

THE MIND OF SAINT PACIANUS ON THE EFFICACY OF THE EPISCOPAL ABSOLUTION

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THE early history of the sacrament of penance is fraught with dogmatic, moral and liturgical obscurities. Among these the question of the efficacy of the sacramental absolution must hold first place for the Catholic. The Council of Trent has declared that the *vis* of this sacrament is situated primarily in the priestly absolution and that the intent of the sacrament is to reconcile the sinner with God. In addition, the celebrated Johannine text represents this sacrament as a judicial process so that, from the very nature of the case, the verdict or sentence or absolution possesses a veritable binding or loosing force. Hence we are dealing with a question that has been dogmatically settled. It is impossible that the evidence of history can oppose the solemn declarations of the Tridentine Fathers.

Nevertheless, certain scholars maintain that historical research does not substantiate these declarations. They find that the absolution in the early centuries of the Church had a purely ecclesiastical effect. By capital sin the sinner was excommunicated, expelled from the ecclesiastical society: by absolution, this excommunication was lifted; he was readmitted to his status as a member of the Church outside which there was no salvation possible. The absolution, therefore, had its effect in this world alone; it did not close the breach between the sinner and God; it did not delete the *reatus culpae*; it had no direct consequences whatever in the world beyond.

The advocates of this view do not deny that all the ingredients of the sacrament were present and that they were subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Church through the bishop would hear the confession of the sinner; she would decide how long and how severe the period of probation and ex-

piation would be; she would exhort all delinquents to undertake penance; she would call upon all her members to pray for them; she would impose hands upon them in a concluding ceremony. Furthermore she would do all this by Divine right transmitted by Apostolic succession and would thus fulfill the precept of Christ to bind and loose. But in the whole process she would have but one predominant idea—to enable the transgressor to re-enter into friendly relations with herself.¹ She would have shrunk from the assumption that she might by her intervention effectually alter the relation of the sinner to God Himself.²

Such an opinion, as is evident, makes a thrust at the very heart of the sacrament of penance; it says in fact that there was no such sacrament in the proper sense of the term. Every sacrament is a *signum gratiae*,³ but penance is excluded if its solitary purpose is reintegration in the ecclesiastical society. Nor can the Tridentine assertion that the *vis* of the sacrament flows from the absolution⁴ be verified, if it effects a mere external reconciliation with the Church and leaves the culprit to his own resorts in order to regain the friendship of God.

¹d'Alès, *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 23, 1933, p. 495, throws light on this hypothesis: "Encore de nos jours, on peut lire chez divers auteurs que la sentence sacerdotale tombe immédiatement sur la mesure d'expiation à fournir par le pécheur: à lui de se libérer par une pénitence convenable; le rôle de l'Eglise consisterait à déclarer officiellement qu'il en a fait assez devant Dieu, non à remettre la faute par un acte d'autorité, efficace au for intérieur".

For a more comprehensive outline of this hypothesis, cf. Galtier, *L'Eglise et la Rémission des Péchés*, pp. 8-22.

²Poschmann reveals his ideas in *Die Abendländische Kirchenbusse im Ausgang des Christlichen Altertums*, p. 44, sqq. We here submit some of his statements:

"Für die alte Kirche hat die *Genugtuung*, mit Leo zu sprechen, schlechthin die Aufgabe des *indulgentiam promereri*, und *indulgentia* schliesst beides in sich: Vergebung der Schuld wie der Strafe". p. 44. Again: "So kann denn die Büsse als ein Heilungsprozess hingestellt werden, und zwar nicht nur in dem psychologischen Sinne der Ertötung der sündhaften Triebe und der Stärkung des guten Willens, sondern auch im Sinne der *allmählichen Tilgung* der Schuld vor Gott. Die Rekonkiliation ist, wie ihr Name sagt, zunächst die *Wiederaufnahme in die kirchliche Gnadengemeinschaft* oder die Eingliederung in das *Corpus Christi*." pp. 45-46. Finally: ". . . und so dürfen wir uns nicht wundern, wenn wir in der alten Kirche mit der Vorstellung rechnen müssen, dass nach einer gültigen Rekonkiliation die Sünde noch nicht immer vergeben ist." p. 46.

³DB. 849, 850, 851.

⁴"Docet praeterea sancta Synodus, sacramenti paenitentiae formam, in qua praecipue ipsius *vis* sita est, in illis ministri verbis positam esse: 'Ego te absolvo, etc.'" DB. 896.

Finally, the solemn pronouncement of Trent that the purpose of this sacrament is *reconciliatio cum Deo*⁵ is contradicted by early historical testimony, if the theory in question be true.

The difficulty in solving the problem is enhanced by the fact that a certain number even of Catholic historians have given the nod of approval to the objectionable hypothesis.⁶ This can be accounted for to some extent, at least, by the methods usually adopted in the investigation of the ancient penitential discipline. Some books on the subject treat of too many problems and offer only isolated texts from the *Pastor Hermae* all the way down to St. Augustine. Others take up one problem, but cover entirely too many Fathers to give assurance that their study is thorough. Others again occupy themselves with one Father, but delve into so many difficulties that their conclusions are necessarily suspect. From the days of Morinus and Petavius to our own the methodology, generally speaking, has been erroneous, and the field of penance will never be rid of its cockle until a single major problem is investigated in a single Father of importance. Thus gradually will a synthesis of the teaching of all Fathers be formed and the present obscurities clarified.

All students of early ecclesiastical penance recognize Saint Pacianus (✠ c. 390) as one of the four outstanding sources in

⁵"Sane vero res et effectus hujus sacramenti, quantum ad ejus vim et efficaciam pertinet, *reconciliatio est cum Deo*, etc." DB. 896.

⁶"Galtier, *L'Eglise et la Rémission des Péchés*, p. 12, declares: "Cette conception (that penance reconciled with the Church only) de la pénitence ecclésiastique s'est imposée en effet, *jusqu'à des savants catholiques*. Sauf à essayer d'en sauvegarder quand même la valeur sacramentelle, ils ont cru devoir admettre que l'absolution, dans la pensée tout au moins de la plupart des docteurs anciens, n'avait point pour but de remettre le péché."

It is to be noted that in instituting the sacraments, Christ, if He did not actually specify the matter and form, at least designated the purpose of each to the Apostles. This would not be true if the Church at any period of her history thought that the aim of penance was reconciliation with herself. As regards their essential *signification*, the sacraments have ever been outside the Divine process of dogmatic evolution. Furthermore, no theory of the evolution of dogma may say that the Church once taught the contrary to what she teaches now. We know now for certain that the sacrament of penance reconciles with God. If the Church had ever taught that it reconciled with herself alone, this would have been a contrary teaching and she would have erred in her understanding of an indispensable means of salvation for the sinner.

the Western Church up to the close of the fourth century.⁷ He was bishop of the important See of Barcelona in Spain. He was exceptionally well educated. He was characterized by a fervent love of tradition. He was thoroughly familiar with the works of Tertullian and Saint Cyprian on the subject of penance. His views, therefore, are not personal ones, but reflect the age-old traditions of the Church. If he has correct notions about the efficacy of the episcopal absolution, it is quite likely that these notions were entertained by his predecessors and do but reflect the implicit teaching of the Western Church.⁸ This is all the more clear because his views agree with those found in other patristic sources.

The following article will be divided into two main divisions. The first will attempt to show that in the mind of Saint Pacianus the primary purpose of the penitential rite was to abolish the *reatus culpae*, to reconcile the sinner with God, not merely with the Church. The second will aim at making it clear that this reconciliation was effected principally by the episcopal absolution, not by the atonement of the sinner. If these declarations can be ratified, another bit of historical evidence will be added to that already accumulated by Father Galtier⁹ to weaken the theory that the Church in her infancy aimed merely at the restoration of harmony between the sinner and herself.

⁷The others are Tertullian, Saint Cyprian and Saint Ambrose.

⁸We have received five works which are unquestionably from the pen of Saint Pacianus. The first three are letters addressed to a certain Sympronianus, a Novatian heretic, and are entitled in order: *De Catholico Nomine*, *De Symproniani Litteris*, and *Contra Tractatus Novatianorum*. The fourth is a kind of pastoral letter addressed to his flock and commonly designated as the *Paraenesis ad Paenitentiam*. The fifth is a familiar sermon delivered to catechumens and received the appellation *Sermo de Baptismo*. All may be found in PL 13, 1051-1094. The *Paraenesis* together with the *Third Letter* and a considerable portion of the *First Letter* evince the Saint's penitential teaching.

⁹*L'Eglise et la Rémission des Péchés aux Premiers Siècles*, (Beauchesne; Paris, 1932). Father Galtier reviews, summarizes and defends the conclusions of this book in "A Propos de la Pénitence Primitive," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 30, 1934, pp. 517-557; 797-846. For some reason unknown to us Father Galtier makes no appeal to Saint Pacianus in his treatment of this subject. This is not due to any lack of acquaintance with the Bishop of Barcelona, since he refers to him copiously in his other writings on penance.

PACIANUS AND THE REATUS CULPAE

Every student of Saint Pacianus realizes that he had a correct notion of sin. He did not consider it as an offense of man against man, of man against an organization of any kind, but as a rebellion against God Himself.¹⁰ This rebellion was brought about by the deliberate commission of certain specified acts contrary to God's law. One such act, if it were of sufficient malice, aroused the anger of God toward its perpetrator—an anger which might be placated, but which would endure until the sinner had fulfilled certain requirements for its appeasement.¹¹ Sin considered merely as a transgression against the Church is unknown to Saint Pacianus. So far is the Church from fostering any indignation towards the wrongdoer, that she actually calls upon her whole membership, both priests and people, to cooperate in his reconciliation.¹² From his accurate concept of the nature of sin, it follows then that Saint Pacianus probably intended to remove the *reatus culpae* by penance.

But if we link up his notion of sin as an offense against God with the effects of penance as he portrays them, we can scarcely evade the conclusion that he *certainly* understood penance to remove the *reatus culpae*. He does not hesitate to designate penance as *criminum remissio* and *remissio peccatorum*.¹³ It is, therefore, the remission of sin as he conceives sin, and conse-

¹⁰*Paraenesis*, c. 10: "Ego deliqui *in Dominum*", exclaims the sinner. *Paraenesis*, c. 6: "*Divinae patientiae insultatis*," he tells the delinquent. *Paraenesis*, c. 8: "Et habet aliquid quod in illo erubescat, qui *Dominum* laesit?" *Epistola* III, c. 12: "Tamen qui in Petrum peccat, *Dominum* laedit." *Epistola* III, c. 7: "Negantem, inquis, *Dominus* negat."

¹¹*Paraenesis*, c. 6. Saint Pacianus assures the sinner: "Potes illum placare si velis." *Epistola* III, c. 23. Speaking of Moses' intercession for the idolatrous Jews, the Saint asks Sympronianus: "Vides offensam esse placatam? Vides lenitam esse iram Dei?"

¹²*Epistola* III, c. 5. "Ubi onera sua sustinet *tota* fraternitas communiter dolens." *Epistola* I, c. 7. The sinner is forgiven "post *totius* Ecclesiae preces". *Epistola* III, c. 12. "Hoc (*venia*) ab omnibus impetratur." *Epistola* III, c. 15. The rest of the congregation weeps in sympathy with the sinner: "Ipsi communicantes, ipsi fideles, lacrimas non habemus?"

¹³*Epistola* I, c. 7. "Ergo nec baptismum nec *criminum remissio*, nec innovatio corporis, sanctae potestati ejus (episcopi) indulta est; quia nihil propria usurpatione mandatum est, totumque id ex apostolico jure defluxit." *Epistola* III, c. 8. "Si paenitentibus *remissio peccatorum* dari potuit, ais, baptismum non fuit necessarium." We might here prove the point at issue from the fact that penance in Saint Pacianus' mind achieves the same result as baptism, which is certainly directed to the establishment of amicable relations with God.

quently means the remission of the *reatus culpaë*. We might argue in the same way from the fact that he calls penance a *remedium criminis*.¹⁴ How could it be a remedy for sin if it does not heal what he deems the very pith and substance of sin—the estrangement of the sinner from God? The sinner is represented as sick; penance is the *medicina*¹⁵ which he must imbibe; let him take it submissively and he will be cured, restored to sound spiritual health.¹⁶ It appears far-fetched to say that mere restoration to peace with the Church could be called a cure for sin. Such a statement conflicts with the very idea of sin as Saint Pacianus represents it and fails to harmonize with his picture of the penitent as healed by the application of the ecclesiastical remedies.

Some scholars who hold a general view at variance with our own advance the following argument. They say that in her infancy the Church conceived herself as the *society of saints*.¹⁷ However, when she began to spread with astonishing rapidity so that more and more of her members fell from grace, she was finally forced, so to speak, to readmit delinquents to her membership, since outside her body salvation was impossible. This opinion finds little support in Saint Pacianus. He was convinced that the Church was a community of saints only *de jure*, not *de facto*. Ordinarily the sinner was not excommunicated. Though forbidden to approach the Holy Table,¹⁸ he notwithstanding retained his status as a member of the Church. When the assembled body of Catholics approach the judg-

¹⁴*Epistola* III, c. 9. "Videamus deinde quid dicas: 'Si Deus saepius jubet hominem paenitere', inquis, 'saepius peccare permittit'. Quid ais? Ergo qui saepius *remedium criminis* monstrat, crimen ostendit?" This concept of penance as a remedy occurs rather frequently. Cf. *Epistola* I, c. 5; "contemnat *omne remedium* superba justitia"; also, *Paraenesis*, c. 2: "*remedia paenitentiae*"; again, *Paraenesis*, c. 6: "Accipite *remedium* si desperare coepistis".

¹⁵*Epistola* III, c. 9. "innocens coronam, paenitens veniam subiret: ille praemium, iste *medicinam* acciperet."

¹⁶*Epistola* III, c. 9. "ille (paenitens) *curatus* viveret." *Epistola* III, c. 4. "*curantur* aegroti."

¹⁷Galtier, *L'Eglise et La Rémission des Péchés*, p. 8.

¹⁸This is the only penalty about which Saint Pacianus is explicit. Cf. *Paraenesis*, cc. 6, 7.

ment seat of Christ, chaff will be found among them.¹⁹ The Church is a sequestered garden strewn with plants of all sizes and kinds, the worthless and the costly.²⁰ Like the prudent householder she cherishes not only those adornments of her mansion which are fashioned from gold and silver, but likewise those of inferior materials.²¹ Furthermore the Church is a body and no body can exult when some of its members are distressed. The Church's body is composed of both the sound and the unsound.²² How could the intent of the penitential ceremonies have been mere readmission to Church membership when even the capital offender yet remained a member? Why speak of penance as a second opportunity to enter the Church, the ark of salvation, when no second opportunity was required?²³

But there are other positive proofs that Saint Pacianus aimed at the abolition of the *reatus culpæ* by the penitential discipline. "If the devil inflicts death in the world," he asks Sympronianus, "is not Christ even now able to lend assistance?"²⁴ The death which the devil occasions is not mere exclusion from the ecclesiastical community; it is enmity between the sinner and God, the *reatus culpæ*. Christ is able to remedy this even

¹⁹*Epistola* III, c. 3. "Tu spinas et tribulos refugisti: tu non habes in tua fruge zizania: tibi jam grana purgata sunt: ad te sine ventilabro purgator ille venturus est: tu solus ex omnibus paleas non habebis?" This sarcasm is leveled at the Novatian. The inference is plain that the Catholic body will come to judgment possessing thorns and tares and chaff.

²⁰*Epistola* III, c. 21. "Scimus etiam (Ecclesiam esse) hortum conclusum plenum oleribus magnis pariter et parvulis, vilibus atque pretiosis."

²¹*Epistola* I, c. 5. "At numquid paterfamilias, in magna domo, argentea tantum et aurea vasa custodit? Nonne et fictilia et lignea, et composita quaedam et refecta dignatur?"

²²*Paraenesis*, c. 8. "Nullum corpus membrorum suorum vexatione laetatur: pariter dolet, et ad remedium collaborat. In uno et altero (the penitent and the non-sinner), Ecclesia est; in Ecclesia vero Christus."

²³Galtier, *L'Eglise et la Rémission des Péchés*, p. 40, note 2, believes that Cyprian also did not consider the ordinary capital offender as excommunicated in the strict sense: "A vrai dire, pour saint Cyprien, il n'y a de vrais morts et de réellement séparés de l'Eglise que les apostats qui refusent de faire pénitence ou sont passés de l'Eglise à l'hérésie. Les pénitents, eux, quand ils sont admis de nouveau à la communion, rentrent moins dans l'Eglise qu'ils n'y recouvrent leur situation première."

²⁴*Epistola* I, c. 5. "Diabolus in mundo interficit, Christus hic non potest subvenire?"

in this world by the Church's atoning rites. Furthermore, these rites produce the same effect that sincere repentance did in the Old Law—reconciliation, namely, with God. Recall the instance of King David. He stained his conscience with both adultery and murder; yet by reason of his compunction God's prophet Nathan announced to him that his sin was forgiven.²⁵ No question here of any reconciliation with an organization. Not only did David retain his position as a member of the chosen people, but he continued to occupy their throne despite his iniquities. Nathan proclaimed their forgiveness inasmuch as they were an affront to God. In the same way the Church does not impose expiatory obligations with a view to granting her own peace to the contrite, but with the sole aim of regaining God's friendship.²⁶ Hence it is that the Catholic who has followed the sinful ways of the Prodigal Son, does not return to the Church only by his satisfaction. No, he returns to his Father in heaven.²⁷ This is the term, the design of ecclesiastical penance—reconciliation of the sinner with God.

Saint Pacianus' attitude on this question is further clarified by the threat of eternal damnation which he brandishes over the heads of those sinners who neglect the rites of penance. The *reatus culpae* and the *reatus poenae aeternae* are correlative terms. If one is present, the other must be present; if

²⁵*Epistola* I, c. 5. "Nonne ille post caedis et adulterii reatum, pro Bethsabée paenitenti, Propheta respondit: 'Dominus abstulit a te peccatum tuum' (II Reg., 12, 13)."

²⁶The reader might be urged to object here that Saint Pacianus is speaking only of the virtue of penance. Hence the proof would only evince that the virtue reconciled with God in the New Dispensation as well as in the Old. Such is not the case. At the outset of the same chapter from which the last two texts have been taken, Saint Pacianus makes it clear that he has the ecclesiastical discipline in mind. It is the penance which the priests should broach only with caution; it is that special means which the Lord has provided ("si haec homini suo Dominus providit"). Moreover, in the case of David, adultery and murder are in question. These are capital offenses according to Saint Pacianus (*Paraenesis*, cc. 4, 5.), and for such, submission to the penalties of the Church was absolutely required (*Paraenesis*, cc. 11, 12).

²⁷*Paraenesis*, c. 12. "Ecce promitto, polliceor, si ad Patrem vestrum vera satisfactione redeatis, . . . continuo de vobis et pecus illud recedet immundum, et siliquarum esca deformis."

one is removed, the other is unfailingly removed. If the Church's penitential discipline rescues the penitent from hell, it must also delete the *reatus culpae*.²⁸ But with Saint Pacianus, especially in the *Paraenesis* where he treats only of capital transgressions and mainly of the sacrament, heaven and hell are ever in the balance and the balance will go up or down depending on the delinquent's submission to the ecclesiastical discipline. Let the sinner blush at the thought of bartering eternal life for a short period of humiliation on earth.²⁹ Let him quail before the just judgments of God when he recalls that the harbor of hell is wide open to receive the wicked.³⁰ Let him deem it a favor to be felled by death now, if only he escapes future retribution.³¹ Let him be mindful of gehenna; let him undertake his *exomologesis* which will quench the danger of consignment to its flames.³² Thus we see that for Saint Pacianus the performance of penance, and by penance he means the ritualistic one enjoined by the bishop, will save from the hazard of eternal damnation. It must, therefore,

²⁸The correlation of the two terms is indicated by Saint Pacianus when he puts these words into the sinner's mouth (*Paraenesis* c. 10): "Ego deliqui in Dominum et periclitor in aeternum perire." Compare this statement with another (*Paraenesis*, c. 11): "gehennam recordemini quam vobis exomologesis extinguet."

²⁹*Paraenesis*, c. 8. "Peccator erubescet, perpetuam vitam praesenti pudore mercari?"

³⁰*Paraenesis*, c. 11. "Timete igitur, dilectissimi, justa iudicia: omittite errorem, damnate delicias: properat jam tempus extremum; tartarus et gehenna laxatos impiis sinus pandunt." The *impii* are those who are deliberately neglecting the ecclesiastical penance.

³¹*Paraenesis*, c. 7. "Laetare, peccator, si in hoc saeculo aut morte interciperis, aut languore consumeris, ne puniaris post saeculum." These words clearly pertain to the sacrament, since they are addressed to those capital offenders who receive Holy Communion without having confessed to the priest.

³²*Paraenesis*, c. 11. "Si de cruciatu exomologesis retracti, gehennam recordemini quam vobis exomologesis extinguet." The word "exomologesis" here refers primarily to the external ecclesiastical penalties of atonement. We infer its reference to the external penalties from the word "cruciatu" in the conditional clause where it is closely related to "exomologesis." The only "torture" involved in the sacrament proceeded from these penalties—the public humiliation, fasting, abstaining from worldly pleasures, wearing of penitential clothing, etc. (*Paraenesis*, cc. 9, 10, 11). It bears upon the *ecclesiastical* penalties because it is precisely these that the sinners of Barcelona are shirking. Many of them have gone to confession; the priest has informed them of the remedies which will effect their cure; yet they go on heedlessly indulging in pleasures and evading these remedies. No wonder Saint Pacianus bursts out to his auditory (*Paraenesis*, c. 10): "Non sustineo jam, fratres."

free from the *reatus culpae*. The capital offender who shiftlessly neglects it is doomed to hell; he will remain God's enemy. In Saint Pacianus' mind, accordingly, the outcome of the system of ecclesiastical penalties, the outcome of the sacrament, is reconciliation with God, not reunion with the Church.

THE BISHOP'S FUNCTION IN PACIANUS

A. CLARIFICATION OF THE ISSUE

We take it, then, as established that the penitent enjoyed God's friendship when the bishop terminated the penitential ritual by the imposition of hands.³³ Shipwrecked though he had been, he had floated to the haven of safety on the plank tendered him by the Church.³⁴ His rescue was directly due to this plank of ecclesiastically moderated penitential discipline. But the efficacy of the episcopal absolution is not yet established. A crucial question now presents itself. What element in the penitential procedure was chiefly responsible for the ensuing reconciliation with God? There are only two possi-

³³Saint Pacianus refers to this concluding ceremony only three times: a) *Epistola* III, c. 21. "Jam intelligitis, Novatiani, Deum posse miserere; jam miseris fratribus, de praeterito confitentibus, vel seram patere medicinam; . . . jam Ecclesiae preces humilibus non negandas; *jam manus sacerdotum miserandis fratribus exhibendas.*" Observe that he puts it last after portraying the sinner as having done penance and been assisted by the intercession of the brethren. b) *Epistola* III, c. 19. "Verum Apostolus Paulus dixit: '*Manus nemini cito imponas*' (I Tim., V, 21). Docet idem; vel tarde, vel post paenitentiam non negandas." Note again that this ceremony takes place *post* paenitentiam. c) He quotes Saint Paul again (*Paraenesis*, c. 8): "Ecce iterum Apostolus ad sacerdotem: '*Manus cito nemini imponas, nec communicas peccatis alienis*' (I Tim., V, 22)." Regarding the exegesis of this text from Saint Paul, Galtier, *Imposition des Mains*, DTC, T. VII, Pt. 2, 1313, says: ". . . l'interprétation primitive (that of Saint Pacianus) nous paraît nettement préférable et c'est pourquoi il nous paraît aussi que l'usage de l'imposition des mains dans la réconciliation des pécheurs peut être considéré comme attesté par saint Paul." Again he says (Col. 1327): "L'imposition des mains est aussi le rite primitif de l'absolution pénitentielle. La réconciliation des pécheurs s'est longtemps produite sous cette forme et n'a pas eu d'autre dénomination." Vacandard, *Absolution des Péchés au Temps des Pères*, DTC, I, Pt. 1, 158, speaks in a similar vein: "Nous ferons pareillement observer que l'oraison de la réconciliation était ordinairement accompagnée de l'imposition des mains, ou de la main, *manuum* ou *manus impositione*. Students of penance are aware that two prayers were uttered over the penitent, one at the time of confession the other at the conclusion of the entire penitential procedure. Both were deprecatory and, as far as their signification goes, either might have served as the absolution. We believe that the second was the efficacious absolution in the mind of Saint Pacianus.

³⁴*Epistola* I, c. 5. "Quis naufragi tabulam, ne evadat, eripiet? *Epistola* III, c. 9. "nec qui naufragum eripit scopulis, in saxa compellit."

bilities. The effect was accomplished either by the expiation of the penitent or by the prayer⁸⁵ and imposition of hands of the bishop. Some students, favoring the first supposition, contend that the penitent by submitting to the ecclesiastically controlled public penance, personally effected his release from guilt. In this case, it is difficult to see how any sacrament of penance existed at all.⁸⁶ The Church merely exercised a certain surveillance over the *virtue*. She clarified its shadowy and indefinite character by setting a determined time-limit for its execution, by specifying precisely the external acts which might guarantee its genuinity. If the penitent should expire or be otherwise legitimately prevented from accomplishing his assigned penance, she might grant him her imposition of hands, but in doing so, she had no intention of assuring him that his sins were forgiven by God. Hence this concluding ceremony did not have the *reatus culpæ* for its direct object; it aimed purely at the period of satisfaction; it was only declarative; it signified to the penitent and to the congregation that, as far as it was possible for the Church to judge, sufficient reparation had been made to warrant the sinner's readmission to full ecclesiastical communion and to suppose that God's friendship had been renewed, but this last she would not vouch for. Such is the hypothesis which is offered.

The easiest and most forceful rebuttal of this hypothesis would be to present testimony from Saint Pacianus to the

⁸⁵Morinus, *De Paenitentia*, pp. 532-533, adduces various texts from Saint Pacianus to demonstrate that he used the deprecatory form of absolution. While we do not doubt the fact, we hesitate to accept the evidence of these texts. They appear to refer to the prayers uttered by both priests and people *while* the penitent was engaged in his expiation. We find no text where we could say with certainty that Saint Pacianus was referring thus to final absolution alone.

⁸⁶The statements of some Catholic scholars appear to lead to this untenable conclusion. Concerning Adam and Poschmann, Galtier, *L'Eglise et la Rémission des Péchés*, p. 12, says: "Cependant, eux aussi contestent que L'Eglise ait des l'abord attribué à son absolution la rémission du péché lui-même." Again, p. 13: "Celle-ci (la rémission du péché) n'est jamais que l'effet de l'expiation ou de la satisfaction offerte par le pécheur lui-même ou par ceux, membres de l'Eglise en général, confesseurs en particulier, qui lui accordent le secours de leurs oeuvres ou de leurs prières." This last statement refers only to their views on the doctrine of Saint Cyprian.

effect that the Church deemed the sinner as restored to God's favor even though he had been unable to perform the prescribed penances.³⁷ However, we fail to find any evidence in his writings which would serve this purpose. True enough, at the close of the *Paraenesis* he lends encouragement to every sinner without exception and bids them all entertain strong hopes for salvation.³⁸ Yet it must have been impossible for some of them, especially for the aged and infirm, to pass through all the stages of public penance. But we should not like to evolve an argument from such nebulous premises. We shall approach the problem in a different way. First, we shall cite from the *Paraenesis* several texts which insist unduly on the obligation of atonement, and offer a generic explanation of them. Second, we shall present a few texts from the *Third Letter* having the same import and show by examination that the "prima facie" interpretation is not correct. Third, we shall collect a series of citations which stress the role of the bishop in effecting the remission of sin. Finally, since these last citations contain an implied comparison between the expiation and the absolution, they will be an invaluable aid to help us discover which of the two was the more necessary element of the sacrament in the mind of Saint Pacianus.

B. TEXTS FROM THE PARAENESIS WHICH SEEM TO
EXAGGERATE THE OBLIGATION TO DO PENANCE.

It is especially in the *Paraenesis* that Saint Pacianus places a disproportionate emphasis on the necessity of penance. In fact, if one were to read this work alone, he might lay it aside convinced that the priest's mediation for sin was very secondary and subordinate. True enough, even the *Paraenesis*

³⁷Father Galtier, "A Propos de la Pénitence Primitive," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 30, 1934, pp. 527-528, develops such a line of argument from Saints Leo and Cyprian: "Il y a que le pardon divin peut être garanti et procuré là-même où ont fait défaut les satisfactions ou les expiations destinées à l'obtenir ou à le rendre plus complet." Cf. also Galtier, *L'Eglise et la Rémission des Péchés*, p. 112, for a similar argument from Saint Gregory the Great.

³⁸*Paraenesis*, c. 12. "Nec quisquam adeo peccatricis animae vilitate desperet, ut se jam non necessarium Deo credat. Neminem nostrum perire vult Dominus: etiam modici et minimi requiruntur."

bears witness that recourse to the priest was required. He hears the confession and imposes the satisfaction.³⁹ He is like the doctor for physical ills who prescribes the cure; but the healing processes are to be ascribed to the patient himself by his docile acceptance and endurance of the remedies.⁴⁰ The priest enjoins the penance, but his action seems to end there. The sinner is yet enmeshed in his sins and the priest would appear to say to him: "I have now done all that I can do; submit to these remedies and you, by your own fidelity to them, will regain God's friendship." According to this picture the priest would merely control the penance; he would have no decisive part in the deletion of the sin itself.

Moreover, this impression is confirmed by sundry individual texts from the same document. When Saint Pacianus addresses those who had once made their confession, but had afterwards defaulted in their penitential obligations and even continued to heap capital sin upon capital sin, he declares that their application for penance is long deferred, their forgiveness is difficult to procure.⁴¹ Nevertheless, he is bound by his office to heal them.⁴² How? By cutting and cauterizing.⁴³ No word is uttered concerning the *virtus* of the priest's imposition of hands. Like David sinners should take their rest on a bed of

³⁹This is a lucid example of the caution required in interpreting a Father and of the necessity of being conversant with all his writings to decide his opinion on any important matter of dogma. It also reveals that correct methodology in patristic interpretation demands that the interpreter keep in mind the purpose of the Father in each of his works. In the *Paraenesis* Saint Pacianus is resolved to inculcate to his own people the necessity of doing penance for sin. In his letters he is expounding to a heretic the power of the Church to absolve from sin. It is from these two divergent purposes of his works that the two series of apparently contradictory texts have their origin.

⁴⁰*Paraenesis*, c. 9. "Nunc ad eos sermo sit, qui bene ac sapienter vulnera sua, paenitentiae nomine, confitentes; nec quid sit paenitentia, nec quae vulnerum medicina, noverunt; similesque sunt illis qui plagas quidem aperiunt ac tumores, medicisque etiam assidentibus confitentur; sed admoniti quae imponenda sunt, negligunt; et quae bibenda, fastidiunt."

⁴¹*Paraenesis*, c. 9. "Serum est in huiusmodi."

⁴²*Paraenesis*, c. 9. "Quid ergo faciam nunc sacerdos qui curare compellor?"

⁴³*Paraenesis*, c. 9. "Verumtamen si quis est vestrum qui *secari et exuri* sustineat, adhuc *possum* (curare)." The word *possum* refers only to the prescription of the penance, not to any subsequent act of the priest, as Saint Pacianus is simply elaborating here the similitude between the physician and the confessor.

ashes, wear sackcloth and submit to a regime of fasting and other expiatory exercises.⁴⁴ It is by these that the cutting is successfully accomplished. If they can bear manfully with the operation, they will be cured.⁴⁵ It is because of their tepidity that Saint Pacianus does not spare a frank and severe lesson for recalcitrant penitents.

To be sure, such defaulters will be compelled to make heroic efforts to undergo the remedies. During the penitential season enjoined upon them at the time of confession, they have gone about more spruce than ever. They have gormandized at banquets; they have issued forth sleek from the baths; they conform to the latest styles in wearing-apparel;⁴⁶ they have country estates and seaside resorts,⁴⁷ and, if their means but permitted, they would indulge in the most lavish comforts of the wealthy.⁴⁸ Not only do they eschew the private practises of atonement which should characterize their lives, but they even omit the public ones of lamenting before the congregation, of wearing squalid clothing, of fasting, praying, prostrating.⁴⁹ Let them now institute a change. These acts of penance will keep them from perishing,⁵⁰ for what they will gain is worth every effort they can make.

The teaching of the *Paraenesis* on the necessity of the public expiation may be epitomized as follows: the man who recoils from it, is doomed to eternal punishment; the sinner who executes it, will be rescued from hell;⁵¹ he may aspire to mercy

⁴⁴*Paraenesis*, c. 9. "Sustinuit illam (secturam) David, jacuit in cinere sordenti, sacco insuper horrente deformis. Ille quondam assuetus gemmis et purpuris, textit in jejuniu animam suam."

⁴⁵*Paraenesis*, c. 9. "Ecce sectio, quam sponendi: qui potuerit tolerare, sanabitur."

⁴⁶*Paraenesis*, c. 10. "An quod in ipsa paenitentia lautiores semper inceditis, convivio farti, balneis expoliti, veste compositi?"

⁴⁷*Paraenesis*, c. 10. "Non desunt tamen vobis hortulani maritimive secessus."

⁴⁸*Paraenesis*, c. 10. "Bene quod mediocres sumus: caeterum et illa faceremus quod quosdam et quosdam non pudet lautiores."

⁴⁹*Paraenesis*, c. 10. "Ne haec quidem quae videri etiam a sacerdote possunt, et episcopo teste laudari; ne haec quidem quotidiani servamus: flere in conspectu Ecclesiae, perditam vitam veste sordida lugere, jejunare, orare, provolvi."

⁵⁰"*Omnia prius tentare quam peras.*" The word *omnia* summarizes the enumerated works of satisfaction.

from God according as he inflicts the tortures of penance upon himself now; there is a direct proportion between the penalties endured and the extent of God's clemency.⁵¹ Such statements certainly appear to invest the sacramental atonement with an inherent efficacy which ill accords with the proper understanding of the sacrament as a whole. The remission of sin is pictured as contingent on the delinquent and on the amount of his personal satisfaction, not upon the bishop and his absolution. In attempting an explanation of the texts which have been cited, we must recall what was noted above about the nature of the *Paraenesis* of Saint Pacianus. The arguments drawn by those who cite this work for their contention are formulated without sufficient advertence to the fact that silence on the bishop's function may be expected here.

For the present we offer the following general explanation of these texts from the *Paraenesis*. It is to be observed, in the first place, that no text is so exclusive as to bar the necessity of the entering of other elements besides satisfaction into the procuring of forgiveness. Genuine sorrow is an indispensable condition for the efficacious administration of the sacrament today, and as long as we find no text in Saint Pacianus to the effect that penance *alone* reconciles with God, it is possible that he

⁵¹*Paraenesis*, c. 11. "Si de cruciatu exomologesis retracti, gehennam recorderemini quam vobis *exomologesis* *extinguet*." For the various meanings of the word *exomologesis* in Saint Pacianus, Cf. Göller, "Analekten zur Bussgeschichte des IV Jahrhunderts," *Römische Quartalschrift*, 36, 1928, p. 259. Saint Pacianus uses *paenitentia* much more than *exomologesis*. Yet the latter word occurs in both the *First* and *Third Letters* as well as in the *Paraenesis*. In only one instance does it appear to be restricted simply to the avowal of sin. After explaining the recantation of Saint Thomas when he declared to Christ: "My Lord and My God," Saint Pacianus asks Sympronianus (*Epistola* III, c. 10): "Numquid non illum *exomologesis ista commendat*?" One might say even here that the *exomologesis* refers rather to the interior contrition of Thomas than to his confession, though the two are evinced by the same word.

⁵²*Paraenesis*, c. 12. "In quantum poenae vestrae non perpercistis, in tantum vobis Deus parcat." At first reading this citation seems irrefragable. Remission would appear to be gradually obtained and in proportion to the penance performed and the penance alone. However, we believe the meaning to be: "God will spare you punishment after death to the degree in which you punish yourselves now." Hence Saint Pacianus must have the temporal punishment in mind here. The eternal punishment "stat in indivisibili". There would have to be some definite point in the penance which would remove it once and for all.

set more store upon the absolution,⁵³ especially if we can assign reasons to evince that he deliberately enhanced the necessity of penance in the *Paraenesis*. These reasons are easily discernible. There was no need to expound to Catholics the power of the bishop's absolution. In the conferring of this the penitent would have no part. But it was imperative that Catholics should realize that the fulfillment of the works of reparation devolved upon themselves. The imposition of hands would be unavailing unless they were sincerely repentant. Hence, the insistence upon expiation.

Furthermore, we have a very special and forceful reason for discounting from the emphasis set upon the public satisfaction in the *Paraenesis*. The Catholics of Barcelona are neglecting it. It is the characteristic feature of the capital offenders in St. Pacianus' diocese to divulge their offenses, hearken to the penance enjoined by the priest, and, subsequently to lapse into their worldly ways entirely oblivious of their penitential obligations.⁵⁴ In his efforts to remedy this situation the bishop naturally accentuated in very heavy proportion the necessity of atonement.

We can only surmise the motives which impelled him to dwell more energetically upon the external acts of expiation than upon the interior sorrow. It is possible that the existence of the latter was always suspect until demonstrated by the ac-

⁵³Galtier, *L'Eglise et la Rémission des Péchés*, p. 23, charges some of the adversaries with forgetting this. He says: "Une autre source d'erreur semble bien avoir été pour eux l'oubli ou la méconnaissance de la question posée. Dans le détail de leurs recherches, ils se préoccupent toujours de découvrir une absolution assurant le pardon du péché indépendamment de toute pénitence de la part du pécheur. Dès là que la réconciliation avec Dieu se présente comme conditionnée par l'expiation du coupable, ils se croient autorisés à contester que l'intervention du prêtre ait pour objet de la produire elle-même. . . . Mais, nous l'avons déjà dit, rien n'est plus étranger à la pensée catholique que cette idée d'une absolution faisant ainsi abstraction de toute expiation personnelle. Elle lui supposerait une vertu qu'au cas des adultes on n'a jamais reconnue au baptême lui-même. Inutile par conséquent d'en rechercher la trace à une époque quelconque de l'histoire de l'Eglise; d'avance on peut être assuré de ne pas la rencontrer."

⁵⁴*Paraenesis*, c. 9. "Nunc ad eos sermo sit, qui bene ac sapienter vulnera sua, paenitentiae nomine, confitentur; nec quid sit paenitentia, nec quae vulnerum medicina, noverunt; . . . sed admoniti, quae imponenda sunt, negligunt; et quae bibenda, fastidiunt. . . . Quo maxime malo fraternitas haec laborat, delictis veteribus nova insuper adjungendo peccata."

complishment of the external penalties. Besides, the Church by her rigorous ritualistic satisfaction sought to restore the sinner's moral strength so that he would not succumb to temptation again.⁵⁵ Finally, it is quite probably true that she intended by the public penance to efface all trace of sinful guilt—to cancel the temporal punishment as well as the eternal. The sacrament of penance was expected to achieve the same salutary effects as baptism. Like baptism it was conferred publicly, at least in the case of capital offenders. Its administration was attended with solemnity and was reserved for a special day. A certain parallel between the status of the public penitent and that of the catechumen is revealed throughout the ancient penitential literature. But this is by the way. Whether these suggested reasons for the insistence on the *external* reparation find favor or not, does not react upon the trend of our argument. It is not the duration of the expiation, nor its greater or less severity, nor its varied manifestations, but expiation as a constitutive element of the sacrament, abstracting from these accidentals, with which we are concerned. Saint Pacianus had excellent reasons for magnifying its necessity in his *Paraenesis*. No declaration of his can be so construed as to exclude the necessity of another cooperating ingredient in order to effect the remission of sin. It is possible, then, that he may have attributed the same efficacy to the absolution as we do today. The point remains to be treated.

(To be continued)

⁵⁵This is evidenced by Saint Pacianus' rejoinder to Sympronianus' objection that forgiveness of sin leads to multiplication of sin. He asks his adversary (*Epistola III, c. 9*): "Volet iterum ille sanatus iterum se secari, rursus exuri? Volet peccare iterum et iterum paenitere?" The severity of the penance will remove all danger of future falls.

