Letter 1

Pacian of Barcelona (d. c. AD 391)

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Letter 1

EXTANT WORKS OF S. PACIAN, BISHOP OF BARCELONA. EPISTLES TO SYMPRONIAN, EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE, ON BAPTISM. EPISTLE I. OF THE CATHOLIC NAME. [Translated by the Rev. C. H. Collyns, M.A., Student of Christ Church.] Variety of heresies united in the Cataphrygians. 320 --- No one convinced against his will; truth not to be blamed if it fail. 321 --- Value and antiquity of the name Catholic. 322 --- Penitence, a necessary, though sad, remedy. 323 --- Exhortations to penitence in O. and N. T. after great sin. 324 --- If Apostles only could absolve, they only could baptize. 325 --- All Apostolic functions descended to Bishops, so none defined. 326 --- Caution in giving absolution; it precludes not Judgment of Christ. 327 Pacian to Sympronian his brother, greeting.

1. If it be not a carnal intention, my lord , but as I judge, a calling of the Spirit, that thou enquirest of us the faith of the Catholic verity, thou, before all, taldng thy rise as far as appears, from a streamlet at a distance, and not holding to the fountain and source of the principal Church, shouldest, in the first instance, have shewn what or how different are the opinions which thou followest. Thou shouldest unfold thyself as to what cause more particularly had loosened thee from the unity of our body. For those parts, for which a remedy is sought, should be laid bare. Whereas now (if I may so say) the bosom of correspondence being closed, we see not on what members more especially we have to bestow our care. For such are the heresies which have sprung forth from the Christian head, that of the mere names the roll would be immense. For to pass over the heretics of the Jews, Dositheus the Samaritan, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, it were long to enumerate how many grew up in the times of the Apostles, Simon Magus, and Menander, and Nicolaus, and others hidden by an inglorious fame. What again in later times were Ebion, and Apelles, and Marcion, and Valentinus, and Cerdon, and not long after them, the Cataphrygians, and Novatians, not to notice any recent swarms!

2. Whom then in my letters must I first refute? Wouldest thou the mere names of all, my paper will not contain them; unless indeed by your writings every way condemnatory of penance you declare your agreement with the Phrygians. But, most illustrious Lord, so manifold and so diverse is the error of these very men, that in them we have not only to overthrow their peculiar fancies against penance, but to cut off the heads, as it were, of

some Lernaean monster. And, in the first place, they rely on more founders than one, for I suppose Blastus the Greek is of them; Theodotus also and Praxeas were once teachers of your party, themselves also Phrygians of some celebrity, who falsely say they are inspired of Leucius , boast that they are instructed by Proculus . Following Montanus, and Maximilla, and Priscilla, howmanifold controversies have they raised concerning the day of Easter, the Paraclete, Apostles, Prophets, and many other disputes, as this also concerning the Catholic name, the pardon of penance.

3. Wherefore if we would discuss all these points, thou hadst need been present and teachable. But if on those points merely on which thou writest, my instruction should not be sufficiently full, yet as it is our duty to serve, in whatsoever way we can, those who solemnly adjure us , we now, for the sake of informing you, discourse with thee summarily on those matters about which thou hast deigned to write to us. If thou wouldest have fuller knowledge on our side, thou must on thine declare thyself more unreservedly, lest by somewhat of obscurity in thy enquiries, thou leave us uncertain, whether thou art consulting or censuring. 4. Meanwhile (and this concerns our present correspondence) I would above all entreat thee not to borrow authority for error from this very fact that, as thou sayest, throughout the whole world no one has been found , who could convince or persuade thee contrary to what thou believest. For although we be unskilled, most skilful is the Spirit of God, and if we are faithless, faithful is God, Who cannot deny Himself. Then, also, because it was not allowed the Priests of God to contend long with one who resisted . We, says the Apostle, have no such custom, neither the churches of God. After one admonition , as thou thyself knowest, the contentious is passed by. For who can persuade any of any thing against his will? Thine own fault was it therefore, brother, and not theirs, if no one convinced thce of what in itself is most excellent. For at this day too it is in thy power to despise our writings also, if thou hadst rather refute than approve them. Yet very many resisted both the Lord Himself, and the Apostles, nor could any ever be persuaded of the truth, unless he consented to it by his own religious feeling.

5. Therefore, my Lord, neither have we written with that confidence, as though we could persuade thee, if thou resistest, but in that faith by which we would not deny thee an entrance to holy peace, if thou wiliest. Which peace if it be after thine own soul and heart, there ought to be no contest about the name of Catholic. For if it is through God that our people obtain this name, no question is to be raised, when Divine authority is followed. If through man, you must discover when it was first taken. Then, if the name is good, no odium rests with it; if ill, it need not be envied. The Novatians, I hear, are called after Novatus or Novatian; yet it is the sect which I accuse in them, not the name: nor has any one objected their name to Montanus or the Phrygians.

5. But under the Apostles, you will say, no one was called Catholic. Be it thus. It shall have been so. Allow even that. When after the Apostles heresies had burst forth, and were striving under various names to tear piecemeal and divide the Dove and the Queen of God, did not the Apostolic people require a name of their own, whereby to mark the unity

of the people that were uncorrupted, lest the error of some should rend limb by limb the undefiled virgin of God? Was it not seemly that the chief head should be distinguished by its own peculiar appellation? Suppose, this very day, I entered a populous city. When I had found Marcionites, Apollinarians, Cataphrygians, Novatians, and others of the kind who call themselves Christians, by what name should I recognise the congregation of my own people, unless it were named Catholic? Come tell me, who bestowed so many names on the other peoples? Why have so many cities, so many nations, each their own description? The man who asks the meaning of the Catholic Name, will he be ignorant himself of the cause of his own name if I shall enquire its origin? Whence was it delivered to me? Certainly that which has stood through so many ages was not borrowed from man. This name "Catholic" sounds not of Marcion, nor of Apelles, nor of Montanus, nor does it take heretics as its authors.

7. Many things the Holy Spirit hath taught us, Whom God sent from Heaven to the Apostles as their Comforter and Guide. Many things reason teaches us, as Paul saith, and honesty, and, as he says, nature herself. What! Is the authority of Apostolic men, of Primitive Priests, of the most blessed Martyr and Doctor Cyprian, of slight weight with us? Do we wish to teach the teacher? Are we wiser than he was, and are we puffed up by the spirit of the flesh against the man, whom his noble shedding of blood, and a crown of most glorious suffering, have set forth as a witness of the Eternal God? What thinkest thou of so many Priests on this same side, who throughout the whole world were compacted together in one bond of peace with this same Cyprian? What of so many aged Bishops, so many Martyrs, so many Confessors? Come say, if they were not sufficient authorities for the use of this name, are we sufficient for its rejection? And shall the Fathers rather follow our authority, and the antiquity of Saints give way to be emended by us, and times now putrifying through their sins, pluck out the grey hairs of Apostolic age? And yet, my brother, be not troubled; Christian is my name, but Catholic my surname. The former gives me a name, the latter distinguishes me. By the one I am approved; by the other I am but marked.

8. And if at last we must give an account of the word Catholic, and draw it out from the Greek by a Latin interpretation, "Catholic" is 'every where one ,' or, (as learned men think,) "obedience in all," i. e. all the commands of God. Whence the Apostle, Whether ye he obedient in all things; and again, For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous. Therefore he who is a Catholic, the same man is obedient . He who is obedient, the same is a Christian, and thus the Catholic is a Christian. Wherefore our people when named Catholic are separated by this appellation from the heretical name. But if also the word Catholic means 'every where one,' as those first think, David indicates this very thing, when he saith, The queen did stand in a vesture of gold, wrought about with, divers colours; that is, one amidst all. And in the Song of Songs the Bridegroom speaketh these words, My dove, My undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her that bare her. Again it is written, The virgins shall be brought unto the King after her. And further, Virgins without number.

Therefore amidst all she is one, and one over all. If thou askest the reason of the name, it is evident.

9. But as to penance , God grant that it may be necessary for none of the faithful; that no one after the help of the sacred font may fall into the pit of death, and that Priests may not be compelled to inculcate or to teach its tardy consolations, lest, whilst by remedies they soothe the sinner, they open a road to sin. But we lay open this indulgence of our God to the miserable, not to the happy; not before sin, but after sins; nor do we announce a medicine to the whole, but to the sick. If spiritual wickednesses have no power over the baptized, none, that fraud of the serpent, which subverted the first man, which hath printed on his posterity so many marks of condemnation: if it hath retired from the world, if we have already begun to reign, if no crime steals over our eyes, none over our hands, none over our minds, then let this gift of God be cast aside, this help rejected; be no confession, no groans, heard; let a proud righteousness despise every remedy.

10. But if the Lord Himself hath provided these things for His own creature man, if the same Lord Who hath bestowed remedies on the fallen, hath given rewards to them that stand, cease to accuse the Divine goodness, to erase by the interposition of your own rigour so many inscriptions of heavenly mercy, or by inexorable harshness to prohibit the gratuitous good gifts of the Lord. This is not a largess from our own bounty. Turn ye, saith the Lord, even to Me, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart; and again, Let the wicked man leave his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts , and turn unto the Lord, and he shall obtain mercy. And also after this manner crieth the Prophet, For He is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. Hath the serpent so lasting a poison, and hath not Christ a remedy? Doth the Devil kill in the world, and hath Christ no power here to help? Be we indeed ashamed to sin, but not ashamed to repent. Be we ashamed to hazard ourselves, but not ashamed to be delivered. Who will snatch the plank from the shipwrecked, that he escape not? Who will grudge the curing of a wound? Doth not David say, Every night I will wash my bed, I will water my couch with my tears; and again, I acknowledge my sin, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid;

and yet more, I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord, and so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my heart. Did not the Prophet answer him when, after the guilt of murder and adultery, penitent for Bathsheba, The Lord also hath put away from thee thy sin? Did not confession deliver the king of Babylon, when condemned after so many sins of idolatry? And what is it that the Lord saith, Shall he who has fallen not arise, and he who has turned not return? What answer give the subjects of those many parables of our Lord? That the woman findeth the coin, and rejoiceth when she hath found it? That the shepherd carrieth back the wandering sheep? That when the son was returning, all his goods wasted in riotous living with harlots and fornicators, the Father with kindness met him, and, assigning the grounds, chideth the , envious brother, saying, This My son was dead, and is alive again,

was lost, and is found. What of him who was wounded in the way, whom Levite and Priest passed by? Is he not taken care of?

11. Ponder what the Spirit saith to the Churches. The Ephesians He accuses of having forsaken their love; to them of Thyatira He imputeth fornication; the people of Sardis He blameth as loitering in the work; those of Pergamus as teaching things contrary; of the Laodiceans He brandeth the riches; and yet He calleth all to penance and to satisfaction. What meaneth the Apostle, when he writeth to the Corinthians thus, Lest, when I come, I bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness, and fornication, and lasciviousness, which they have committed? What, when again to the Galatians, If a man be overtaken in a fault, (i. e. any whatever,) ye who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Does then the master of the family in a large house guard only the silver and golden vessels? Does he not deign to guard both the earthen and the wooden, and some that are put together and repaired? Now I rejoice, saith the Apostle, that ye sorrowed to repentance; and again, for godly sorrow worketh repentance unto enduring salvation. But penitence, you say, was not allowed. No one enjoins a fruitless labour, For the labourer is worthy of his hire. Never would God threaten the impenitent, unless He would pardon the penitent . This,you will say, God alone can do. It is true. But that also which He does through His Priests, is His own authority.

Else what is that which He saith to the Apostles, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven? Why said He this, if it was not lawful for men to bind and loose? Is this allowed to Apostles only? Then to them also only is it allowed to baptize, and to them only to give the Holy Spirit, and to them only to cleanse the sins of the nations; for all this was enjoined on none others but Apostles.

12. But if both the loosening of bonds and the power of the Sacrament are given in one place, either the whole has been derived to us from the Apostolic form and authority, or else not even this relaxation has been made from the decree. I, he saith, have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. This, therefore, we build up, which the doctrine of the Apostles laid as the foundation. And, lastly, Bishops also are named Apostles, as saith Paul of Epaphroditus, My brother and fellow-soldier; but your Apostle. 13. If, therefore, the power of the Laver, and of the Anointing, gifts far greater, descended thence to Bishops, then the right of binding and of loosing was with them. Which although for our sins it be presumptuous in us to claim, yet God, Who hath granted unto Bishops the name even of His only Beloved, will not deny it unto them, as if holy and sitting in the chair of the Apostles.

14. I would write more, brother, were I not pressed by the hasty return of the servant, and were I not reserving a fuller account for thee when either present, or making confession of thy whole purport. Let no one despise the Bishop on consideration of the man. Let us remember that the Apostle Peter hath named our Lord, Bishop. But are now, he saith, returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. What shall be denied to the Bishop,

in whom operateth the Name of God? He shall indeed give an account, if he have done any thing wrong, or if he shall have judged corrupt and unrighteous judgment. Nor is God's Judgment forestalled, but that He may undo the work of a wicked builder. In the mean while, if that his ministration be holy, he abideth as an helper in the work of God. See the Apostle writeth to Laity: To whom, ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. But if what the Laity forgive, the Apostle saith that he hath forgiven, what a Bishop hath done, in what character can it be rejected? Therefore neither the Anointing, nor Baptism, nor remission of sins, nor the renewing of the Body, were granted to his sacred authority, because nothing was entrusted to him as assumed by himself, but the whole has descended in a stream from the Apostolic privilege.

15. Know , brother, that not indiscriminately to all is this very pardon through penance granted; nor until there shall have been either some indication of the Divine will, or perchance some visitation, may men be loosed; that with careful pondering and much balancing, after many groans and much shedding of tears, after the prayers of the whole Church, pardon is in such wise not refused to true penitence, as that no one thereby prejudgeth the future Judgment of Christ. If, brother, thou wouldest write thy sentiments more openly, thou shalt be more fully instructed. [Marginal numbered notes, references, and footnotes all moved to the end and renumbered]

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