Letter 2

Pacian of Barcelona (d. c. AD 391)

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Letter 2

EPISTLE II. CONCERNING NOVATIAN'S LETTER. [Translated by the Rev. C. H. Collyns, M.A., Student of Christ Church.] Novatians claimed to be called Christians only, not Catholics; cannot get rid of their human name; or affix any on the Catholics. Sympronian's captious criticism; all language God's gift. The civil power may punish misbelievers, if with good end. Novatians not persecuted, yet dwindle. Contrast of S. Cyprian and Novatian. Nov. no martyr, nor would suffering out of the Church make one. Pride of Novatian; humility is innocence. Pacian the Bishop to Sympronian his brother, greeting. 1. On a prolix question I will, as far as I can, seek brevity. Nor will I, brother, make thee any return of evil, although, under plea of fair questioning, casting and directing at me hidden arrows in thy speech, of thine own framing. We are bidden to pray for those that persecute us, and to bless those who curse us. Deceit belongeth as it were to the fox, violence to the lion. Either is most alien from the nature of man, but deceit is deservedly the most odious. For whereas thou deemest thou art best informed , thou questionest as if ignorant; when thou thinkest that thou art teaching, thou pretendest to be taught. The Pharisees of old were wont to call the Lord, Rabbi, when they were setting before Him ambiguous questions of the law; they entitled Him Master, when they would claim all mastery for themselves. But do what thou wilt, brother, thou shalt hear all in return from me without guile. I had rather be thought unskilful, than malicious. I. had rather be judged foolish, than crafty.

2. Wherefore, before I assign the grounds of our faith, (about which thou art anxious,) hear a few words on your letter, which you put as a front to your treatise. You say that you were refreshed by our former Epistle, and then straightway add that my answer was couched in bitter terms. If bitter things refresh, I know not what would be the effect of sweet; unless it be that, as in a draught of medicine, what is bitter is wont to cure more than what is sweet. But, I beg, look again at my letters and see whether they are at all sprinkled with gall; what there was haughty, what unsweet in my answer. Thou sayest that I named many heresies, about which no one enquired. Well, how did this affect thee, if thou wert not an heretic? You raised a question concerning our faith, and said that you wished for instruction; I wrote that the causes of ignorance were manifold, in order that you might shew which one especially had influence on you, to save perplexity in opening a large number.

3. On the name Catholic I answered fully and with calmness. For I said, that it mattered to neither, what the other was called. And if you demanded the meaning of the name, I said that, whatever it might be , it was wonderful, whether it was 'one in all,' or 'one over all,' or (an interpretation which I have not mentioned before,) 'the king's son,' that is, 'the Christian people.' Certainly too that was no accessory name which endured through so many ages. And indeed I am glad for thee that although thou mayest have preferred others, yet thou agreest that the name attaches to us. What, should you deny? Nature would cry out. But and if you still have doubts, let us hold our peace. We will both be that which we shall be named, witness the antiquity of the name. If, however, thou perseverest in asking, beware lest that man of might exclaim, Why askest thou thus after My Name, seeing it is wonderful? I next added, that we need not consider, whence Catholics, derived this name, because neither was it wont to be any imputation against the Valentinians, if they were called after Valentinus, nor the Phrygians, if from Phrygia, nor the Novatians, if after Novatian. At this you are grievously excited, and rouse yourself as if pierced with a sting. For in your wrath you thus exclaim, 'Is it ever any objection to that holy man Cyprian, that his people bear the name of Apostaticum, Capitolinum , or Synedrium? Thou revilest, but lo!

I am not moved. Have we been called by any of these names? Ask a century, brother, and all its years in succession, whether this name has adhered to us; whether the people of Cyprian have been called other than Catholic? No one of these names have I ever heard. Consider now, if a man can be called by a name, which he knows not to have been given him. What then? These are taunts, not names, and taunts of the angry, taunts of the petulant. I too could call you by as many names as you will, were it lawful to be angry. Callest thou Cyprian holy, and his people apostatizing? How so? If the first-fruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches. Am I Apostate, or Novatus? I, I say, or Novatus who forsook his father, abandoned the Church, and caused his wife to miscarry ? Am I Apostate, or Novatian, whom a letter in his absence made a feigned Bishop , whom the Episcopal seat received without consecration from any? But of these points hereafter. In the mean time, tell me yourselves what ye are called. Do ye deny that the Novatians are called frorm Novatian? Impose on them whatever name you like; that will ever adhere to them. Search, if it please you, whole annals, and trust so many ages. You will answer, "Christian. But if I enquire the genus of the sect, you will not deny that it is Novatian.

And yet it is not the name of thy Novatian which I censure, and which, so often sought after, thou cnvelopest in lines of circumlocution, and, if I may so speak, in closed bosom. Confess it without deceit. There is no wickedness in the name. Why, when so often enquired for, do you hide yourself? Why ashamed of the origin of your name? When you first wrote, I thought you a Cataphrygian. Dost thou acknowledge it in thy second letter? Dost thou grudge me my name, and yet shun thine own? Think what there is of shame in a cause which shrinks from its own name.

5. But what is this thy criticism on which thou art so busy? As though I had applied to a Rhetorician, or had to treat of a science, or to expound verses of Virgil? What then had I said? or what verses of Virgil was I expounding ? Having named several heretics, I added, 'Et quos fama recondit obscura .' And whence thinkest thou this to be quoted from a verse of Virgil, if thou hadst no knowledge at all of Virgil? But I did not set down the verse in order, for I said, 'Quos fama recondit obscura,' just as, when speaking, we are accustomed, out of the abundance of human language, to say any thing which may have been said before. Whereas you requote the verse in its own order, in its rhythm. Hadst thou so much more love for Virgil, as to deem it sacrilege, to make any infringement on his verse? And yet I had learnt this of a little child. What wonder if I stumbled on that which I knew? Is there such a spirit of enterprise then, brother, that now at last thou readest those very things, which thou didst blush should once have been read by others? As well mayest thou accuse one, taught in Latin, for speaking Latin, as thou mightest a Greek for speaking Greek, a Parthian for speaking Parthian, a Carthaginian for speaking Punic. Medes, Egyptians, Hebrews, have each their own language, according to the abundance of the Lord, Who hath harmonized language into an hundred and twenty tongues.

A Bishop quote a verse from a Poet! What? Does the Apostle Paul blush, when he hath both quoted and approved of that Athenian verse? For in the Acts of the , Apostles he putteth it thus, As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are His offspring. Since then we are the offspring of God. And again, to Titus he said, One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. And he added, This witness is true. So we have authority for our error. Nor are we Rhetoricians, but whatever word we use, we believe it to be the rich gift of God. Latium, Egypt, Athens, Thracians, Arabians, Spaniards, acknowledge God. The Holy Spirit understandeth all languages.

7. But why do you say, 'I will smear thy letters with fresh oil of cedar, to protect them from the destructive enemies of the Muses?' What Muses, I pray you? Those who invented letters, and wrote the sheets which are the prey of moths? Tell me, I pray then, brother, did the Muses invent letters? Are not all things through The Lord, and all from God? Besides those hundred and twenty tongues, was there yet another of the Muses? That idea was falsely devised by Hesiod on Helicon, but only to please the Athenians, who , the Apostle says, had no leisure but to talk. We (the Apostle is our witness) retain the measures of all words, and all kinds of language, as inspired by God. Yet I pardon you, brother, if you rely somewhat upon your own author, and if you join together the philosophy of Novatian, whereby he made shipwreck of religion, with the authority of Hesiod. But thou oughtest to have remembered the words of the Apostle, who saith, Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.

8. And now of what sort is that which you think is to be imputed to Catholics, "if at any time kings or governments have persecuted you? Then, on the other hand, ought it to be imputed to you, as often as Catholics have had to endure the wickedness and persecution of kings, and pagan princes have persecuted us. Have ye had to bear the odium attached

to Christians? But we have had more reason to complain. Let him who did this, see to it with what intention, in what spirit he did it; to procure peace or discord. But and if some of them have erred, he saith, shall they make the faith of God without effect? And yet think not that there was any reason to complain of us. When through our Faith princes had begun to be Christians, these very princes, favouring the Catholic, that is their own, side, were moved by their own sorrow; unless it is to be imputed to Daniel, that he was avenged by Darius: or to that most holy woman Esther, when for her a chief minister of the king is put to death: or to the three youths, because after they had made trial of the flames, the king of Babylon for their sakes threatens the wicked and unbelieving. Does not Peter put Simon to confusion with the consent of the judge ? Does not Paul strike Elymas blind with the approval of Sergius?

And even at Jerusalem he had been avenged, had he when in bonds had any confidence in them . Dost thou not know that authorities themselves are the servants of the innocent, and minister for good to the holy side ? As saith the Apostle, Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shall have praise of the same through the Lord; for he is a minister of God to thee for good.

9. And yet I have complained of no one, I have been avenged on no one, nor do I think that the Novatians are any obstacle to me, in whose fewness and decrease, if I would, I might glory. See, no one accuses your people to the Emperor, and yet thou art alone . Nevertheless we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, of which one thing I know the Novatians would complain, if their cause were acceptable to any princes. 10. ”It profiteth more,” you say, ”to overcome than to please.” But they who are led by a burning desire to overcome make their way by contention. Whereas the Apostle saith, But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the Churches of God. On the other hand, of the desire of pleasing he saith, I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own, profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. But ye, whilst ye are thinking of your own, not the profit of your brethren, had rather destroy by overcoming, than refresh by pleasing. To overcome evil with good, is the office of reason: but to wish for victory, in whatever cause it be, is the part of a mad presumption. This cometh from the law not of Apostles, but of Greeks, amongst whom it is found on record, that the whole spirit of the Lacedemonians was inflamed with a desire of conquering. The filthy boar also, and the infuriated tigress, what else do they desire but to conquer, rather than to please?

11. ”I have leisure,” you write, and therefore art thou well pleased with contention. But to me, fully occupied in Catholic business, your letters were delivered after about thirty days; resumed, after forty more. 12. You say that I am angry. God forbid. I believe that I am roused; like the bee who sometimes defends her honey with her sting. But reconsider the letters on either side. You will soon see whether it be with stings or with flowers that we join issue on paper. The Apostle indeed speaks of some similar persons, whose mouths must be stopped . But listen, we engage with thee, as doves, with the mouth rather than with the

teeth. 13. Oh! would it were true that thou sayest thou wouldest be taught! at once, with my own hands would I give thee the very anointing of the Holy Spirit. Dost thou love me? I have not harmed thee, this I know. But then couldest thou love me, if thou didst not hold things contrary; then wouldest thou approach my work with kindly feelings.

14. Dost thou marvel that the Epistles of Cyprian please me? And how should they not, the Epistles of a blessed Martyr and a Catholic Priest? Dost thou force Novatian upon me? I hear that he was a philosopher of the world; it is not then much wonder to me that he fell away from the Church of the Living God. I know that he deserted the root of the ancient law, the fountain of the ancient people; envying Cornelius, lending himself to the phrenzy of Novatus, made Bishop without legitimate consecration, and therefore not even made, by the letter of those men, who pretended they were Confessors, who rent asunder the limbs of their one mother. These points, brother, I will prove to you in letters, by the confession of your own friends. Thus this philosopher of thine, seeking to establish his own wisdom, as the Apostle saith, was not made subject to the wisdom of God, since by its wisdom the world knoweth not the wisdom of God. For whereas thou supposest that Novatian suffered first, and subjoinest that Cyprian said, "My adversary hath preceded me," see how clear the answer I can make. Novatian never endured martyrdom; nor was that ever heard or read from the words of the most blessed Cyprian. Thou hast his Epistles in which he mentions Cornelius Bishop of the City , of whom Novatian was then envious, as resisting the hostile princes, often a confessor, often harassed;

as made the leader of many Confessors, of many Martyrs also, and as receiving a most glorious crown with many others, whilst Novatian was still alive, and even free from all anxiety. For he had left the Church of Christ for this very reason, that he might not have to bear the toils of Confessorship . First, stung by envy, he could not endure the Episcopate of Cornelius; then, with the mockery of those letters of a few, he had bound himself to Novatus. All this concerning Novatian you may learn from the letters of Cyprian.

15. But, moreover, although Novatian did endure some suffering, yet was he not also slain. And although he was slain, yet was he not crowned. Why not? He was without the peace of the Church, without the bounds of concord, without the pale of that mother, of whom he ought to be a part who is a Martyr. Hear the Apostle, And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. But Cyprian suffered, in concord with all, in the common peace of all, amid a company of Confessors; and, having often been a Confessor in reiterated persecutions, and harassed with many a torment, had at last given him to drink of the cup of salvation. This was to be crowned! Wherefore let Novatian have his Epistles to himself, to himself his haughtiness, to himself his pride, by which, whilst he is lifted up on high, he is dashed down to pieces, whilst he spares no one, he is himself cast out.

16. Lo! the man, who by an inexorable religion closes the way of salvation against his brethren! Lo! the man, who is confident that he beareth the fan , and is purging the garner

of the Lord! Take pity on thyself, brother Sympronian, lest Novatian deceive thee under this mask, as though he were therefore to be thought the more righteous, because he despised others in comparison of himself. Audacity often feigns itself confidence; and the false image of a good conscience flatters even desperate sinners. Whereas contrariwise all humility is innocence, even that of the debtor, even that of the sinner, even that which softeneth its soul with the sinner. Blot me, I pray Thee, says Moses, out of Thy book which Thou hast written; and this, that sinners might not perish. For I could wish, saith the Apostle, that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. Both then pray for sinners; and yet neither Moses nor Paul offend God on this account. Is Novatian better than they? a corrector of Prophets? a teacher of Apostles? Is he now seen with Christ, as was this same Moses? Is he now carried up, as was Paul, into the third heaven? Is he alone to be now heard, and all others neglected? This would have been a sufficient answer to return to your letter.

17. But as you argue to some extent against doing penance, or for doing it before Baptism; and have filled your page with many chapters of examples from his treatise, I will, though more than is called for, answer each point. I will not hold back the substance of the truer faith. And as thou hast deigned to enjoin on me to hear thee at great length, do thou in return afford a kind requital to our treatise. The Lord perhaps will vouchsafe, that we, who have patiently yielded ourselves to thy enquiries, may gather some fruit from thy patience also. The Lord vouchsafe to guard and protect thee for ever, and make thee to live a Christian and a Catholic, and to agree with us! Amen. [Marginal numbered notes, references, and footnotes all moved to the end and renumbered]

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