

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

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## PACIANUS AND THE REATUS CULPAE THE BISHOP'S FUNCTION IN PACIANUS

A. CLARIFICATION OF THE ISSUE.

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

(in the present issue)

C. TEXTS FROM THE THIRD LETTER WHICH SEEM TO EXAGGERATE THE OBLIGATION TO DO PENANCE.

D. THE BISHOP'S MORE IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE DELETION OF SIN.

### CONCLUSIONS

C. TEXTS FROM THE THIRD LETTER WHICH SEEM TO EXAGGERATE THE OBLIGATION TO DO PENANCE.

**I**N two chapters of the *Third Letter* we come upon evidence leading us to believe that Saint Pacianus considered the expiation as the preponderating factor in blotting out sin. The texts to this effect owe their origin to an objection raised by the Novatians. If God bids the sinner to iterate penance, He permits him to multiply sin. Forgiveness, in short, is an incentive to future transgressions. In retorting this objection, Saint Pacianus points out the difference between baptism and penance, and places the distinction between the two in the

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<sup>58</sup>*Epistola III*, c. 8. "Baptismum enim sacramentum est dominicae passionis; paenitentium venia, *meritum confitentis*. Illud omnes adipisci possunt, quia gratiae Dei donum est; id est, *gratuita donatio*: labor vero *iste* paucorum est qui post casum resurgunt, qui post vulnera convalescunt, qui lacrimosis vocibus adjuvantur, qui carnis interitu reviviscunt." The word *paucorum* does not mean that some were debarred from forgiveness. Saint Pacianus believed that sinners formed but a relatively insignificant portion of the Church's membership. He tells Sympronianus (*Epistola III*, c. 3): "tu totam Ecclesiam *exiguæ portio*nis infirmitate condemnas." Cf. also *Epistola III*, c. 14.

In his comment on the preceding citation, Poschmann, *Die Abendlandische Kirchenbusse*,

fact that baptism is gratuitous without qualification, while penance is not effective without arduous labor.<sup>56</sup> The impression is thereby conveyed to the reader that the satisfaction itself obtains pardon in the sacrament of penance. The atonement is of excessive rigor; it engenders the annihilation of the flesh, incessant wailings, everlasting groans.<sup>57</sup> If the penitent is willing to undergo these, he will obtain forgiveness. But suppose we preclude the possibility of his having recourse to them? Then he will despair. All hopes of spiritual rejuvenation will be quenched; salvation becomes for him an unattainable goal.<sup>58</sup> Such utterances assuredly overemphasize the necessity of the satisfaction and lead us to infer that the personal expiation of the penitent effected his reconciliation with God.

In reply to these texts it must be observed again that none of them definitely pronounces against the existence of an additional requisite besides the atonement in the effacement of sin. The absolution is not mentioned, but this is no token that it was superfluous or inefficacious. Furthermore, if we recall Saint Pacianus' reluctance to speak of the possibility of forgiveness for sin, lest this knowledge might contribute to increasing waywardness among his flock,<sup>59</sup> we can readily understand his

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p. 145, note 3, reveals his sincere anxiety as a Catholic to guard the value of the sacrament: "Diese Unterscheidung zwischen der Wirkungsweise der Taufe und der Busse ist, wie ich schon an anderer Stelle hervorgehoben habe, charakteristisch für die ganze alte Kirche. Tatsächlich lässt sie sich nicht strikt durchführen. Ist die Sündenvergebung bei der Busse im Gegensatz zu dem in Kraft des Leidens Christi wirkenden Gnadengeschenk der Taufe wesentlich die Frucht der persönlichen Bussbemühung, dann wird damit die kirchliche Lösegewalt ihres wesentlichen Inhalt entleert. Die Väter gingen indes über die Inkongruenz dieser Auffassung hinweg. Erst die Scholastik, die damit begann, die Wirksamkeit des Bussakraments spekulativ zu erörtern, hat in jahrhundertelanger Kontroverse das Verhältnis zwischen dem subjektiven und dem sakramentalen Faktor der Busse zu einer gewissen Klärung gebracht."

<sup>57</sup>*Epistola III*, c. 9. "Et fortasse paterer hoc credi, si paenitentia deliciae putarentur; cujus labor tantus imponitur, cui carnis interitus imperatur, cui juges lacrimae, cui gemitus sempiterni."

<sup>58</sup>*Epistola III*, c. 9. "Quid tamen ille facturus est, cui paenitentia ipsa praeccluditur; cui desperato remedio, totum vulnus operitur; cui prorsus ex integro vitae aditus denegatur?" From the context it is clear that the word *paenitentia* here refers to the exercises of the public penance, not to the sacrament as a whole.

<sup>59</sup>*Paraenesis*, c. 1. "Unum illud vereor, dilectissimi, ne solitae contrarietatis adversis, inculcando quae fiunt, *admoneam magis peccata quam reprimam.*" *Epistola I*, c. 5. "nec tarda solamina ingerere sacerdotes aut docere cogantur, *ne peccandi iter aperiant, dum peccati remediis blandiuntur.*"

unswerving insistence upon the necessity of satisfaction. His surest relief from this danger of inculcating sin by teaching forgiveness was to wave the painful cudgel of expiation incessantly before the eyes of his people. In addition, Sympronianus had protested that forgiveness of sin would inevitably lead to repeated sin and had thus magnified the fears that already haunted the mind of the bishop. No wonder, then, that the latter retorts by overstressing the obligation to perform works of penance.<sup>60</sup>

D. THE BISHOP'S MORE IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE DELETION OF SIN.

From the preceding sections of this paper it is clear that Saint Pacianus required the performance of the expiation. But did he also stipulate the mediation of the bishop, not merely to regulate the penitential discipline, but to cancel the sin itself? If so, did he set the two indispensable elements on a par, or did he reckon the latter as paramount in removing the *reatus culpae*? Let us see if his testimony enables us to affix an affirmative answer to the second member of this question.<sup>61</sup>

Either of two methods would prove satisfactory for the exposition of the proof. We might lay down certain propositions which, if accepted, would validate our contention, and then proceed to establish these propositions by copious quotations from Saint Pacianus. According to this method, we might assert that the entire Novatian controversy supposes our claim

<sup>60</sup>That a certain rhetorical exaggeration pervades the entire reply of the bishop may be inferred from his expression "gemitus sempiterni."

<sup>61</sup>Various authors have recognized the value of Saint Pacianus' testimony on this subject. Huarte, *De Paenitentia*, p. 32, declares: "Saint Pacianus . . . praeclarissime de toto hoc argumento scripserit."

Writing against Lea who affirmed that Saint Pacianus had ascribed to the Church only an assisting power in forgiving sin, while Christ Himself forgave the sinner directly, Casey, *Notes on a History of Auricular Confession*, p. 44, rejoins: "Saint Pacianus is an important witness in the case." He then goes on to develop a proof from the bishop of Barcelona that the priest intervened effectually for the sinner.

Tixeront, *Histoire des Dogmes*, II, 326, avers: "Saint Pacien, en tout cas, est très formel: les évêques remettent les péchés, sans doute en vertu d'un pouvoir à eux communiqué par Jésus Christ et en tant que ses ministres, mais ils remettent néanmoins réellement les péchés et exercent un pouvoir et un droit, le *jus apostolicum* donné primitivement aux apôtres."

Neither the authors just cited, nor others consulted, advance an elaborate proof. Most are satisfied with one or two excerpts, especially from *Epistola I*, c. 6.

to be true;<sup>62</sup> so also the fact that the bishop is represented as producing the same effects in the sacrament of penance as in baptism;<sup>63</sup> likewise the truth that a marked distinction is made between the performance of the satisfaction and the conferring of pardon, so that forgiveness does not follow mechanically from the former; finally, that even after the penitential injunctions have been complied with, a certain caution and circumspection are postulated of the minister before he extends pardon. These propositions could be verified from Saint Pacianus and their combined force would lend strong support to the opinion that the bishop's absolution was the preponderant factor in the remission of sin.

But perhaps a running commentary on diverse pertinent quotations from the saint will be more effective.<sup>64</sup> The fashioning of *a priori* moulds of argumentation contributes much to clarity, but restricts the meaning of texts and impedes the exposition of the complete thought of the author. Hence, we prefer to adopt the more cumbersome method of commenting, and since the question on hand is of such moment, our citations will be more complete than heretofore, in order to set out the historical argument in its full strength.

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<sup>62</sup>This is an effective proof. The later Novatians granted penance to capital offenders, but denied them pardon. They could hope for this only from God Himself. Hence, according to the Novatian concept the penance, even though ecclesiastically imposed and controlled, did not efface sin necessarily. The Fathers protest against this policy of enjoining penance and then refusing forgiveness. If the penance has been fulfilled, then its fruit of forgiveness should be granted. This fruit results from the bishop's intervention. Penance by itself is sterile; the sin is condoned only when the bishop intervenes. Thus, the wiping away of sin is to be attributed to the mediation of the bishop, not to the penitential exercises. Morinus, *De Paenitentia*, p. 524, throws some light upon this argument from Saint Pacianus' dispute with Sympronianus. Cf. also Galtier, "A Propos de la Pénitence Primitive," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, XXX, 1934, pp. 521-522, for Cyprian's and Ambrose's controversies with the Novatians.

<sup>63</sup>Vacandard, *Absolution des Péchés aux Temps des Pères*, DTC., T. I., Pt. 1, 159, offers a brief exposé of this argument from Saint Pacianus.

<sup>64</sup>Göller, "Analekten zur Bussgeschichte des IV Jahrhunderts," *Römische Quartalschrift*, XXXVI, 1928, pp. 245-261, offers a running commentary from the penitential viewpoint on the works of Saint Pacianus. His article is helpful for understanding Pacianus' doctrine in a general way, but is of little assistance in solving a controverted point such as the present one where various texts must be assembled and compared with a definite end in view.

A weighty proof is to be found in the very first letter, the sixth chapter of which reads as follows:

"Sed paenitere non licuit.<sup>65</sup> Nemo sine fructu imperat laborem: 'Dignus est enim mercenarius mercede sua.' Numquam Deus non paenitenti comminaretur, nisi ignosceret paenitenti. Solus hoc, inquires, Deus poterit. Verum est: sed et quod per sacerdotes suos facit, ipsius potestas est. Nam quid est illud quod Apostolis dicit: 'Quae ligaveritis in terris, ligata erunt et in caelis: et quaecumque solveritis in terris, soluta erunt et in caelis?' Cur hoc si ligare hominibus ac solvere non licebat? An tantum hoc solis Apostolis licet? Ergo et baptizare solis licet, et Spiritum Sanctum dare solis, et solis gentium peccata purgare: quia totum hoc, non aliis quam Apostolis imperatum est. Quod si uno in loco, et resolutio vinculorum et sacramenti potestas datur; aut totum ad nos ex Apostolorum forma et potestate deductum est; aut nec illud ex decretis relaxatum est. 'Ego,' inquit, 'fundamentum posui; alius autem superaedificat.' Hoc ergo superaedificantes, quod Apostolorum doctrina fundavit. Denique et episcopi, Apostoli nominantur, sicut de Epaphrodito Paulus edisserit: 'Fratrem et commilitonem,' inquit, 'meum; vestrum autem apostolum.' Si ergo lavacri et chrisimatis potestas, majorum et longe charismatum, ad episcopos inde descendit; et ligandi quoque jus adfuit atque solvendi. Quod etsi nos ob nostra peccata temerarie vindicamus; Deus tamen illud, ut sanctis et Apostolorum cathedram tenentibus, non negabit; qui episcopis etiam Unici sui nomen indulsit."

This celebrated<sup>66</sup> reply of Saint Pacianus was evoked by an objection presented in Sympronianus' missive and condensed in the bishop's own words in the introductory sentence: "It was not permissible to grant pardon<sup>67</sup> for mortal sin."<sup>68</sup> In his

<sup>65</sup>Gruber reads *libuit*. We believe *licuit* fits in better with the meaning of the passage. When Saint Pacianus in the same chapter answers the objection contained in this introductory sentence, he uses *licet*, not *libet*. He uses *licet* twice more in the same chapter and never once employs *libet*.

<sup>66</sup>Scholars have been impressed by the clarity with which this chapter insists on the necessity of the bishop's intervention in the remission of sin. Cf. Casey, *Notes on a History of Auricular Confession*, p. 47; Huarte, *De Paenitentia*, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup>This is an instance where the word *paenitere* necessarily means *to grant pardon*. We gather this from the immediate context: *Nemo sine fructu imperat laborem*. The *labor* consists in the doing of penance; the *fructus* is the forgiveness. Besides, we know that the Novatians were not averse to granting penance; it was absolution that they denied. Cf. Galtier, *Pénitence-Confession*, DAFC. III, 1851-1852.

<sup>68</sup>We have inserted the expression *for mortal sin*. This is the only subject-matter in dispute as Sympronianus objects (*Epistola III*, c. 1): "Quod mortale peccatum Ecclesia donare non possit."

answer Saint Pacianus maintains a clear distinction between the satisfaction and the pardon. True, an intimate nexus flourishes between the two. Pardon eventuates from works of penance since it is its fruit (*fructu*) or recompense (*mercede*). Just as pardon may not be granted without the antecedent reparation, so the reparation itself may not be imposed and fulfilled without exacting the bestowal of pardon. (*Nemo sine fructu imperat laborem*). But the two are lodged in diverse subjects; the sinner must perform the expiation; he is like a workman (*mercenarius*) toiling for his future wages, whereas God accords the pardon (*nisi ignosceret paenitenti*).

The apparent causal relationship between the satisfaction and the pardon is not founded on any natural connection between the two, but solely on God's decree revealed in the Scriptural threats hurled at the unrepentant sinner (*Numquam Deus non paenitenti comminaretur, nisi ignosceret paenitenti*). But though the forgiveness will infallibly ensue upon the performance of atonement, it yet remains a distinct act, one that God must elicit, and it is this act which truly absolves from sin. Sympronianus was willing to concede this, but he now broaches the typical Novatian objection. Only God can absolve (*Solus hoc, inquires, Deus poterit*). How does Saint Pacianus retort? You are partly right, partly wrong, Sympronianus. To be sure, God's infinite power is required for the remission of sin, but He does not have to exercise this power personally. As a matter of fact, He does not do so. He wields it through the agency of select men, His bishops, who are the successors of the Apostles (*Sed et quod per sacerdotes suos facit, ipsius potestas est*).<sup>69</sup> Thus we explain your difficulty. The bishop can remit sin because God has communicated or delegated to him the divine power (*ipsius potestas*).<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Many authors advert to this text to establish the *delegated power* of the penitential minister. Cf. Galtier, *Pénitence-Confession*, DAFC. III, 1852; Pohle, *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, III, 398; Göller, *Analekten zur Bussgeschichte*, *Römische Quartalschrift*, XXXVI, 1928, p. 246; Tixeront, *Histoire des Dogmes*, II, 321; Watkins, *History of Penance*, I, 454.

<sup>70</sup>Saint Pacianus inculcates the doctrine of delegated power in the minister of penance in other places, *Epistola I*, c. 7. "Quid episcopo negabitur, in quo nomen Dei operatur?"

The argument from the passage under discussion may, then, be put briefly as follows: The sinner who does works of penance has a claim to forgiveness, but this forgiveness does not flow spontaneously from the penitential atonement. An act of God must supervene<sup>71</sup> and it is this act which constitutes the pardon. However, for Catholic penitents God does not elicit this act directly; He has appointed the apostles and their successors to act in His stead and they are vested with God's own power (*ipsius potestas*).<sup>72</sup> Without their intervention penance is barren; its fruit is not produced; its compensation is not paid. But let them speak authoritatively and the satisfaction fructifies; its hardship receives its requital.

From this argument it is obvious that satisfaction and pardon are not placed on an equal footing in the mind of Saint Pacianus. Even the penitent who has complied with all his obligations is helpless, maimed, fettered, unless God's minister pronounces absolution. Nor is there question of mere episcopal

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If the bishop observes the norms required by God in administering the sacrament, he is (*Epistola* I, c. 7) "*adjutor Dei operum*." Speaking again of the bishop's power to forgive sin, he says (*Epistola* III, c. 7): "*Caeterum quod ego facio, id non meo jure, sed Domini*."

Referring to this last text, Göller, *Analekten zur Bussgeschichte, Römische Quartalschrift*, XXXVI, 1928, p. 248, says it means: "Gottes Helfer sind wir." In his comment on it Batiffol, *Etudes d'Histoire et de Théologie Positive*, p. 139, declares: "Pacien explique que l'évêque, soit qu'il baptise, soit qu'il impose la pénitence, soit qu'il accorde le pardon au pénitent, ne fait rien qu'au nom du Christ."

<sup>71</sup>Dealing with the various Fathers who had to debate with the Novatians, Galtier, *Pénitence-Confession*, DAFC, III, 1851-1852, offers the following illuminating remark: "La pénitence dont ils (these Fathers) revendiquent la légitimité a cela de propre qu'elle est le traitement du péché par les hommes, et non pas exclusivement par Dieu. Les Novatiens, eux, se défendent de guérir eux-mêmes le péché. . . . Les Catholiques au contraire,—et c'est sur quoi porte toute la discussion,—revendiquent ce pouvoir. Mais ils ne renoncent pas pour cela à débouter les Novatiens de leur accusation d'empiètement sur le monopole divin. Ils y opposent le principe que, dans la rémission du péché, l'action de Dieu et celle du prêtre se confondent."

Note the following statement of Saint Ambrose, *De Paenitentia*, I, c. 8, par. 8, ML. 16, 477: "*Omnia ergo dedit (Christus), sed nulla in his hominis potestas est, ubi divini muneris gratia viget*."

<sup>72</sup>That St. Pacianus means literally that the bishops exercise the divine prerogative is confirmed at the close of the passage. It is so great a power that they claim it with a certain amount of trepidation (*temerarie vindicamus*), because of their own sinfulness. The Father, nevertheless, has granted them the authority of his only Son (*Unici Sui nomen indulsit*).

control of the expiation, since the expiation is viewed as completely terminated. Nothing is left to control, and yet the sinner is depicted as unforgiven unless the bishop wields his divine power.

In the last chapter of the same first letter, we find another citation which lends force to our demonstration. It reads as follows:

“Ergo nec baptismus, nec criminum remissio, nec innovatio corporis, sanctae potestati ejus (episcopi) indulta est; quia nihil propria usurpatione mandatum est, totumque id ex apostolico jure defluxit. Scio, frater, hanc ipsam paenitentiae veniam non passim omnibus dari, nec ante quam aut interpretatio divinae voluntatis aut forsitan visitatio<sup>73</sup> fuerit, relaxari. Magno pondere magnoque libramine post multos gemitus effusionemque lacrimarum, post totius ecclesiae preces, ita veniam verae paenitentiae non negari, ut iudicaturus Christo, nemo praepredicet.”

The first sentence of this quotation iterates that the bishop is the minister of the remission of sin and that his power is not a personal one. But how is the sacrament administered? It contains two disparate elements, the *paenitentia* and the *venia*.<sup>74</sup> Any sinner may be admitted to the penitential status, but not

<sup>73</sup>The meaning of this word cannot be determined satisfactorily. Koch, *Cyprianische Untersuchungen*, p. 477, says that it refers back to the pneumatic forgiveness of sins in the early Church—“nur der die Vergebung aussprechen könne, dem der Wille Gottes kund geworden sei.” However, there is no proof in penitential literature for a pneumatic remission of sin. Besides, in the rest of Saint Pacianus’ writings, and especially in the *Paraenesis* where he treats quite fully of penance, there is no hint of any miraculous intervention to signify that the penitent is to be absolved. Confession, sorrow, the performance of the penance are the conditions prescribed. *Anyone* who fulfills these requirements will be forgiven. Hurter’s commentary (SPOS, XXXVII, 150 note 1) certainly fits in better with the totality of Saint Pacianus’ doctrine. He says that the whole phrase *interpretatio divinae voluntatis aut visitatio fuerit* means that pardon is accepted “cum ministri Ecclesiae ex paenitentis dispositione poterunt interpretari, colligere voluntatem divinam ad veniam promptam vel gratiae divinae in peccatoris animo operationem. Quam praxim dicit (Pacianus) non esse praepredicandam seu damnandam, prout Novatiani faciebant.”

<sup>74</sup>We would ask the reader to observe the additional force of this citation and the preceding one from the fact that they deal with both the penance and the pardon, not with either individually. This was not the case with the texts which exaggerated the necessity of penance. They spoke of penance alone. Here we have an opportunity to weigh the relative importance of the penance and the absolution and thus gain insight into Saint Pacianus’ mind on the *sacrament as a whole*.



every one so admitted will be forgiven. Pardon is not accorded whimsically (*veniam non passim omnibus dari*). No, the sinner must be observed, some inkling of the divine will must be glimpsed, the most meticulous caution must be exercised; he must manifest his sorrow in copious tears and incessant groanings; the entire Church must intercede for him. This is true satisfaction (*verae paenitentiae*). From such, pardon is not to be withheld (*veniam non negari*). It must be granted (*dari, relaxari*) under penalty of preventing Christ Himself, the future Judge.

From this summary exposition of the passage it is clear that pardon does not emanate mechanically from the performance of satisfaction. Even though the atonement is genuine (*verae paenitentiae*), Saint Pacianus supposes that some one besides the penitent must interpose to make the sacrament effective. This agent interprets the divine will and employs the utmost discretion. Therefore, the agent is a human being, not God Himself. Nor is this agent the community of the faithful. These pray for the penitent, but even after their joint intercession pardon has not yet been obtained. This agent is the bishop who is endowed with a hallowed power (*sanctae potestati*), the power of effacing sin (*criminum remissio*). The expiation, though indispensable, is secondary; it gives a title to pardon but it does not produce it. Unless complemented by some prayer or verdict or action of the bishop, it is fruitless and the penitent remains God's enemy.

A passage in the seventh chapter of the *Third Letter*, consisting of an objection made by the Novatian and its answer by Saint Pacianus, affords another indication of his mind on this question. The text follows:

"Sed paenitenti, inquires, peccata dimittis; cum tantum in baptisate tibi liceat relaxare peccatum. Non mihi plane, sed Deo soli, qui et in baptisate donat admissum, et paenitentium lacrimas non repellit. Caeterum quod ego facio, id non meo jure, sed Domini: 'Dei sumus adjuutores,' inquit, 'Dei aedificatio est' (1 Cor. 3, 9). Et iterum: 'Ego plantavi, Apollo irrigavit, sed Deus incrementum dedit: Ergo neque qui

plantat est aliquid, neque qui rigat; sed qui incrementum dat, Deus' (1 Cor. 3, 6, 7). Quare sive baptizamus, sive ad paenitentiam cogimus, seu veniam paenitentibus relaxamus; Christo id auctore tractamus. Tibi videndum est, an Christus hoc possit, an Christus hoc fecerit."<sup>75</sup>

It may conduce to clarity if we first render summarily the thought of this quotation. "You are remitting sins to penitents," protests Sympronianus, "whereas you are empowered to do this only in baptism." What is the response of Saint Pacianus? I personally can do nothing, Sympronianus; God alone operates effectively both in baptism and in penance. My action in both does not flow from any personal title, but from the Lord's authorization. Hence, whether we bishops baptize or exhort to penance or actually accord pardon to the penitent, we are ever acting with the authority of Christ. It is your concern to examine whether Christ could confer such power upon us, whether He has actually done so.

This excerpt supplies a double line of argumentation. In the first place, consider the very objection of the Novatian. "You are remitting sins to penitents." What does this suppose? First, a sinner is truly contrite (*paenitenti*). He is, however, not forgiven by that fact. The Catholic bishop intervenes,<sup>76</sup> and, in so doing, professes to blot out the sins of the penitent. What more limpid proof could we find that the bishop deletes the offense? The satisfaction is subordinate and does not restore to God's favor. Some declaration or action of the bishop effects this result.

Moreover, this conclusion is verified by Saint Pacianus' answer to the objection. The Novatian has not misconstrued the part of the bishop in abolishing the effects of sin; he rightly understands the Catholic practise. The bishop does as a matter of fact extend pardon to the penitent (*veniam paenitentibus*

<sup>75</sup>Both Casey, *Notes on a History of Auricular Confession*, p. 46, and Tixeront, *Histoire des Dogmes*, II, 326, quote a part of this passage. Its meaning is so plain to them that they offer the bare text without a word of comment.

<sup>76</sup>That Sympronianus restricts this power to the bishops is evident from the fact that he addresses St. Pacianus, the bishop, in the singular (*dimittis, tibi liceat*). It also follows from the comparison between baptism and penance. The bishop was certainly the minister of baptism. Penance is put in the same category.

*relaxamus*). The *venia* is a distinct element from the expiation. Let the sinner wail and lament and fulfill all his penitential prescriptions; they are in vain unless the bishop climaxes the whole procedure with his *venia*. The forgiveness, therefore, proceeds from the bishop's intervention, not from the atonement. The Novatian is alarmed at the exercise of such power by mere men, because his concept of delegated power is faulty. God has transmitted this faculty to the bishops; they act in the name of the Lord (*non meo jure, sed Domini*). Examine the Scriptures, Sympronianus, and see if you can convince yourself, not only that Christ was able to communicate this power to the bishops, but also that He has verily done so.

The second method of arguing from this citation is based upon the comparison between baptism and penance. The Novatian does not disclaim the right of the bishop to forgive sins in baptism; he concedes it expressly (*tantum in baptisate tibi liceat relaxare peccatum*). Now, it is beyond all quibble that baptismal remission was effected mainly by the bishop's action. For Saint Pacianus baptism is a *gratuita donatio*.<sup>77</sup> Its lavage in the case of many recipients purges away all sin without any requirement from them. But Sympronianus protests that the Catholic bishop asserts the right to forgive sin in the sacrament of penance just as he does in baptism, provided only that the transgressor is sorry. The comparison can have but one meaning: in the Catholic mind it was the intervention of the bishop for the penitent that canceled the sin. The bishop certainly remitted sin in baptism; he vindicated the same power for himself in penance, and it is against this supposed presumption that the Novatians inveigh. Furthermore, in his reply Saint Pacianus stoutly upholds the Catholic position that the bishop forgives sin in both sacraments. It makes no difference whether he baptizes or accords pardon to penitents. He has equal jurisdiction for both since they originated with Christ Himself and are, therefore, of Divine institution. It is not, then, the atonement of the penitent, but the operation of the

<sup>77</sup>*Epistola III, c. 8.*

bishop that is of prime import in the sacrament of penance, as is the case in baptism; expiation alone will not obliterate sin; pardon proceeds primarily from the condonation pronounced by the bishop (*veniam paenitentibus relaxamus*). The same argument is found in other early writers.<sup>78</sup>

We now subjoin one last passage to clarify further the mind of Saint Pacianus in this matter. It is taken from the fifth chapter of the *Third Letter* and runs as follows:

“Nescio, ais, an remitti peccatum ab episcopis possit, cum dixerit Dominus: ‘Qui me negaverit coram hominibus, negabo eum coram Patre meo qui in caelis est.’ Cur igitur Novatianus tuus, ne falso quidem adhuc episcopatu sacerdos, longe ante quam Cornelius Romae episcopus fieret, ante quam sacerdotio illius invideret, haec suasit? Habes Cypriani testimonium: Cypriani quem nec vos umquam infamare potuistis.<sup>79</sup> Nam quodam in loco, ad Antonianum hoc modo scripsit: ‘Additum est etiam Novatiano tunc scribente; et quod scripserat, sua voce recitante; et Moyse, tunc confessore nunc jam martyre subscribente; ut lapsis infirmis et in exitu constitutis pax daretur: quae litterae per totum mundum missae sunt, et in notitiam ecclesiis omnibus perlatae sunt.’ Quid ais, Symproniae frater? Novatianus haec scripsit, et ut obsequium merae voluntatis adjungeret, etiam scripta recitavit. Testis est ejus dextera, testis quae scripsit, manus; testis lingua, quae legit. Adhuc Cornelius, pro quo omnis haec erupit invidia, episcopus non erat. Longe posterius cum plurimis coepiscopis, cum plurimis confessoribus, statimque martyribus, ut idem Cyprianus scribit, assensus est senum consilio, licere dare pacem.”

<sup>78</sup>Saint Ambrose likewise argues against the Novatians that the bishop may remit in penance as well as in baptism (*De Paenitentia*, I, c. 8, par. 36, ML. 16, 477): “Cur baptizatis, si per hominem peccata dimitti non licet? In baptismo utique remissio peccatorum omnium est: quid interest, utrum per paenitentiam, an per lavacrum hoc jus sibi datum sacerdotes vindicent? Unum in utroque mysterium est.”

Cf. also *De Paenitentia*, II, c. 2, par. 12, ML. 16, 499: “Nam et impossibile videbatur ut peccatum ablueret aqua; . . . similiter impossibile videbatur per paenitentiam peccata dimitti: concessit hoc Christus apostolis suis, quod ab apostolis ad sacerdotum officia transmissum est.”

The following excerpt from Saint Cyprian, *De Lapsis*, c. 29, CSEL. T. III, pt. 1, 258, likewise indicates the power of the sacerdotal absolution: “Confiteantur singuli, quaeso vos, fratres, delictum suum, dum adhuc qui deliquit in saeculo est, dum admitti confessio ejus potest, dum satisfactio et remissio (*facta*) per sacerdotes apud Dominum grata est.”

<sup>79</sup>Sympronianus himself tried to evolve an argument against Saint Pacianus from Saint Cyprian (*Epistola III*, c. 22): “Nam quod Cyprianum beatissimum mihi pro contrario teste proponis, etc.”

Not much elaboration is required here to indicate the force of the argument. The very objection denotes that Sympronianus himself considered the remission of sin as proceeding from the bishop, not from the satisfaction. "I do not know," he declares, "whether grave sins can be forgiven *by bishops*." In his rejoinder Saint Pacianus ignores the Scripture text advanced by his adversary and launches into an *argumentum ad hominem*. On the incontrovertible testimony of the illustrious Cyprian, we know for certain that Novatian himself subscribed to the Catholic teaching. By written and vocal utterance he acquiesced in the decision of the convoked council that the *lapsi*, when enfeebled and at the point of death, should be succored by the episcopal reconciliation (*ut lapsis infirmis et in exitu constitutis pax daretur*).<sup>80</sup>

Why was this episcopal intervention so consequential? Because it forgave the sin. The languishing sinner had repented, had perhaps been engaged in performing an excruciating atonement for a lengthy period; but his eternal welfare was not assured on that account. He had not received the *pax* from the bishop. The Church might have deferred her absolution a long time, but when the contrite *lapsus* was on the verge of death, she hesitated no longer to reconcile him with God. "You say, Sympronianus, that you doubt whether the grave sin of apostasy may be forgiven by the bishop. I answer on the authority of Saint Cyprian and of a Church council—yes, even on the authority of Novatian himself—that the bishop can remit such a sin. The force of the phrases *pax daretur* and *licere dare pacem* cannot be evaded."<sup>81</sup>

One final brief excerpt from the nineteenth chapter of the

<sup>80</sup>We leave to students of Saint Cyprian the answer to the objection that he allowed deacons to remit sin. Only one text leads to this belief. Cf. Nerney, *De Paenitentia*, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup>For the general meaning of the expression *dare pacem* cf. d'Alès, *L'Édit de Calliste*, pp. 176-178, 196, 213, 330, 415. Whatever may be the general signification of the phrase, there can be no doubt that it means here the remission of sin. Otherwise the objection of Sympronianus would not be answered. "I do not know whether the bishop can remit grave sin," he declares. Saint Pacianus answers: "*pax daretur, licere dare pacem*." These are the only expressions in his reply that can mean the forgiveness of sin.

*Third Letter* likewise throws light upon this matter: "Verum Apostolus Paulus dixit: 'Manus cito nemini imponas.' Docet idem: vel tarde, vel post paenitentiam non negandas."<sup>82</sup>

Basing his decision on the text of Saint Paul, Saint Pacianus lays down two laws for the imposition of hands on the penitent. First, the sinner is not to be admitted to this ceremony precipitately; second, he *must* be admitted to it after he does his works of penance. According to this concept we have a sinner who has humbly undergone the ecclesiastical penalties. If the deletion of sin depends upon the personal atonement of the sinner, then, surely, such a one should be enjoying God's friendship. But apparently he remains unforgiven. Of necessity he must be benefitted by another rite, the imposition of hands, which is to be conferred by the bishop, since Saint Paul gives his injunction to Bishop Timothy. We have already dismissed the hypothesis that restoration to full ecclesiastical communion might account for the obligatory nature of this rite.<sup>83</sup> Its significance must have borne upon the relationship of the sinner to God, and it must have been the prime element in transforming that relationship into one of amity, since it was required even though the satisfaction had been fulfilled.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have attempted to demonstrate from Saint Pacianus that the sacrament of penance truly wiped away sin. The Church was not concerned chiefly with the readmission of penitents to their ecclesiastical privileges, but with their eternal welfare and their friendship with God. The effect of the sacrament was the renewal of this friendship. Once this problem was solved, we encountered another of even greater perplexity: which element of the sacrament contributed most effectively to the spiritual renovation? From diverse texts of the *Paraenesis* and *Third Letter* it became apparent that the

<sup>82</sup>Cf. p. 374, note 33, on this text. The very fact that Saint Paul by a figure of metonymy picks out the imposition of hands as the characteristic feature of the penitential discipline might suggest that he deemed it the most efficacious element.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. *supra*, pp. 369-374.

personal expiation of the sinner was an indispensable requirement. In fact, certain texts seemed to justify the inference that the expiation alone was operative in the world beyond. Upon examination, however, we found that reasons were not wanting to show that Saint Pacianus had overstressed the necessity of penance.

We observed, too, that no citation was of such a nature as to exclude the possibility that the episcopal intervention might also be imperative. No reference was made to it, but this fact did not perforce eliminate its necessity, especially since sound reasons could be advanced for its omission. Adverting, then, to sundry passages from the *First* and *Third Letters*, we found proof that Saint Pacianus deemed the bishop's intervention an essential part of the sacrament.

But did he consider it as *the* essential part? Was it of greater moment even than the contrition and expiation of the penitent? The texts under review helped us to answer this question. They were not confined to remarks about the bishop's power alone, but contained evidence regarding the satisfaction likewise and consequently enabled us to institute a comparison between the two. From our study we were able to draw the following conclusions:

1. Expiation alone without the subsequent absolution of the bishop is inefficacious.
2. The very objections of the Novatians imply that they looked upon the absolution as the principal fount of forgiveness.
3. The bishop in conferring absolution is possessed of God's own power and hence must play the leading role in the effacement of iniquity.
4. Even after satisfaction has been duly performed, the bishop must exercise discretion and judgment before imposing hands, and this hesitancy reveals that it is in the bestowal of absolution that the primary *virtus* of the sacrament is situated.
5. The bishop is credited with effecting the same results in penance as in baptism, and this can only mean that he chiefly remitted the sin.

6. It was imperative that the dying and repentant *lapsus* be succored by the priestly *pax*; the obligatory nature of this mediation is inexplicable unless it was viewed as deleting the sin.

7. St. Pacianus lays it down as a general principle that hands must be imposed *after* atonement has been made; the atonement by itself, therefore, did not achieve the pardon sought; the bishop was constrained to intervene and only then was the sinner restored to grace.

If some doubt may be cast upon the validity of one or other of these proofs individually, they do nevertheless, taken jointly, appear to justify the conclusion that Saint Pacianus regarded the episcopal absolution as constituting the very marrow of the sacrament of penance.

