Letter 3

Pacian of Barcelona (d. c. AD 391)

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EPISTLE III. AGAINST THE TREATISE OF THE NOVATIANS. [Translated by the Rev. C. H. Collyns, M.A., Student of Christ Church.] Pacian the Bishop to Sympronian his brother, greeting. 1. The whole treatise of the Novatians, which you have addressed to me thronged with propositions on all sides, amounts to this, brother Sympronian: That there is no room for repentance after Baptism; that the Church cannot remit mortal sin; that by the receiving of sinners she herself perishes. Illustrious honour! Singular authority! Great constancy! To reject the guilty; to flee the touch of sinners; to have so little confidence in her own innocence!

2. Who is the assertor of this doctrine, brother, Moses, or Paul, or Christ? But Moses wishes to be wiped out of the book for the sake of blasphemers; and Paul to be accursed for his brethren; and the Lord Himself willeth to suffer for the unrighteous. None of these, you will say. Who then, I ask? It was the ordinance of Novatian. Some spotless and pure man, I suppose, who was no follower of Novatus, who never deserted the Church, who was made Bishop by Bishops, who was consecrated according to the received rites, who obtained the Episcopal Chair in the Church when duly vacant? What is that to thee? thou wilt say. I answer, Novatian taught this doctrine. But, at least, when did he teach it, brother, or at what period? Immediately after the Passion of the Lord? After the reign of Decius, that is, nearly three hundred years after the Passion of the Lord. And what then did he? Did he follow Prophets, as the Cataphrygians? some Philumene, as Apelles? or received he himself so great authority? Spake he with tongues? Did he prophesy? Could he raise the dead? For some one of these powers he ought to have had who was to bring in a Gospel with new laws . Although the Apostle crieth even against this, Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

3. Novatian, you will say, discerned this; but Christ taught it. Was there no one of discernment from the Advent of Christ even to the reign of Decius? Again, since Decius, has every Bishop been weary of his office ? all others relaxed men, choosing rather to join themselves with the lost, to perish with the miserable, to be wounded through the wounds of others? Novatian vindicateth, righteousness is set free; Novatian guideth, every error is corrected. 4. "But come," you will say, "let our conflict be carried on with examples, and let us contend with reasoning." But I so far am safe. Contented with the line of the Church itself, with the

peace of the ancient congregation, I have learnt no desire of discord, I have sought no arguments for contest. Thou, having been separated from the rest of the body, and divided from thy mother, that thou mayest give account of thy deed, art an assiduous searcher into the inmost recesses of books; every thing which is hidden, you molest; and whatever is at rest, you disturb. Our Fathers, unrequired, entered into no dispute; our very unanxiousness sought no arms; every advance of your party is guarded. I then know not what Novatian did, of what Novatian was guilty, what the swelling pride of Evaristus, what the report of Nicostratus. Despising your weapons, I know them not; yet, beware, how thou engage with unarmed truth. Let us await, however, what thou mayest object, what thou hast to say. Will truth be able to hold its ground though unarmed, or innocence unskilled?

5. You set forth, and rightly indeed, that "the Church is a people born again of water and the Holy Spirit, free from denying the Name of Christ, the temple and house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth; a Holy Virgin of chastest feelings, the spouse of Christ, of His Bones and His Flesh, not having spot, or wrinkle, holding the laws of the Gospels entire." Who of us denies this? But we add moreover that: the Church is the queen in a vesture of gold, wrought about: with divers colours; the fruitful vine on the walls of the House of the Lord; the mother of virgins without number; the one beautiful and perfect Dove, the chosen' of her mother, the very mother of all; built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. A great house enriched with a diversity of every kind of vessel. But this of ours hereafter. Meanwhile, consider we those of yours.

6. "The Church is a people born again of water and the Holy Spirit" Well! say, who hath closed the fountain of God against me? Who hath taken the Holy Spirit from me? Yea, rather with us is the living water, the very water which springeth from Christ; but thou, separated from the everlasting Fountain, whence receivest thou thy birth? Nor hath the Holy Spirit departed from the chief mother; whence then came He to thee? Unless perchance He hath followed one that is in strife, and abandoning so many priests, nor pleased to abide in His consecrated dwelling-place, hath preferred the broken cisterns of an adulterated fountain? Whence have your people the Spirit, not having, been sealed by an anointed priest? Whence the water, being separated from its mother's womb? Whence renewal, who have lost the cradle of Bridal Peace?

7. 'The Church is a people free from denying the Name of Christ' Are there then no Confessors amongst us, no Martyrs, no untainted and spotless Priests, who have been proved by prisons, by chains, by fire, by the sword? " There were," thou wilt say, " but by receiving those who had denied, they perished. I do not mention, I do not infer even this, that your own Novatian, whilst he was still living in the Church, both wrote, and recommended, and read a book, on receiving those who had denied, or the lapsed. In the mean time, whom will you be able to persuade that by receiving the lapsed the whole Church hath perished? That by the admission of penitents, the people of those who admit them has been made a denier of the Faith? But even if the people here or there have been too lax, have the other

peoples also who approved not of their deed, but followed custom and peace, lost the Christian name? Hear the voice of Jeremiah, In those days shall they not say, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity. Nor is the Lord silent by the mouth of Ezekiel, As the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die; and afterwards, The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son;

the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him. You yourself bring forward this example; Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they only shall be delivered. See, they who are placed in the midst of sinners, who cannot deliver others, are themselves saved. Whereas thou bindest the whole world with the chains of a few; thou condemnest the whole Church for the infirmity of a small portion. What are all with you saints, whom Novatus trained, whom Evaristus chose, whom Nicostratus taught, whom Novatian instructed? Hast thou escaped the thorns and briars? Hast thou no tares in thy corn? Is thy wheat already purged? Will He that purgeth come to thee without His fail? Shalt thou alone of all have no chaff? But come, proceed with the rest.

8. "The Church is the body of Christ." Truly, the body, not a member; the body composed of many parts and members knit in one, as saith the Apostle, For the body is not one member, but many. Therefore the Church is the full body, compacted and diffused now throughout the whole world; like a city, I mean, all whose parts are united, not as ye are, O Novatians, some small and insolent portion, and a mere swelling that has gathered, and separated from the rest of the body. 9. "The Church is the temple of God." Truly, an ample temple, a great house, having vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth, some unto honour; and many indeed of glorious fashion destined for the manifold uses of various works. 10. "The Church is a holy Virgin, of chastest feelings, the Spouse of Christ." "A Virgin," it is true, but a mother also. A " Spouse," it is clear, but also a wife and an helpmeet taken from her Husband, and therefore bone of His bones, and flesh of His flesh. For of her David saith, Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine upon the walls of thine house; thy children like the olive-branches round about thy table. Great, therefore, is the progeny of this Virgin, and without number her offspring, wherewith the whole world is filled, wherewith the populous swarm ever throngs the circumfluous hive. Great is the care of that mother for her children, and tender her affection. The good are honoured, the haughty are chastised, the sick are cared for, no one perishes, no one is despised, the young are kept safe under the indulgent protection of a mother.

11. "The Church is without spot or wrinkle," that is, without heresies, without Valentinus, without Cataphrygians, without Novatians. For in these are certain spotted and wrinkled folds, envious of the ornaments of the precious vesture. But the sinner and the penitent are not a spot on the Church, because, as long as he sinneth and repenteth not, he is put without the Church . When he ceases to sin, he is already whole. But the heretic rends, divides, spots, wrinkles, the garment of the Lord, the Church of Christ. For whereas there

are schisms and contentions among you, saith the Apostle, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? and moreover, Their word will eat as doth a canker. This is the spot that defileth unity, this the wrinkle. Lastly, when the Apostle is speaking of these things, he is setting forth the love and affection of Christ. As Christ, he saith, loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might remove , that is, the heretics, because they know not how to love. But why is this, you will say, for the wretched penitent? Because he wisheth both to love and be loved.

12. "The Church is that which keepeth the laws of the Gospels entire." Truly "entire," because all, because fully Where reward is given to the faithful, where tears are not denied to the wretched, where the weeping of them that ask is heard, where the wounded are bound up, where the sick are healed, where insolent health claimeth nothing for itself nor a proud righteousness, where charity endureth long solicitous for all, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things; (whence is that of the Apostle, Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?) where the whole brotherhood mourning together, beareth its own burdens, secure in mutual affection, all in turn bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This will be the Church, brother Sympronian; this will be the " people born again in Christ of water and the Holy Spirit."

13. "I know not," you say, "whether sin can be remitted by Bishops, since our Lord hath said, Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Which is in heaven. Why then did your Novatian teach this, when a Priest, before he had falsely assumed the Episcopate, long before Cornelius was made Bishop of Rome, before he was envious of his priesthood? You have the evidence of Cyprian to this; Cyprian, whom not even ye have ever been able to defame. For in a certain place he writes to Antonianus after this manner ; 'It was added, moreover, (Novatian being then the writer, and with his own voice reciting what he had written, and Moyses, then a Confessor, now a Martyr, subscribing,) that peace should be given to the lapsed when sick, and in extremities; which Epistle was sent throughout the world, and brought to the knowledge of all the Churches.' What sayest thou, brother Sympronian? Novatian wrote this, and, that he might add the assent of his entire will, recited it also when written. His right hand is witness; witness the hand which wrote; witness the tongue which read. As yet Cornelius, on account of whom all this envy of yours burst forth, was not Bishop. Long subsequent to this, with very many brother Bishops, with very many Confessors, and forthwith Martyrs, as the same Cyprian writes, he agreed in the decision of the elders, that peace might be given. If the approach to penance is to be refused, Novatian is involved in the guilt, who wrote, recommended, and recited this. Where then was this impatient rigour? Where then this unrelenting censorship? Had no one preferred Cornelius to you, that authority of Novatian so writing had remained.

14. Now this whole judgment displeaseth, now are arrows shot at us, and these very men furnish them, by whose authority the cause whereat they direct them, gained its strength. But when began the Novatians to fall into this very heresy? Listen, I pray, and consider the

whole course of your error. Cornelius, now made Bishop of Rome by sixteen Bishops, had succeeded to the place of the vacant Chair, and in that virginal chastity wherewith he was endued, suffered frequent persecutions from the angered Prince. At that time by chance a certain Presbyter named Novatus , having defrauded the widows in the Church of Carthage, robbed orphans, denied and withheld the money of the Church, cast his father out of his house, suffered him to die of hunger and left him without burial, stricken with his heel the womb of his pregnant wife, and destroyed her child, came from Africa to Rome. And there, when at the urgent request of his brethren in the Church, the day on which he must render account at Carthage was close upon him, he lay concealed.

15. And not long after, when this Novatian was troubled at the Episcopate of Cornelius, (for he had hoped it for himself,) he, with some partizans of his side, (as is men's wont in such cases,) urges him on when hesitating, encourages him when doubtful, exhorts him to hope for something great. He finds some out of the number of those who escaped the tempest of that persecution, in whose minds he could infuse against Cornelius this very odium about the receiving of the lapsed. He gives to Novatian their letters to him. He by authority of these letters, there being already a Bishop sitting at Rome, in opposition to the laws of the singleness of the Priesthood, assumes to himself the name of a second Bishop; accuses Cornelius of being in communion with the lapsed; asserts his own innocence. Over against such a man I am to render account; against such, I am to maintain the cause of modesty; against such is purity of life to be vindicated!

16. "But," thou wilt say, "why do ye too, Bishops, approve such things?" This let another say; do thou defend Novatian. Let the cause seem to others inexcusable; to thee it should be acceptable. Be he innocent in thy sight, whoever is in thy behalf guilty. Accuse not another of a crime, from which you cannot clear yourself. Well, be it that we Bishops every way owe a debt of shame, because we have received the name of Apostles, because we are sealed with the title of Christ. "The Lord," thou sayest, "denies him that denieth, I would not that thou shouldest acknowledge him denying." Who does acknowledge him denying? He, I ask, who constrains him to penance, rebukes him, shews him his crime, lays bare his wounds, tells him of eternal punishments, corrects him by the destruction of the flesh? This is to chasten, not to acknowledge. The Lord saith unto us, Ye are the salt of the earth. Good then is the harmony when we so teach, nor will its authority be slight, whosoever shall hear us. Thou seest that the sentence of the Lord is not trampled on, but enforced by us; severity is not laid aside, but His will laid open.

17. "But," thou wilt say, "you forgive sin to the penitent, whereas it is allowed to you to remit sin only in Baptism." Not to me at all, but to God only, Who both in Baptism forgiveth the guilt incurred, and rejecteth not the tears of the penitent. But what I do, I do not by my own right, but by the Lord's. We are labourers together with God, saith the Apostle; ye are God's building; and again, I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Wherefore, whether we baptize, whether we constrain to penance, or grant pardon

to the penitent, we do this by the authority of Christ. See thou to it, whether Christ hath this power, whether Christ have done this. 18. "If remission of sin," thou sayest, "could be given to the penitent, Baptism was not necessary." Most senseless comparison! For Baptism is the Sacrament of the Lord's Passion: the pardon of penitents is the earning of him that confesseth. The former all can obtain, because it is the gift of the grace of God, that is, a free gift; but penitence is the toil of the few, who after falling arise, who after wounds recover, who are holpen by tearful prayers, who recover life through the destruction of the flesh.

19. Thou maintainest that to no purpose did I adduce that instance that God hath said, I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he repent. What had I added that of Isaiah, When thou shall return and mourn, then shall thou be saved, and know where thou hast been? What if that of the Apocalypse, Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works? "These things," (thou wilt say,) "were spoken to the Gentiles before Baptism." Hear the Apostle, Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law. Therefore, those who lived without the law will not be holden by this condition of repentance. And should they have repented, they had done it out of an unconstrained faith, not by any bond of repentance imposed by the law.

20. Therefore (thou wilt say) the Jews at least who repented before Baptism cannot repent after Baptism. Who taught thee this, brother Sympronian? Who convinced thee that he who may have repented before, ought not to repent afterwards? But this we will see hereafter. Meanwhile, even if the Jews were precluded from repentance after Baptism, because they had repented before, allow that the Gentiles at least who, before, knew not the law of repentance, ought to repent afterwards. But I would not that thou shouldest be deceived even as to the Jews. For on this very ground did they before repent, because they had corrupted their old Baptism, and they repented as having, after Faith, betrayed the Faith. Hear the Apostle, Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Bock was Christ. This Baptism then they had violated, and therefore did they repent. Let us now see what thou sayest.

21. "If God bids man often repent," (sayest thou,) "He allows him often to sin." What sayest thou? Does he then who frequently points out the remedy for a crime, point out the crime? And when the physician cures, does he teach us to be constantly wounded? God wisheth not man to sin even once, and yet He delivers him from sin. Nor yet when He delivereth, doth He teach sin; as neither does he who delivers from a fire, teach to kindle it; nor does he who rescues the shipwrecked from the cliffs, drive him upon the rocks. It is one thing to be delivered from danger, another to be forced upon danger. And perchance I might allow this, if luxury were accounted penitence, on which such toil is imposed, the destruction of the flesh enjoined, continual tears, unending groans. Will he then who has been cured wish again to feel the knife, again to suffer cautery? Will he wish to sin again, and again to

repent, when it is written, Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee; and again, On him that sinneth constantly I have no mercy .

22. But if, as thou sayest, he is driven into sin, to whom is pointed out the medicine of penance; what then will be his case, who is shut out even from penance? who has his whole wound laid bare, and yet despairs of any remedy? who is utterly and entirely denied any approach to life?

23. "In Baptism," (thou wilt say,) "we die once for all according to the Apostle, Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His Death? Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. What marvel? The Apostle taught that we were renewed, that no one might sin. And yet it followed that he who had sinned should repent. The one is to live uninjured, the other cured. The innocent should receive a crown, the penitent pardon: the one a reward, the other a remedy. And, lastly, the same Apostle saith, For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Much more then, being now justified by His Blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. From the wrath, that is, which was due to sinners. But if He suffered not the Gentile people to die, much more when redeemed will He not suffer them to be lost. Nor will He cast away those, whom He hath bought at a great Price. Nor is the loss of His servants a little matter in His eyes. , He That has risen again shall die no more, as it is written. But Himself is our Advocate with the Father, Himself intercedeth for our sins, no powerless Maintainer of the cause of the wretched, no inadequate Intercessor! Answer, brother; can the devil oppress the servants of God, and cannot Christ set them free?

24. Thou sayest, that "the repentance of Peter was before the Passion of our Lord?" No one adduced this instance to thee. And yet Peter had been already baptized. For to him the Lord had said , He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit. Afterwards, however, he received the remedy of Christ's Death, but he repented before, and was esteemed holy before he attained to thisremedy. Nor would his repentance be written as a memorial, had it not in some way profited the penitent. He wept, it is said, bitterly. Wiliest thou not that the believer should do what Peter did? Wiliest thou not that what profited Peter should profit us? Come say, Favoureth it not me, that Thomas, after the Resurrection of the Lord, doubt of the Resurrection? Is he not marked by the Lord as guilty of faithlessness, when are shewn him the prints of the nails, the pierced Hands, the wound in the Side, when the Lord saith unto him thus, Be not faithless, but believing? What then? Was he ashamed to repent? Was he not humbled? Does he not straightway acknowledge his God and his Lord? And is not that confession his commendation?

25. How acutely now dost thou dispatch that head which I set down, that power was given unto Bishops, that whatsoever they bound on earth, should be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever they loosed on earth, should be loosed also in heaven. Thou sayest, that this has reference not to the Faithful, but to Catechumens, that in the case, namely, of people yet to

be baptized, sins were allowed either to be loosed or retained. Lastly, thou joinest together clauses from two Evangelists, so as to seem one; and addest, that what Matthew detailed less fully, John filled up: so that whereas the Lord had said according to Matthew, Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, He completed His words in John, saying, Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained; so that this loosing or binding may seem to refer to the Gentiles who were yet to be baptized, because the former Evangelist spoke first of the Gentiles, but the latter "filled up" concerning loosing and binding. What sayest thou? Do the two Evangelists relate meanings mutually halved between them, and but half entire? Were they mutually deficient either in language or in reason? Or did not in all the Holy Spirit fill the whole man, carrying out entirely the sense proposed, and defining the words even to the full? No one super-addeth to a man's testament when confirmed:

shall another covenant change the covenant of God? What is this desire in you of overcoming, that you dare any such thing? What is this, which according to Matthew himself the Lord had said before His Passion, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven? Our Lord had foretold this in St. Matthew, and made there no mention of the Gentiles. Why then do you join on the chapter of John to him, where he has set down what is peculiar to himself, and so set it down, as to keep it distinct from the Gentiles; which, had he wished to refer to the Gentiles, he could surely join that together which himself elsewhere set down.

26. All thou seekest then, thou hast in Matthew. Why didst not thou, who teachest a Bishop, read the whole? Look at the first head of that command. According to the relation of Matthew himself, the Lord spake a little above to Peter; (He spake to one, that from one He might lay the foundation of unity;) afterwards delivering the very same command in common to all, He still begins in the same terms as to Peter; And I say also unto thee, He saith, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And 1 will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Say, brother, did He speak this of the Gentiles only, Upon this rock, He saith, I will build My Church? Doth He call nations not baptized, the Church? Is man not as yet re-born, the body of Christ? What do I loose to the Gentiles? What is not bound? For if it is not imputed, nor bound, why bind I on, what I bind not of right? The Gentile is free from the Law. See now, on the other hand, whether both words do not agree with the baptized. He is loosed by pardon, because he was bound by sin: he is bound by anathema, because he had been loosed by faith, and set free through grace. But if I grant that this power of loosing and binding regarded the Gentiles also, much more do I prove that it appertained to the baptized. For if he could be loosed or bound, who had no chain, how much more he, who was held by the laws of faith?

27. Thou sayest that Matthew had written, If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; and that immediately after the Lord added, Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; so that it would seem to have reference to offence given to a brother. But look, seest thou not what He saith above, If thy brother shall trespass against thee? but here He addeth, Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall loose on earthy &c. The former is a command to one, the latter a power of loosing granted to many; the one, that same looseth against whom it is committed, the other, the Church; the former is obtained without the priest, without the brethren, the latter from all. Whatsoever ye shall loose, He says. He excepted nothing whatever. Whatsoever, He says, great or small. Listen to what He saith to Peter below, that sin against man is to be forgiven seventy times seven, in order to shew that in other cases it can be forgiven at least once . And yet he who sins against Peter, doth despite to the Lord, as He declares Himself when speaking to Samuel, They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me. What then is commanded to us so often, is allowed to the Church, at least, once.

28. But to return to the lost sheep, the piece of silver, and the younger son, examples upon which I slightly touched in my former letter, thou hast gone over again in full, teaching and shewing that the piece of silver, and the sheep, and the younger son, refer to publicans and sinners, that is, a lowly people, not to the image of the Christian people, nor the likeness of the faithful. I congratulate myself on being taught, but I am sorry that I comprehend not. For what shall I say? That whatsoever the law saith, it saith to those under the law, and that this was spoken principally to the former people, but as a likeness of the faithful, but as an image of those who should be, as the Apostle saith, Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come; and again, All which things in them were a shadow of good things to come. Certainly thou thyself acknowledgest that these things were spoken to publicans and sinners, that is, a lowly people, and therefore the younger. Say then, is not the Christian people itself that younger people ? Hath it not grown together into the root? Hath He not compacted these members into one? built, as it is written, upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner Stone. Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles?

Yes, of the Gentiles also. For there is One God, Who justifieth the ungodly by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith. Certainly, that lowly people, whom God compared to the piece of silver, the younger son, and the sheep, was the Church, whence are Apostles, whence is the whole assembly of believers, whence the Christian people. To this body then are joined our members also, and all portions of believers, out of the wild olive tree of the Gentiles, that they might grow together into a good olive tree, partaking, as the Apostle saith, of its fatness; and so we might be all one in Christ, Jew and Greek, bond and free. If, therefore, we with those lowly ones are one body, those things which were said to the lowly among the ancients were spoken also to us; and thus whatever was declared to a part of the body, was announced to the whole body.

29. I will speak more plainly still. This latter, this poor, this lowly people was an image of the Church, the humble and modest soul, the soul delivered through Christ. This the Lord came to save. This He left not in hell. This is the sheep which is carried back on the shoulders, that is, with the effort and might of patience. This the piece of silver, which is looked for, and, when found, is shewn unto the neighbours. Seest thou how its fashion is like unto the similitude of penitents? Seest thou that mercy is extended even to this time? Seest thou that whatever was spoken to the Church at its birth, relates also to the Church in its fulness? Thence did the Lord then add, Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. For if all these things were written for our admonition, to whom, I ask, shall that sinful, humble, people be compared, but to the penitent people? And if, the figures recurring in regular order, the ninety and nine sheep that were safe are the whole Church, but the one that strayed in that small portion of offenders, the piece of money which was lost is that wretched sinner, let the son returning after his evil ways, be held the pattern of him that is redeemed.

30. Thou now seest that I rightly set down, when treating of the cure of penitents, that the Lord said, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick; and rightly again, Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Whatsoever was said of publicans and sinners, will apply to all that are sick, and all that are miserable. 31. Thou sayest, "It was written of Martyrs only, Blessed are they that mourn." Does no one bewail his sins besides them? Doth not David cry, Every night wash I my bed? and again, For I have eaten ashes as it were bread; and, mingled my drink with weeping? Saith not Jacob, Few and evil have the years of my life been? Does not the Apostle write to Timothy, Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears? And yet he spoke not this of a Martyr. What now? Are the eyes of the wretched penitents dry? And they who grieve that they have sinned, know they not how to weep? We ourselves, the communicants, we, the faithful, have not we tears? Hath anyone of us pleasure in rejoicing, when the world rejoiceth? Ye, Novatians, Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us. It is not then they only who are miserable, who are the objects of commiseration .

82. Your next proposition is, that it is written by the Lord, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. Either I am mistaken, or this example makes against thee. For if all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, thou seest that pardon is not denied to penitents; all sin then, even blasphemy itself then. According to Luke you have it added, And whosoever shall sin against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him. What can be more large than this as to the mercy of God, the clemency of the Judge? Is not thine eye evil because the Householder is good? May not He do, what He willeth? Moreover, Who art thou that judgest a servant? to his own Master he standeth or falleth. Yea, God is able to make him stand. But he that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit, He saith, shall not be forgiven. Thou usually readest the whole lessons. Why didst thou not read here what that meaneth, against the Spirit? Thou hast it written above, that,

when our Lord was casting out devils by His word, and performing many other deeds by the power of the Spirit, the Pharisees said, This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

This it is to have sinned against the Holy Spirit, to have blasphemed against those things which were wrought by the Holy Spirit. For in other sins we either fall through error, or are conquered by fear, or are overcome by the infirmity of the flesh. This is the blindness of not seeing what thou seest, imputing to the devil the works of the Holy Spirit, and calling that glory of God, by which the. devil himself is overcome, the power of the devil. This it is then which shall not be forgiven. All other things, brother Sympronian, are forgiven to good penitents.

33. After this thou thus givest the instances of the branches and the vine: in John the Lord saith, I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it. Thou seest then that in the branches fruit is required, that is, good works of repentance, as John says, Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. Thou seest that the branches are purged. This purging is the destruction of the flesh, the loss of joy, the loss of inheritance, the toils of life; and these are the peculiar acts of penitents. You see also that the Husbandman is the Lord, Who destroyeth not even the very branches, but purgeth and gathereth, some certainly for the fire, some to renew and plant again His vineyards.

34. "Eli the priest," thou sayest, "speaketh, saying, If one man sin against another, they shall pray for him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him? In like manner John, If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask,and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that thou shall pray for it. Thou seest that all this has reference to sins still remaining, not to those persons who have at any time sinned, and begun to repent before any one asketh for them. It were a long task to unfold the instances. Remark all the sins which God threatens, thou wilt at once see that they are present sins. But if his past righteousness shall not profit the righteous in the time of his iniquity, neither shall his wickedness which he hath forsaken hurt the wicked man in the time of his righteousness; for it is written, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he shall obtain mercy. But if God hath punished even past sins, tell me, hath He it not in His own power to change His sentence against him, to whom He hath appointed punishment and suffering for things past and overlooked? Did He not deliver Rahab, Nebuchadnezzar the king, the Gibeonites, the Ninevites, and Zoar, from the destruction foretold?

Doth not Joel thus speak in His Name, Turn unto the Lord your God with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him? Wherefore if thou shalt have anyhow proved that punishment is appointed for the sinner, thou must allow this, either that it is

appointed for enduring sins, or that liberty is left to God of changing His sentence in their favour, on repentance.

35. Thou sayest it is further written, If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cast them from thee. The meaning of this Moses foretold by the testimony of the Book of Deuteronomy, If thy brother, (for these are our eyes and our hands,) or thy daughter, or thy wife, which is in thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known: then he added below, Thou shalt accuse him, and thine hand shall be upon him to put him to death. Dost thou see then that this was not spoken of penitents, but of those who not only themselves persevere in wickedness, but also cease not to put stumblingblocks in our way? These, however dear they be, we must relinquish; however useful, we must abandon.

36. Further, thou settest forth that the Apostle Paul said, Put away from among yourselves the evil thing ; the evil which continues, that is. But repentance is not an evil, for David saith, It is a good thing to make confession unto the Lord. And yet he who is doing penance is not with me, nor is he joined in the portion of the saints, nor in peace. But the Apostle saith, If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one not even to eat. Thou seest that not without cause doth it stand, if he be, i. e. one who is not yet penitent, who has not ceased to be wicked. And certainly the same words apply to the covetous, to drunkards, and to railers. Answer, brother, is no one of this kind comprehended in your communion? Thence then is it that God crieth by Isaiah, The destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together; not of the penitent, not of those who are busied in works of mercy, to whom God saith again in the same Isaiah, Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

37. "Nevertheless," thou sayest, "the Apostle condemned him that erred. For in the first Epistle to the Corinthians he saith thus: For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus. Mark, brother, first that he condemns not those with whom this man is in communion. He alone who had done this deed, is delivered to Satan, he only is excommunicated, the peace of the Saints being kept entire. Ye for one sinner condemn all churches. Next thou seest, that this very incestuous sinner is not delivered to death, but to Satan, to be reformed, to be buffeted, to repent. Lastly, he says, for the destruction of the flesh, not however of the soul, not even of the spirit also, but for the destruction of the flesh only, trials, namely, straits in the flesh, wearing of the members, as in another place he saith of them who refrain not, Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh. Wouldest thou know? In the second Epistle to the Corinthians, the same Paul absolves this same wicked man. For of him he saith. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted of many.

So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such an one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you, that ye would confirm your love toward him. And so below, 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. Seest thou the indulgence of the Apostle, tempering even his own sentences? Seest thou his most gentle lenity, so far removed from your pride? Widely differing from the front which Novatian assumes, but consulting for the common life and salvation of all?

38. But thou inveighest against us also with the severity of a censor. Thou sayest, that "according to the law of heaven it is not allowed to break one of the commandments, and that lambs ought not to hold communion with wolves, and that all consenting unto such is in fault, that he then who toucheth pitch is defiled, and that there is no society of light with darkness, of the temple of God with idols, or agreement of Christ with Belial." Thou sayest at last that we "rescind the commandments of God." Do we alter one tittle of the law, or the Novatians rather, who have violated all laws of the Church, all laws of concord, who, after so many years of peace, so many sacred treaties, have produced these new laws of yours, new customs, new rites, feigning sanctity under an inexorable front, a sanctity heretofore unknown? Do we receive wolves into the Church, who avoid the very faces of heretics, or the Novatians rather, who, themselves rapacious wolves, shudder at the poor sheep but little more wretched than themselves? Do we "consent unto the wicked," do we "touch pitch," have we fellowship with darkness, do we join ourselves unto idols and unto Belial, or they who received Evaristus, who received Nicostratus, and the others who left the Church, defiled in tongue, in hand, in life? Have we dealings with adulterers and thieves, or they who preferred Novatus over their own lives and heads, after he had embezzled the money of orphans and widows, the murderer of his wretched parent and of his wife's offspring, not only not penitent, but even glorying?

39. But the Apostle Paul said, Lay hands suddenly on no man. Yet he teacheth, that slowly and after repentance it must not be refused. "Yet at the destruction of Jericho Achan the son of Carmi was put to death for stealing a garment." Slay ye then all who have stolen our money and our books, and exercise your fury against the bones of Novatus. Take upon you again that yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. Why delay ye, O Novatians, to ask eye for eye, tooth for tooth, to demand life for life, to renew once more the practice of circumcision and the sabbath? Put to death the thief. Stone the petulant. Choose not to read in the Gospel that the Lord spared even the adulteress who confessed, when none had condemned her; that He absolved the sinner who washed His feet with her tears; that He delivered Rahab at Jericho, itself a city of the Phoenicians; that He set Tamar free from the sentence of the Patriarch; that when the Sodomites also perished, He destroyed not the daughters of Lot; willing likewise to have delivered his sons-in-law, had they believed the destruction to come.

40. Come, dost thou not remember that the Lord saith by David, With them that hated peace was I peaceful? and that the sentence of Solomon is not withheld when he saith, A brother that helpeth a brother shall be exalted? What says the Apostle? Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so shall ye fulfil the law of Christ; and again, (which I have before quoted,) I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh; and again, I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save all; that is, so as to share their groans with the wounded, suffering with the sick, death with the dying, to be able to blend the fall of brethren with his own standing, to abate from his own health, and apply medicine to the sinking.

41. What profiteth it you to harden yourselves with an haughty and hard brow, to be stiff and bear your necks high, to turn away your faces from the miserable, to close the ear and eye? Have ye, I pray you,never fallen? Is there no stain on your minds? No mote, I pray, in your eyes? Who will boast that he hath a clean heart, or that he is free from sins? Ye, I suppose, are just, benevolent, temperate, your members are all sound, your whole body unharmed, ye have no need of a physician, nor of medicine for weakness! Enter ye heaven at once, penetrate the approaches to paradise while the sword gives way before you, close your holy gifts against so many nations of ours, who confess the One and Only God! But if they are in a far different state from that which the implacable rigour of nature and your cruelty pretend, ye must see now, O Novatians, that God can have mercy; now, that a remedy, late though it be, is open to wretched brethren who confess what is past; now, that that wounded man, passed by by the Levite and Priest, can be healed by Christ; now, that the prayers of the Church are not to be refused to the humble; now, that the hands of the Priests are to be imparted to those brethren who deserve pity.

42. But we understand, as thou reproachest us, that the Church of God is a dove, not bitter with gall , not fierce nor rending with talons, white moreover with small and tenderplumage. We know likewise that, being the well of living water, and a fountain sealed, it is defiled with no filth of engulfing heresy, and that it is a garden enclosed and full of herbs great alike and small, vile and precious; that it is the eight souls from the Ark, among whom, however, was Ham also, and those thousands of birds and beasts, in pairs and in sevens, clean alike and unclean. But by the dry fountains and clouds carried about of winds we understand the barrenness of heretics, and the assaults of strangers' voices. 43. Neither do we promise liberty, when we are ourselves the servants of punishment, but we confess our sins, and exhort the rest also to confess theirs, and to believe on Him Who justifieth the wicked by faith, Who revoketh the sentence pronounced against wickedness. When also we avoid you, we beware of false prophets and ravening wolves. But we believe that Jannes and Mambres withstood Moses, as ye do the Catholics. Whence the Apostle layeth it down thus, Now as Jannes and Mambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly

shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was. That this was spoken against you, is clear; for ye can neither proceed further, nor hide your folly.

44. He that is washed by the dead, profiteth nothing , he, that is, who is dipped in an heretical fountain, and in like manner, he who is anointed with the oil of the sinner, who is filled, that is, with an unclean spirit. So then ye shall be also children of blood. For ye desire not the peace, but the blood of brethren. Your cruelty is a false faith. An heretical congregation is an adulteress woman; for the Catholic hath never from the beginning left the couch and the chamber of her Spouse, nor gone after other and strange lovers. Ye have painted a divorced form in new colours, ye have withdrawn your couch from the old wedlock, ye have left the body of a mother, the wife of One Husband, decking yourselves out with new arts of pleasing, new allurements of corruption.

45. For whereas ye bring forward as a witness against me the most blessed Cyprian, because in his Epistle on the Lapsed he says that Moses and Daniel and Job prayed for sinners, and obtained not, our Lord saying, Though. Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. Would, would ye did rely on the witness of Cyprian, would ye acquiesced in doctrines so salutary! For when he was urging the lapsed to penance, who were unwilling to do penance because they said that they had received peace from Confessors or Martyrs, he taught and shewed that not even those Patriarchs obtained any thing for the unrepentant. For who can deliver one unwilling? Who can humble himself for the proud? Who obtain any thing for the unrepentant? So when he said this, he was constraining them to the remedies of penance. Nor did a man of such gravity and merit in any wise contradict himself, but he taught that the sinner must pour forth prayer, and must love Confession.

46. These examples, however, of Cyprian shake you, in which he relates that both Moses and other saints who prayed for sinners, obtained not their request. Sayest thou? Seest thou not for whom Moses obtained not his request? Returned to the people, what heareth he in the camp? The voices of drunkards and the songs of the idol-sacrifice were resounding through it. The people was still persevering in wickedness, still remaining in the very crime, but repentance it knew not. And yet who of us told thee that Moses obtained not his request? God indeed had said unto him, Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book. He had spoken, however, with the authority of a Judge, and with the power of a Lord. But see how soon He turned back the sentence pronounced against the wickedness of the people. Listen. Immediately, in the same place, the Prophet saith, And Moses besought the Lord his God, Lord, why doth Thy wrath wax hot against Thy people? and so on. Then again below, And the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people. Seest thou that the anger of God was softened? Seest thou that the offence was atoned for? And he prayed for a people not praying, nor repenting what they had done.

47. ”But Noah,” thou sayest, ”and Daniel, and Job,could not deliver sons nor daughters.” And the meaning of this is; if they should ask for them who asked not themselves, if they should pray for him that persevered in crime, if they would throw their protection over not

individuals, not a few, but many thousands. Yet Noah delivered his own household from the general ruin; and Job received again all which he lost; and Daniel by prayer removed that sword which was hanging over the wise men of Babylon. Lot certainly prayeth for the safety of a city, Paul for the passengers of the ship. So they who know how to repent are absolved by help of the righteous. 48. Lastly, look even at the very words which are written, They only shall be delivered. Who are they? Those same who pray for sinners, shall pray for such with impunity. And why condemnest thou the Church? Why forbiddest thou to pray for the penitent? if we may pray even for those, for whom we may not obtain? Read, therefore, my Cyprian with more care. Read the whole Epistle on the Lapsed; read another which he wrote to Antonianus, in which Novatian is pressed by examples of all sorts. Then thou wilt learn what he pronounced as to the healing of penitents; Cyprian, I say, who is opposed to you, and adhered to the Catholic laws. Tertullian after he had fallen into heresy, (for you have taken much from this source,) you may hear himself, in his Epistle, and that same which he published when a Catholic, confess that the Church can forgive sins.

49. Thou seest then that the Church is a Queen in a vesture of gold, wrought about with divers colours; consisting, that is, of many diverse bodies, and of many people. This painting is not of one colour, nor doth this great diversity glisten in one garment. This part of her array covereth, another adorneth. One part is fitted to the bosom, another sweeps along in the lowest fold, and contracts defilement in the very act of walking. Part is likened to the purple of Martyrs; part to virgin silk. A part is sewed on beneath in folds, or repaired by the stitches of the needle. One after this manner, and another after that. And yet in all is she made one queen. 50. Therefore she is also a fruitful and rich vine, with many branches, and the varied tresses of many a tendril. Look. Are there every where large clusters, is every grape full-swelled? Have none of these suffered from the winter cold? Has none endured the rough hail? Has none to accuse the burning heat of summer? One bud is studded thicker with shoots; another is stronger; another cleaner; one bursts forth into fruit, another only into exuberance of leaves. Yet is she a vine in every part beautiful.

51. She is the mother of virgins without number. Calculate now, if thou canst, the Catholic flocks, and count on thy fingers the swarms of our people. Not those only, which are scattered throughout the whole world and fill whole regions, but those, brother Sympronian, which are with thee in the nearest borders and in the neighbouring city. Contemplate how many of us you alone see, how many people of mine you alone meet. Art not thou absorbed as eaves-droppings in great fountains, as a single drop by the ocean? Say, say, are these virgins the offspring of your people? Art thou alone the mother of so many? This queen, I say, is ours, the chosen one of her mother and perfect. Nothing indeed can be chosen, except what is better and greater from another; nothing can be perfect except what is full. 52. Next consider this, whether she is not especially built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner Stone. If her beginning was before thee, if her belief was before thee, if she hath not left her former foundations, if she hath not moved them, if she hath not separated from the rest of the body and appointed her own rulers for herself and peculiar documents, well ; if she hath made unreceived interpretations,

if she hath invented some new law, if she hath given a divorce from peace to her own body, then clearly may she seem to have left Christ, then may she seem to stand apart from Prophets and Apostles.

53. This then will be the great house, rich in diversity of all vessels, in which glistens the pure gold, in which gleams the ductile silver, but which despises not, as it is written, the vessels of wood and earth. For a great house employeth many services, is busied about various works. It seeks not silver only, nor is delighted with ornament of gold alone. Now and then what is of slight account is more ornament to things great; and in a noble suite, things little are sometimes pleasing. No workman despiseth his own work, nor thinks that vile which he hath made. And whence was it, thinkest thou, that Christ suffered for sinners, except that He was unwilling to lose any thing which He Himself formed? Whence was it, thinkest thou, that He even now intercedeth with the Father for the miserable, except that He repels not him of little worth, even though he be most despised. None of those whom He has received, would He lose, although compared to vessels of wood and earth, and so He putteth together in His house all vessels.

54. At length, brother Sympronian, be not ashamed to be with the many; at length consent to despise these festering spots of the Novatians, and these parings of yours; at length, to look upon the flocks of the Catholics, and the people of the Church extending so far and wide. Where one is, (thou wilt say,) there am I also; and where two are, there is the Church: "where one," yet in concord, "where two," but at peace. "Where one is, there is the Church also." How much more, where many are? Two, it saith, are belter than one, and a three-fold cord is not broken. Hear what David saith, I will sing unto Thy Name in the great Congregation; and again, I will praise Thee among much people; and, The Lord, even the most mighty God, hath spoken: and called the world, from the rising up of the sun, unto the going down thereof. What! shall the seed of Abraham, which is as the stars and the sand on the sea shore for number, be contented with your poverty ? In thy seed, he saith, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Say, does Novatian make these up? Not thus little hath God redeemed with His Own Blood, nor is Christ so poor.

55. Recognise now, brother, the Church of God extending her tabernacles, and fixing the stakes of her curtains on the right and on the left; Understand that The Lord's name is praised, from the rising up of the sun, unto the going down thereof. See, see, I beg you, that, whilst the Novatians are striving over words, the riches of Catholics are being dispersed throughout the world. 56. I have now instructed thee on all the points, about which thou hast consulted me. I have passed over no head or sentence of your propositions. I have answered every tittle and word. If you enquired as one consulting, I have shewn you lovingly. If as attacking, I have argued not indi-ligently. I will add, when I shall have leisure, another Epistle also, in which I will not confute your views, but set forth ours. And if you read it with good feeling and without fastidiousness, perchance it may not hurt you. Meanwhile in this Epistle I beg you to read each and all parts of it thoroughly. All that is read in haste passes away. If thou cravest better gifts, and hast a soul open to good instruction, thou wilt

not easily despise things so true. The Lord vouchsafe to guard and protect thee for ever, and make thee live a Christian to the unity of the Spirit! Amen.

[Selected footnotes only]

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.