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PENITENTIAL DISCIPLINE IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES.

THE Church was sent forth from the Upper Room at Jerusalem to preach the Forgiveness of Sins, and provided with the power of imparting it¹. To those who believed the message and repented of the sins of their past lives Baptism was an absolution in full. Upon this point there is a remarkable *consensus* of Apostolic and other early testimony².

The case of post-baptismal sin was less simple, and it does not seem to have been dealt with at first in a comprehensive way. No definite policy is shadowed forth in the New Testament, although it contains incidental references to the subject. St. John teaches that sins committed by Christians who 'walk in the light' are forgiven, upon the simple condition of being confessed, or through the prayer of a brother; but there is such a thing as 'sin unto death,' for which prayer will not avail³. A gross sin which created scandal might be visited by a Divine chastisement, with the result that the offender was overtaken by sickness or death⁴; or he might be expelled from the Church by

¹ Lc. xxiv 47; Jo. xx 21 ff.

² For the belief of the Apostolic age it is sufficient to point to Acts ii 38, xxii 16, I Cor. vi 11; but it is implicit in all passages where the forgiveness of sins is represented as possessed by the baptized, e.g. Eph. i 7, iv 32; Col. i 13 f.; I Jo. ii 12.

³ I Jo. i 7 ff., v 16.

⁴ Acts v 5, 10; I Cor. v 5, xi 30.

the judgement of the whole body¹. In the latter case the soci which had expelled a member could reinstate him²; both expelling and in restoring it was believed to act by the power Christ, but would ordinarily look for the concurrence of Apostolic founder³ or his delegate⁴. Some words dropped St. James⁵ suggest that sins which did not need such drastic treatment were sometimes confessed before the congregation, who interceded for the pardon of the sinner. There is, however, no sign as yet of any ordered system of discipline. The busy age which carried the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome had little time for the settlement of details; perhaps it was felt that the matter was one which did not admit of being settled in the infancy of the Church, but must be left to experience guided by the Spirit of Christ.

Nor did the sub-apostolic age proceed many steps further, if we may judge from its literary remains. The Epistle of Clement, though called forth by disorders in the Church at Corinth, has little to say upon the question of discipline. It seems to assume that a healthy Christian life needs no confession of sins but that which is made to God, and no absolution but that which the Atonement offers to the penitent⁶. The leaders of the revolt at Corinth are warned that they must accept chastisement, humbling themselves before the presbyters whom they had unjustly ejected and acknowledging their error⁷; but no formal penance seems to be contemplated. Ignatius uses *μετανοια* and *μετανοειν* only when he refers to the conversion of the heathen or the return of

¹ 1 Cor. v. 4, 5 & reference to 2 Cor. xii. 19, 20.
² 1 Cor. v. 4.
³ 1 Cor. v. 4, 5 & reference to 2 Cor. xii. 19, 20.
⁴ 1 Cor. v. 4, 5 & reference to 2 Cor. xii. 19, 20.
⁵ 1 Cor. v. 4, 5 & reference to 2 Cor. xii. 19, 20.
⁶ 1 Cor. v. 4, 5 & reference to 2 Cor. xii. 19, 20.
⁷ 1 Cor. v. 4, 5 & reference to 2 Cor. xii. 19, 20.

schismatics to the unity of the Church¹, and apparently not in a technical sense. Polycarp briefly refers to certain judicial functions exercised by presbyters², but in alluding to a scandal which had arisen within the presbyterate, he is content to express his grief and to pray that the offender may be brought to 'true repentance'³. The *Didache* twice speaks of confession of sins as a necessary preparation for public prayer and the Eucharist⁴, and there is a similar statement in Barnabas⁵. The homily which was long thought to be a second letter of Clement prescribes almsgiving as a means of relieving the soul from the burden of sin⁶.

In the *Shepherd* of Hermas we have the first serious attempt to deal with the whole question of post-baptismal sin. The Shepherd is the 'Angel of Repentance,' and the book might well have borne the secondary title 'ἡ περὶ μετανοίας⁷.' Evidently the subject was attracting attention in the Roman Church at the time when Hermas wrote, i.e. if we are to believe the Muratorian writer, during the episcopate of Pius (c. 140-155). Certain teachers in the Church had asserted that there was no place for a post-baptismal repentance; the one and only *μετάνοια* was that which was consummated by the baptismal remission of sins. The Shepherd admits that this teaching is theoretically true; those who have received forgiveness of their sins in Baptism ought to 'sin no more⁸'; and in future, it is hinted, this ideal must be

¹ *Eph.* 10. 1; *Philad.* 3. 2, 8. 1; *Σπυργ.* 4. 1, 5. 3, 9. 1.

² *Phil.* 6. 1 καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι δὲ ἐβουλαγχοῦν, εἰς πάντα ἐλεήμονες . . . μὴ ταχέως πιστεύοντες κατὰ τινος, μὴ ἀπότομοι ἐν κρίσει, εἰδότες ὅτι πάντες ὀφείλονται ἕσμεν ἁμαρτίας.

³ *Ibid.* 11.

⁴ *Did.* 4. 14 ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἔξομολογήσῃ τὰ παραπτώματά σου κτλ. 14. 1 προεξομολογήσάμενοι τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν.

⁵ *Barn. ep.* 19. 12.

⁶ 'Clem. R. 2 Cor.' 16 ἑλεημοσύνη γὰρ κούφισμα ἁμαρτίας γίνεται. On the whole passage and its relation to Tobit xii 8 and Prov. x 12 (1 Pet. iv 8) see Lightfoot, *ad loc.*

⁷ *Herm. Vis.* 5. 7 ταῦτά μοι πάντα οὕτως γράψαι ὁ ποιμὴν ἐνετείλατο, ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς μετανοίας. *Mand.* 4. 2 ἐγώ, φησί, ἐπὶ τῆς μετανοίας εἰμι καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς μετανοοῦσιν σῦναισι δίδωμι.

⁸ *Mand.* 4. 3 ἤκουσα, φημί, κύριε, παρὰ τινων διδασκάλων ὅτι ἑτέρα μετάνοια οὐκ ἔστιν εἰ μὴ ἐκείνη ὅτε εἰς ὕδωρ κατέβημεν καὶ ἐλάβομεν ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν τῶν προτέρων. λέγει μοι Καλῶς ἤκουσας, οὕτω γὰρ ἔχει· ἔδει γὰρ τὸν εὐληφότα ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν μηκέτι ἁμαρτάνειν.

munion of the Roman Church¹. In Asia Minor, as it seems, certain female disciples of the Valentinian teacher Marcus, on returning to the Church, made public confession of the errors into which they had been betrayed, the state of *exomologesis* lasting in one case to the end of life². Eusebius attributes to Dionysius of Corinth a letter addressed to the Church of Amastris in Paphlagonia and to the Churches of Pontus, in which the Bishop of Corinth recommends that persons who sought to return to the Church after any fall, whether a moral offence or a lapse into heresy, should be restored to communion³. There seems to be no sufficient reason for doubting the attribution of this letter to Dionysius, whose *floruit* is placed by Eusebius in A. D. 173⁴.

This letter to the Churches on the shores of the Euxine suggests the existence in those parts of a tendency to deal severely with certain offenders who sought reconciliation with the Church. Perhaps there were local reasons for this trend of opinion. Epiphanius notes the prevalence of Encratite views throughout a large part of Asia Minor⁵, and they were probably still more common in the second century. When Dionysius wrote, another movement was in progress which may have been partly responsible for the tendency mentioned above. According to Eusebius Montanism broke out in 173-4⁶; but Epiphanius places it as early

¹ Epiph. *l.c.* ἀλθώς μετόπισιν οὐκ εἴληφε παρὰ τοῦ ἰδίου πατρὸς. On his arrival at Rome, ἤγει συναχθῆναι καὶ οὐδεὶς αὐτῷ συγκεχώρηκε. The story seems to have come from the lost *σύναγμα* of Hippolytus (cf. Harnack-Preuschen, *Gesch.* i p. 623); see Salmon, art. *Μαρκίον* in *D. C. B.*

² Iren. i 13. 5 αὐται πολλάκις ἐπιστρέψασαι εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξομολογήσαντο (*confessas suas*) . . . ὥστε καὶ διάκονόν τινα τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ τῶν ἡμετέρων . . . περιπεσεῖν ταύτῃ τῇ συμφορᾷ . . . τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ διαφθορείσης . . . ἔπειτα μετὰ πολλοῦ κόπου τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐπιστρέψαντων, αὐτὴ τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον ἐξομολογουμένη διετέλεσε (*omne tempus in exomologesi consummativā*), κενθούσα καὶ θρηνοῦσα ἐφ' ᾗ ἔπαθεν ὑπὸ τοῦ μάγου διαφθορᾷ. Ἐξομολογῆσθαι is used instead of the normal *ἐξαγορεύειν* in Dan. ix 20 (Lxx) and in the N.T. (Mc. i 5 = Mt. iii 6, Acts xix 18, Jas. v 10). The early appearance in the West of *exomologesis* in a technical sense is not easy to account for; the noun is fairly common in the Lxx, but as = τῆρε, 'praise'; in the N. T. it does not occur, or in the sub-apostolic writings, except Herm. *Sim.* 2. 5, where it is used as in the Lxx.

³ Eus. *H. E.* iv 23 καὶ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ δὲ τῇ παροικούσῃ Ἀμαστριν ἄμα ταῖς κατὰ Πόντον ἐπιστείλας . . . τοὺς ἐξ ὅλας δ' ὄν ἀποπτώσεως, εἴτε πλημμελείας εἴτε μὴν ἀρετικῆς πλάνης, ἐπιστρέφοντας δεξιούσθαι προστάττει. It is significant that the letter contained, apparently just before this, πολλὰ περὶ γάμου καὶ ἀγγελίας.

⁴ Eus. *Chron.* ed. Schoene, p. 172 f.

⁵ Epiph. *Haer.* xlvii 1. The provinces named are Pisidia, Phrygia, Asia, Pamphylia, Cilicia, Galatia.

⁶ Eus. *Chron.* l. c.

as the nineteenth year of Antoninus Pius¹, i.e. in 157, and it is possible that the later date is that of its condemnation by the Asiatic Churches. Amastris and the towns of Pontus were not too far from the centre of the movement to have been influenced by its ascetic tone.

At Rome the 'New Prophecy' had been brought to the notice of the Bishop as early as 177, when Irenaeus was commissioned by the Viennese confessors to approach Eleutherus in the interests of peace². According to Tertullian, a later Bishop of Rome, probably Zephyrinus, had actually recognized the Montanists and issued 'letters of peace' on their behalf to the Asiatic Churches, when he was persuaded by Praxeas to recall the letters and, in Tertullian's strange phrase, to 'expel the Paraclete'³. It is possible that this sudden and, as Tertullian relates it, inexplicable change of front may not have been altogether unconnected with the question of discipline, and may mark the rise into power at Rome of the party who advocated a relative laxity in the treatment of penitents. From two quite independent sources we gather that the old strictness which Hermas had sought to abate was sensibly relaxed by Callistus, who succeeded Zephyrinus and had been his chief adviser. If we are to believe Hippolytus, Callistus offered absolution unconditionally to all who joined his party, and ruled that a bishop ought not to be deposed, even if he should sin a 'sin unto death'⁴. Tertullian mentions no name, but there can be little doubt that he refers to Callistus when he writes: 'I hear that an edict has been issued from which there is no appeal; the Supreme Pontiff, the bishop of bishops, proclaims: "I remit, after penance done, the sins of adultery and fornication." . . . This edict was read and delivered in the Church: God forbid that the virgin Spouse of Christ should hear such an announcement'⁵.

¹ Epiph. *Haer.* xviii 1.

² Eus. *H. E.* v 3 τῆς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν εἰρήνης ἕνεκα.

³ Tert. *adv. Prax.* 1.

⁴ Hipp. *philos.* ix 12 καὶ πρῶτος τὰ πρὸς τὰς ἡδονὰς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις συγχωρεῖν ἐπειθήσει λέγων πᾶσιν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἀφίεσθαι ἁμαρτίας. ὁ γὰρ παρ' ἐτέρῳ τινὶ συναγόμενος καὶ λεγόμενος Χριστιανὸς εἴ τι ἂν ἁμάρτη, φησὶν, οὐ λογίζεται αὐτῷ ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰ προσδράμοι τῇ τοῦ Καλλίστου σχολῇ . . . οὗτος ἐδογματίσεν ὅπως εἰ ἐπίσκοπος ἁμάρτοι τι, εἰ καὶ πρὸς θάνατον, μὴ δεῖν κατατίθεσθαι.

⁵ Tert. *de pudic.* 1 'Audio etiam edictum esse propositum, et quidem peremptorium. pontifex scilicet maximus, quod est episcopus episcoporum, edicit: "Ego et moe-

The 'edict' of Callistus is a landmark in the history of Ante-Nicene discipline. But its exact nature and import are not easy to determine. Both the witnesses are prejudiced, and Tertullian, who was now a Montanist, gives free play to the exaggerations of his biting pen. It is as absurd to speak of an actual edict having been issued by a Roman Bishop of the third century, as to suppose that he had assumed the title of *pontifex maximus* or even *episcopus episcoporum*. What happened was doubtless this: sitting in his episcopal chair the Bishop had before the faithful declared his purpose to readmit to communion, after penance, persons who had been guilty of unchastity, whether married or not. But though not an 'edict,' such a statement, whatever may have been the motive of Callistus in making it, is undoubtedly important in more respects than one. In the first place it pledged the Roman See to the support of the less rigorous party as against Encratite and Montanistic severity. The leniency which Hermas had somewhat timidly proposed to show to penitents of a particular class¹, was now offered from the episcopal chair without reserve. By this act Callistus had, in the view of the stricter disciplinarians, taken upon himself to remit sins which were 'irremissible²,' i. e. which must be left to the judgement of God. The lifelong penitence hitherto required in such cases was terminated by a restoration to communion, which was not even postponed to the last extremity³. Further, the 'edict' asserted for the first time, so far as we know, the authority of the Bishop as the organ of the absolving voice of the Church. In principle this had been conceded from the days when the episcopate rose into power; it is implied in the refusal of the stern old Bishop of Sinope to absolve his son; it is allowed by Tertullian, Montanist as he was, in the case of lighter sins⁴. But while recognizing the *chiaie et fornicationis delicta pœnitentia functis dimitto* . . . *sed hoc in ecclesia legitur, et in ecclesia pronuntiat, et virgo est. absit, absit a sponsa Christi tale praeconium.*

¹ Tert. *de pudic.* 10 'Scriptura Pastoris quae sola moechos amat.' 20 'receptor apud ecclesias epistola Barnabae illo apocrypho Pastore moechorum.'

² *Ibid.* 12. The distinction is based on Acts xv 28.

³ M. Batiffol (*Études d'Histoire*, p. 95) has stated this point correctly: 'La nouveauté de Calliste consistait donc, non point en ce qu'il croyait au pardon en Dieu et à l'efficacité de l'exomologèse . . . mais en ce que Calliste relevait le pénitent de son état de pénitent dans le cas d'adultère, et le restituait après exomologèse à la *communicatio ecclesiastica.*'

⁴ Tert. *de pudic.* 18 'Salva illa pœnitentiae specie post fidem quae aut levioribus

Church's power in this matter, Tertullian deprecates its exercise; had not the Paraclete by the mouth of the 'new prophets' said, 'The Church can forgive sin, but I will not do it, lest men add sin to sin'¹? Moreover, if any Church forgave sins, it should be the 'Church of the Spirit,' the Montanistic Church which possessed 'spiritual men,' and not a Church which was a mere 'company of bishops'. Callistus perhaps laid claim to the grant of the keys made to Peter, but that grant, Tertullian urges, was a personal one, and certainly had nothing to do with the remission of 'capital' sins such as adultery². It may be doubted whether Callistus himself thought of the 'power of the keys' as belonging to him by virtue of the connexion of the Roman Church with St. Peter, as Tertullian suggests; his 'Ego . . . dimitto' is probably no more than the emphatic declaration of a policy the opposite of that which was followed by the rigorists. Still less can it be inferred that Callistus used an indicative form of absolution, or pronounced any sentence of absolution at all. Yet the tone of personal authority assumed in his 'edict' certainly marks a new stage in the history of Penitence. However loudly the Montanists might protest—partly perhaps because they protested—the Bishops kept in their own hands, with rare exceptions, the exercise of the ministry of the Remission of Sins.

From Tertullian the Montanist we will now return to Tertullian the Catholic. His tract *De paenitentia* may be taken as fairly representative of Catholic opinion and practice at Carthage in the early years of the third century. He starts with the broad principle that forgiveness is offered, by way of repentance, to all sins both of flesh and of spirit, of will and of deed⁴. Repentance

delictis unicum ab episcopo consequi poterit aut maioribus et irremissibilibus a Deo solo.'

¹ Tert. *de pudic.* 21 "'Sed habet," inquit, "potestatem ecclesia delicta donandi." hoc ego magis et agnosco et dispono, qui ipsum paracletum in prophetis novis habeo dicentem, "Potest ecclesia donare delictum, sed non faciam, ne et alia delinquant."'

² *Ibid.* 'Et ideo ecclesia quidem delicta donabit, sed ecclesia Spiritus per spiritalem hominem, non ecclesia numerus episcoporum.'

³ *Ibid.* 'De tua nunc sententia quaero unde hoc ius ecclesiae usurpes. si quia dixerit Petro Dominus . . . tibi dedi claves regni caelestis . . . idcirco praesumis et ad te derivasse solvendi et alligandi potestatem, id est ad omnem ecclesiam Petri propinquam, qualis es evertens atque commutans manifestam Domini intentionem personaliter hoc Petro conferentem?' &c. The whole passage is of great interest in view of later history.

⁴ Tert. *de paen.* 4 'Omnibus ergo delictis seu carne seu spiritu seu facto seu voluntate

normally precedes baptism, in which sin is forgiven; after baptism there should be no return to sin, and no need of a second penitence or a second pardon¹. Nevertheless, if a Christian sins after baptism, the gate of forgiveness is not absolutely closed against him. It is shut and barred, but a second Penitence is stationed at the outer door to open to those who knock, and no one should hesitate to avail himself of the opportunity if he needs it. But this second chance is the last; post-baptismal repentance cannot be repeated². Nor can it be used without effort and personal humiliation; the consciousness of guilt (*conscientia*) will not avail without submitting to the process of penitence (*actus*). This process, which was known as *exomologesis*, was one of confession regarded as a satisfaction for the sin confessed, and accompanied by disciplinary acts of self-humiliation³. It carried on its very face an admission of guilt so complete and unsparring as to bring an assurance of pardon. It was made before the Church, and the whole body partook in the grief of the suffering member and in prayer for his restoration. The Church represents Christ; Christ, touched by the sorrow of the Church, intercedes with the Father, and the penitent receives forgiveness. Tertullian does not conceal the fact that reluctance was already manifested on the part of offenders to undergo the ordeal of a public penitence. His answer is that there is no other way of restoration; the alternative is the second death⁴. If the drown-

commissis qui poenam per iudicium destinavit, idem et veniam per paenitentiam spondit.'

¹ Tert. *de paen.* 6 'Lavacrum illud obsignatio est fidei quae fides a paenitentiae fide incipitur et commendatur. non ideo abluimur, ut delinquere desinamus, sed quia desiimus, quoniam iam corde loti sumus.' 7 'piget secundae immo iam ultimae spei subtexere mentionem, ne retractantes de residuo auxilio paenitendi spatium adhuc delinquendi demonstrare videamur.'

² *Ibid.* 7 'Deus clausa iam ignoscentiae ianua et intinctionis sera obstructa aliquid adhuc permisit patere. collocavit in vestibulo paenitentiam secundam, quae pulsantibus patefaciat, sed iam semel quia iam secundo; sed amplius nunquam quia proxime frustra.'

³ *Ibid.* 9 'Huius igitur paenitentiae secundae et unius quanto in arto negotium est, tanto operosior probatio, ut non sola conscientia praeferatur sed aliquo etiam actu administratur. is actus, qui magis Graeco vocabulo exprimitur et frequentatur, *exomologesis* est, qua delictum domino nostrum confitemur . . . quatenus satisfactio confessione disponitur . . . itaque *exomologesis* prosternendi et humilificandi hominis disciplina est.'

⁴ *Ibid.* 10 'Miserum est sic ad *exomologesin* pervenire!' 12 'si de *exomologesi* retractas, gehennam in corde considera, quam tibi *exomologesis* extinguet.'

ing mariner refuses to cling to the plank¹, what hope remains that he can be saved?

At Alexandria the same view of the 'second penitence' prevailed as at Carthage. Little as Clement has in common with Tertullian, his treatment of this question is remarkably similar to that which it finds in the *De paenitentia*. 'He who has received the forgiveness of sins ought to "sin no more." The first and only repentance should be that by which the pagan turns from the sins of his past life before baptism. But of His great mercy the Lord has vouchsafed one opportunity of repentance to those who sin after baptism. Repeated and successive repentances indicate a condition which can be distinguished from unbelief only in that the baptized sinner is conscious of his sin. To be compelled to ask for pardon again and again after frequent falls is not repentance, but merely the semblance of it!'

There is here nothing very new; Clement is repeating what Hermas said fifty or sixty years before, only without the tentative and apologetic manner of the *Shepherd*. The 'second penitence' had in the interval taken its place in Christian tradition, an inevitable although undesirable necessity. On that point Carthage and Alexandria were now agreed, and they were also at one in their determination to allow no repetition of the post-baptismal *exomologesis*. With Origen fresh light breaks upon us. He approaches the whole subject from the point of view which was natural to him, regarding it as offering problems for

¹ Cf. *de paen.* 4 '[Paenitentiam] ita amplectare, ut naufragus alicuius tabulae fidem.' 12 'quid ego ultra de istis duabus humanae salutis quasi plancis.' The metaphor rooted itself in the terminology of Latin Christendom, cf. e.g. Hieron. *ad Demostrian.* 9 'ignoremus paenitentiam, ne facile peccemus; illa quasi secunda post naufragium miseris tabula sit.'

² Clem. Al. *Strom.* ii 13 § 56 τὸν οὖν εὐλαβῆτα τὴν ἔρεσιν τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν οὐκ ἐπιμαρτάνειν χροῖ ἐπι γὰρ τῇ πρώτῃ καὶ μόνῃ μετανοίᾳ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν (αὕτη ἐστὶν εἰς τὸν προσημαρτάνων κατὰ τὸν ἔθνηικόν καὶ πρώτον βίον τὸν ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ λέγειν) αὐτίκα τοῦ εὐλαβῆτα πρόκειται μετάνοια ἢ καθάρσιος τὸν τύπον τῆς ψυχῆς τῶν πλημμελημάτων . . . Ἐπειὸς οὖν [ὁ κύριος] ἄλλοι ἐπι τοῖς κῆν τῇ πίστει κεναιότουσι τινι πλημμελήματι, πολεῖται ἐν μετάνοιᾳ δευτέρᾳ . . . μίαν ἐπι μετάνοιαν ἀμετανόητων . . . αἱ δὲ σωεχῆς καὶ ἐπέλληλα ἐπι τοῖς ἀμαρτήμασι μετάνοιαι οὐδὲν τῶν καθάμαξ μὴ πιστευομένων διαφέρουσιν ἢ μόνῃ τῇ συναισθίσει ὅτι ἀμαρτάνουσι . . . δόκησις οὖν μετάνοια, οὐ μετάνοια, τὸ πολλὰς αἰτείσεις συγγράμην ἐφ' οἷς πλημμελοῦμεν πολλαίαι. There are indications that Clement has been influenced in this passage by Hermas: cf. Herm. *Manif.* 4. 3. 5 πολεῖται πλεοναχχοῖς οὖν ἐν τῷ κύριῳ . . . ἔδεικεν τὴν μετάνοιαν ταύτην . . . εἰς τὴν ἐπιμαρτάνουσαν ἐπὶ τοῦ διαβόλου ἀμαρτήσιν, μίαν μετάνοιαν ἔχει.

solution by the Christian thinker. In his early¹ work *Περὶ εὐχῆς*, the question of absolution arises in connexion with the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer. 'All of us have authority to forgive sins committed against ourselves. But he who is inspired by Jesus, as the Apostles were, and who may be known by his fruits, forgives whatever sins God has forgiven, and retains such as are past remedy. The Apostles, and those who are made like to the Apostles, being priests after the example of the Great High Priest, and possessing a knowledge of the Divine art of healing, know as they are taught by the Spirit in what cases sacrifices may be offered for sins, and in what cases this ought not to be done. Some there are, who claiming a dignity beyond that of priesthood, though perhaps they are not experts even in priestly science, boast of being able to pardon even idolatry and remit acts of adultery and fornication, as if by their prayer for such presumptuous offenders even the sin unto death could be discharged².' This refers obviously enough to Callistus, and it breathes the spirit of Montanism in so far as it limits the gift of John xx 23 to the spiritual members of the Church, and its exercise to 'remissible' sins; but it does not, like Tertullian's Montanism, go to the length of discouraging the remission of sins under any circumstances. Towards the end of his life Origen, now a presbyter at Caesarea³, returns to the subject in his commentary on Matt. xvi 18 ff. 'Since the members of the Episcopate use this passage as if it implied that they, like Peter, had received the keys, and teach that sins bound (i. e. condemned) by them are bound in Heaven, and sins forgiven by them are loosed in Heaven, it must be remarked that their contention is sound if they can show that they do that which

¹ Westcott (*D. C. B.* iv p. 103) places it before 231, adding 'date uncertain.' Batiffol on the other hand (*Études*, p. 109) assigns it to 244-9.

² *De orat.* 28 πάντες μὲντοι γε ἔξουσίαν ἔχομεν ἀφίειν τὰ εἰς ἡμᾶς ἡμαρτημένα . . . ὁ δὲ ἐμπνευσθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὡς οἱ ἀπόστολοι, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν γινώσκεισθαι δυνατόμενος . . . ἀφήσιν ἃ ἐὰν ἀφῆ ὁ θεός, καὶ κρατεῖ τὰ ἀνάτα τῶν ἡμαρτημάτων . . . οὕτω τοιγαροῦν οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ τοῖς ἀποστόλοις ὁμοιωμένοι, ἱερεῖς ὄντες κατὰ τὸν μέγαν ἀρχιερέα, ἐπιστήμην λαβόντες τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ θεραπείας, ἴσασιν ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος διδασκόμενοι περὶ ἃν χρῆ ἀναφέρειν θυσίας ἡμαρτημάτων καὶ πότε καὶ τίνα τρόπον, καὶ γινώσκουσι περὶ ἃν οὐ χρῆ τοῦτο ποιεῖν . . . οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἐαυτοῖς τινες ἐπιτρέψαντες τὰ ὑπὲρ τῆν ἱερατικῆν ἀξίαν, τάχα μὴδὲ ἀκριβοῦντες τὴν ἱερατικὴν ἐπιστήμην, αὐχοῦσιν ὡς δυνάμενοι καὶ εἰδωλολατρίας συγχαρεῖν, μοιχείας τε καὶ πορνείας ἀφίειν, ὡς διὰ τῆς εὐχῆς αὐτῶν περὶ τῶν ταῦτα τετολημμένων λυομένης καὶ τῆς πρὸς θάνατον ἡμαρτίας.

³ Cf. Eus. *H. E.* vi 36.

Peter did and for which he received the *Tu es Petrus*, and if they are such as Christ builds His Church upon—then this promise may reasonably be applied to them. But if a man is bound with the chain of his sins, it is idle for him to bind or to loose others. If any one who is not Peter and has not Peter's qualifications thinks like Peter to bind on earth and loose on earth, after such a manner that what he binds or looses is bound or loosed in Heaven, that man is 'puffed up,' not knowing the mind of the Scriptures, and in his pride he has fallen as the Devil fell¹. This is plain speaking for one who was in the communion of the Church, and it shows that even to the last Origen was dissatisfied with the claim of the Episcopate to remit sins without regard to the personal character of the absolver. He would have been content that the Bishops should retain the power, provided that it was exercised only by those of proved sanctity—a touch of Montanism still surviving in the veteran scholar. On the benefits of confession he speaks with more conviction. He holds that there are sinful thoughts which can never be wholly eradicated while they are hidden in the breast, or until they have been revealed to those who can heal these wounds of the soul. Secret sins are like undigested food; confession relieves the soul as the body is eased by vomiting. Christ is the Head Physician, but He has committed the practice of the healing art to the Apostles and those who succeed them in the ministry of the Church. Care must be taken, however, to choose a physician who is skilful and sympathetic, and when he has been found the penitent must be prepared to follow his advice without reserve². The old rule of 'one and only one penitence after Baptism' applies to the graver sins: sins which are not 'unto death' may always be

¹ Orig. *Comm. in Matt.* l. xii 14 ἐπεὶ δὲ οἱ τὸν τόνον τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς ἐκκεκέντηται χρώνται τῷ βῆτι, ὡς Πέτρος, καὶ [*scilicet*] ὡς καὶ αὐτοὶ καθὼς Πέτρος] τὰς κλειδας τῆς νῦν οὐρανῶν βασιλείας ἀπὸ τοῦ σωτῆρος εὐλαφῶστερ, δεδόντοσι τε τὰ ἐν' αὐτῶν δεδεμένα (τοῦτοίσι καταδεχασμένα) καὶ ἐν οὐρανοῖς δεδέσθαι, κ.τ.λ., λαετίον ὅτι ὅγινος λέγουσιν εἰ ἔχουσιν ἔργον δι' ὃ εἰρηται ἐκεῖν τῷ Πέτρῳ Σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ εἰ τηλικούτοι εἰσιν ὡς ἐν' αὐτοῖς οἰκοδομῆσθαι τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ ἐν' αὐτοῖς ἐβλόγως τοῦτο ἀναφέρου' ἐν' ὑμῶν δὲ ἄδου ὅς οὐ φείλοσι κατασχέειν τοῦ θέλωντος δεσμεῖν καὶ λύειν. εἰ δὲ σεραῖς τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων αὐτοῦ ἐσφραγεται, μάτην καὶ δεσμεῖ καὶ λύει. . . εἰ δὲ τις μὴ ὡς Πέτρος καὶ μὴ ἔχων τὰ εἰρημένα ἐνταῦθα, ὥσπερ Πέτρος οἴεται δεῖν ἐπι γῆς, κ.τ.λ., ὅσως τετόφωται, μὴ ἐπιστάμενος τὸ βούλημα τῶν γραφῶν, καὶ τυφθεὶς ἐμπεύνησεν εἰς τὸ τοῦ θαβύλου πτώμα.

² Cf. *Hom. in Ps.* xxxvii 1. 1 sqq.; *in Luc.* xvii.

repaired by confession¹. Yet formal confession is not the only remedy which the Gospel offers to the penitent. When people complained that while the Israelite could offer his trespass offering as often as he would, the Christian was allowed but one *exomologesis*, they should remember that those for whom Christ died might well expect to live under a severer rule than that which prevailed before the Incarnation. Yet, as a matter of fact, the Church could count up no fewer than seven channels through which forgiveness might be obtained. Origen places in this category (1) baptism; (2) martyrdom; (3) almsgiving (Luke xi 41); (4) readiness to forgive (Matt. vi 14); (5) converting sinners (Jas. v 20); (6) fervent love (Luke vii 47, 1 Pet. iv 8); (7) penitence (Ps. xxxii 5, Jas. v 16). The last means is the hardest to use; the sinner who repents washes his bed with his tears, and he does not blush to tell his sins to God's priest and ask for a remedy². Such a private interview might or might not result in a public *exomologesis*; if it did, the confession was repeated by the offender before the Church, and he must not shrink from the consequences³. It was no light matter to make a public confession in the age of growing worldliness which preceded the outbreak of the Decian persecution⁴, and at Caesarea and elsewhere in the East it was now usual to consult the Bishop in private beforehand.

With the persecuting edict of 250 a new chapter in the history of Penitence begins. At Carthage and perhaps everywhere throughout the Empire the edict of Decius found the Church unprepared⁵. In the panic that followed, Christians rushed to the heathen altars to sacrifice, or to the officials to purchase

¹ *Hom. in Lev. xv 2* 'in gravioribus enim criminibus semel tantum paenitentiae conceditur locus; ista vero communia quae frequenter incurrimus, semper paenitentiam recipiunt et sine intermissione redimuntur.'

² *Ibid. ii 4*: the passage ends: 'est adhuc et septima, licet dura et laboriosa, per paenitentiam remissio peccatorum, cum lavat peccator in lacrimis stratum suum, et fiunt ei lacrimae suae panes die ac nocte, et cum non erubescit sacerdoti Domini indicare peccatum suum et quaerere medicinam.'

³ *Hom. in Ps. xxxvii 2* 'ut ita demum si quid consilii dederit [sacerdos] facias, et sequaris si intellexerit et praeviderit talem esse languorem tuum qui in conventu totius ecclesiae exponi debeat et curari, ex quo fortassis et ceteri aedificari poterunt et tu ipse facile sanari.'

⁴ *Ibid. 1.*

⁵ *Cypr. de laps. 5 sq.*; cf. Benson, *Cyprian*, p. 41 ff.

certificates which guaranteed immunity at the cost of truth. Either act was obviously equivalent to an abandonment of the faith, excluding the offender *ipso facto* from communion in the Eucharist. When the reaction came and a crowd of the 'lapsed' sought reconciliation with the Church, a grave question of discipline at once arose. It was complicated by the action of the confessors, who used the privilege of intercession which had long been accorded to them¹. Producing the *libelli pacis* obtained from the confessors, many of the lapsed presented themselves at the Eucharist, and some of the Carthaginian presbyters admitted them to communion without exacting penance². Against this abuse Cyprian protested, insisting that immediate restoration to communion should be granted only to persons in danger of death, all other cases being deferred until the persecution was over and the Bishops could meet to deal with them one by one³. Such a Council met at Carthage as soon as peace was restored to the Church (April, 251)⁴, and decided upon a policy which was a *via media* between licence and severity. While the door of hope was not shut against any of the lapsed, it was resolved to make a broad distinction between the *sacrificati* and the *libellatici*; the former were to be subjected to a life-long penance, and admitted to communion only on the approach of death, while the latter were allowed to make reparation by the usual process of *exomologesis*⁵.

At Rome events took a less favourable course. The conflict between a positive and a concessive policy, which reveals itself in the *Shepherd* and again in the invective of Hippolytus against Callistus, reached a climax in the schism of Novatian. But lamentable as it was that Roman Christianity should be broken up, especially at such a time, into two hostile camps, the secession of the Novatianists served the purpose of setting the Church of Rome free to adopt the moderate counsels which had already prevailed at Carthage⁶. Henceforth the party of extreme rigour, which left no hope⁷ for the lapsed and practically

¹ See Tert. *de mart.* 1; *de paen.* 12.

² *Cypr. ep.* 18. 1; 19. 2.

³ *Cypr. ep.* 55; cf. Benson, p. 156 ff.

⁴ Eus. *H. E.* vi 43 ὡς μηκέτ' ὄσης αὐτοῖς σωτηρίας ἐλπίδος, μηδ' εἰ πάντα τὰ εἰς ἐπιστροφὴν γνησίαν καὶ καθαρὰν ἐξομολόγησιν ἐπιτελοῖεν—a γνήμιη ἀπανθρωποπάτη, as Eusebius truly says. Cf. *ad Novatianum* 1 'obortus est . . . Novatianus qui non tantum

⁵ *Cypr. ep.* 15. 1; 34. 1.

⁶ Benson, p. 128.

⁷ Benson, p. 163 f.

abolished penitence, was openly at issue with the Catholic Church¹.

At Alexandria, where, through local circumstances, the persecution broke out a year before the publication of the edict of Decius², the policy of Rome and Carthage found warm and able support from the great Bishop Dionysius. His just and kindly nature shrank from the inhumanity of Novatianism; the teaching of Novatian was nothing short of a calumny on the mercy of Christ³. Various letters by Dionysius *περὶ μετανοίας*, enumerated by Eusebius and Jerome⁴, conveyed to the Churches his judgements upon the subject. A fragment of one of these, printed by Pitra, pronounces in favour of giving absolution to the lapsed who sought it *in extremis*, and of allowing to persons so forgiven, in case of recovery, the full benefit of their sick-bed penitence⁵. In the diocese of Alexandria the clergy were enjoined to give effect to this policy, at least so far as regards the admission of dying penitents to the communion of the Eucharist⁶. The canons issued by Dionysius' successor Peter⁷, four years after the commencement of the last persecution, fall outside our period, but may be mentioned here as embodying the practical results of the experience gained by the Church during the troubles which followed the Decian edict.

Something may be added in reference to the rite of *exomologesis* as practised during the period.

I believe the process to have generally begun with a public

.. iacentem vulneratum praeteriret sed ... potius occideret adimendo spem salutis, denegando misericordiam Patris, respuendo paenitentiam fratris.'

¹ The canons of Elvira show a strong reaction in favour of the puritan view, but the *παλαιὸς καὶ κανονικὸς νόμος* of the Decian settlement is reasserted by the thirteenth canon of Nicaea. On ante-Nicene fluctuations of practice in this matter, see Bright, *Canons*, p. 53 f., and Dale, *Synod of Elvira*, p. 100 ff.

² Dionys. Alex. *ap.* Eus. *H. E.* vi 41.

³ Eus. *H. E.* vii 8 *Νοουατιανῶ μὲν γὰρ εὐλόγως ἀνεχθανόμεθα . . . τὸν χρηστότατον κῆρον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ὡς ἀνηλεῆ σποφαντοῦντι.*

⁴ Eus. *H. E.* vi 46; Hier. *de viris illustr.* 69.

⁵ Pitra, *Spic. Solesm.* i p. 15 f. *τοὺς πρὸς τῇ ἐξόδῳ γηνομένους τοῦ βίου, εἰ δέονται καὶ ἱκετεύουσιν, ἀφέσεως τυχεῖν . . . καὶ τούτους ἐλευθέρους παραπέμπειν τῆς θειοκρητοῦς ἑστὶ φιλανθρωπίας. εἰ μὲντοι μετὰ τοῦτο ἐπιμένουσιν τῷ βίῳ, δεσμεύειν μὲν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπαχθίζειν ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις οὐκ ἀέλουθὸν μοι φαίνεται.*

⁶ Eus. *H. E.* vi 44 *ἐντολῆς δὲ ἐπ' ἐμοῦ δεδομένης τοὺς ἀπαλλαγτομένους τοῦ βίου, εἰ δέονται, καὶ μάλιστα εἰ καὶ πρότερον ἱκετεύσαντες τύχοιεν, ἀφίεσθαι, ἰσ' εὐέλπιδες ἀπαλλάττανται, κ.τ.λ.*

⁷ Routh, *rell. sacr.* iv pp. 23-45.

confession of the fault. When and how such confessions were made it is not easy to make out; that they were made, and before the congregation, seems to be repeatedly implied¹. Even more humiliating than the confession by word of mouth was the public discipline which accompanied and followed it; the prostrations, the mean attire, the neglect of the common decencies of life². It needed a pen like Tertullian's to describe the horrors of the situation, and a will of iron or a strange insensibility to undergo them. Nor was the ordeal usually a brief one. Cyprian and the African Bishops at the Council of 251, while not debarring the lapsed from the hope of forgiveness, were careful to require a protracted penitence³. The canons of Bishop Peter assign various periods according to the nature of the offence. During the early years of the fourth century the graduated scale of 'stations' came into use which the Council of Nicaea recognized and enforced⁴.

In ordinary cases it was reserved to the Bishop to readmit penitents when their *exomologesis* was complete. To forgive sins is specified as an episcopal power in the earliest Church Orders⁵; but the prayer used at the consecration of the Bishop

¹ M. Batiffol (*Études*, p. 199) would eliminate from the ancient *exomologesis* a public confession of sins: 'C'est un aveu de la faute ou des fautes commises, oui, mais un aveu qui n'implique qu'une attitude et point la confession publique de fautes déterminées.' No doubt *exomologesis* almost from the first includes the idea of satisfaction, and covers the whole humiliating process of public penitence. But it will need more evidence than M. Batiffol has produced to show that no verbal confession was made before the congregation in the second and third centuries.

² Cf. Tert. *de paen.* 9 'exomologesis . . . mandat sacco et cineri incubare, corpus sordibus obscurare . . . ingemiscere, lacrimari et mugire dies noctesque ad dominum deum tuum, presbyteris advolvi et caris dei adgeniculari . . . cum igitur provolvitur hominem, magis relevat; cum squalidum facit, magis mundatum reddit.' Or the terrible picture in *de pudic.* 13 'paenitentiam moechi ad exorandam fraternitatem in ecclesiam inducens conciliatum et concineratum, cum dedecore et horrore compositum, prosternis in medium ante viduas, ante presbyteros, omnium lacrimas invadentem, omnium vestigia lambentem, omnium genua detinentem.'

³ Cypr. *ep.* 55. 6 'ut nec in totum spes communicationis et pacis lapsis denegaretur . . . nec tamen rursus censura evangelica solveretur, ut ad communicationem temere prosilirent, sed traheretur diu paenitentia.'

⁴ Conc. Nicaen. can. 11 *τρία ἔτη ἐν ἀπροωμένοις ποιήσουσιν οἱ πιστοί, καὶ ἐπεὶ ἔτη ὑποεσοῦνται, δύο δὲ ἔτη χωρὶς προσφορᾶς κοιναπήσουσι τῷ λαῷ τῶν προσευχῶν.* This system appears also in the last of the canons attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus (Migne, *P. G.* x 1048; cf. Harnack, *Gesch.* i p. 429 f.), and in the sixth canon of Ancyra.

⁵ Achelis, *die Canones Hippolyti*, p. 46: the consecrator prays, 'Grant him also,

was also, according to the Hippolytean canons, to be said at the ordination of the Presbyter¹, who was thus invested with authority to absolve, even if he did not exercise it in the Bishop's presence. The Bishop gave absolution by laying his hand on the head of the penitent, but the *clerus* joined in the act of imposition², and in cases of necessity it might be ministered by a single Presbyter or by a Deacon if a Presbyter could not be found³.

H. B. SWETE.

O Lord, the episcopal office, and a merciful spirit to forgive sins.' Hauler, *Didascalie fragmenta*, p. 27 f. 'similiter episcopus [et episcopi est] dimittere in remissione . . . per te salvator dicit his qui peccaverunt, "Remittuntur tibi peccata tua"'; ib. *canonum reliquiae*, p. 105 'da . . . solvere etiam omnem colligationem secundum potestatem quam dedisti apostolis.' Similar forms occur in the *Constitutions* (ii 11 f., 41, viii 8), and in the *Testamentum Domini* (Rahmani, p. 31).

¹ Achelis, p. 61; cf. Hauler, p. 108.

² Cypr. *ep.* 15. 1, 16. 2, 17. 2, 18. 1, 19. 2; cf. Benson, *Cyprian*, p. 420.

³ Cypr. *ep.* 18. 1.