, parents, brothers, children; a dense and copious throng longs for us, already secure in their safety but still anxious for our salvation. How great a joy it is both for them and for us in common to come into their sight and embrace! What pleasure there in the heavenly kingdom without fear of death, and with an eternity of life the

¹ Cf. *Mort.* 2.

¹ Cf. *Mort.* 2.

highest possible and everlasting happiness; there the glorious choir of apostles, there the throng of exultant prophets, there the innumerable multitude of martyrs wearing crowns on account of the glory and victory of their struggle and passion, triumphant virgins who have subdued the concupiscence of the flesh and body by the strength of their continency, the merciful enjoying their reward who have performed works of justice by giving food and alms to the poor, who in observing the precepts of the Lord have transferred their earthly patrimony to the treasuries of heaven! To these, beloved brethren, let us hasten with eager longing! let us pray that it may befall us speedily to be with them, speedily to come to Christ. May God see this our purpose. May Christ look upon this resolution of our mind and faith, who will give more ample rewards of His charity to those whose longings for Him have been greater.¹

¹ Saint Cyprian, "[Mortality](#)," in *Treatises*, ed. and trans. Roy J. Deferrari, vol. 36, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 193–221.