



*The Martyrdom of St. Boniface*  
*After the fresco by Carl Stenon*

THE ENGLISH CORRESPONDENCE OF SAINT BONIFACE, : BEING FOR THE MOST PART LETTERS EXCHANGED BETWEEN THE APOSTLE OF THE GERMANS AND HIS ENGLISH FRIENDS: TRANSLATED AND EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTORY SKETCH OF THE SAINT'S LIFE BY EDWARD KYLIE, M.A.

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mind from his steady guardianship of thy love. But the flames of that love burn the stronger in me, since I know that, through the merits of thy prayers, I have come to a harbour of some quiet. And so, again I humbly beg thee, deign to offer thy intercession before God for my poor self, that His grace may keep me safe under thy protection.

I would also have thee know that *The Sufferings of the Martyrs*, which thou didst ask to have sent thee, I have not yet been able to obtain, but I shall send it when I can. And do thou, my beloved, send to console me what thou hast promised in thy kindest of letters, some selections from the Holy Scriptures.

I beg too, that thou wilt offer holy masses for my relative \*\*\*, who was dear to me beyond all others. With this messenger I send thee now fifty shillings and an altar pall, because I could not get larger gifts. But these, though small, are sent with my fondest love.

Fare well throughout this life in sanctity and "love unfeigned." 1

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 6.

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V

*Daniel, Bishop of Winchester, instructs Boniface as to what means he should use in converting the heathen to Christianity. 723-725.*

To Boniface, honoured and beloved leader, Daniel, servant of the people of God.

Although, my beloved brother and fellow-priest, I rejoice that thou dost deserve the first reward of virtue, who trusting in the might of the faith hast boldly attacked the stony and hitherto barren hearts of the heathen, and working them tirelessly with the plough of gospel-preaching dost strive to change them by daily toil into fertile harvest-fields, so that the words of the prophet and of the evangelist may be applied to thee, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness" 1 and the rest, yet a portion of the second prize will come, not unjustly, to those who give what aid they can to such holy and saving work, and supply the needs of the preachers with the corresponding means of strength, that they may be eager to

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xl. 3; Matt. iii. 3.

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take up the task of preaching thus begun and to begot spiritual sons for Christ.

Hence, out of devotion and goodwill, I have sought to make to thy prudence a few suggestions, that thou mayst know, how best in my judgment to overcome promptly the obstinacy of ignorant minds. Thou shouldst not offer opposition to them concerning the genealogy of their false gods. Thou shouldst suffer them rather, to claim that they were begotten by others through the intercourse of man and woman; then thou canst show that gods and goddesses who were born after the manner of men were men rather than gods, and in that they existed not before, had therefore a beginning.

When they have learned perforce that the gods had a beginning, since some were born of others, they must be asked whether they think this universe had a beginning or was always in existence. If it had a beginning, who created it? For certainly they cannot find for the gods begotten before the establishment of the universe any place where these could subsist and dwell; by the universe I mean not merely the visible earth and sky, but the whole extent of space, which the heathen themselves can grasp with the imagination. But if they maintain that the universe always existed without a beginning, seek to refute and convince them by many arguments and proofs; if they go

on contending, ask them: Who ruled it? How did they reduce beneath their sway and bring under their jurisdiction a universe that existed before them? Whence and by whom and when was the first god or goddess constituted or begotten? Do they suppose that the gods and goddesses still beget other gods and goddesses? If they do not, when or why have they ceased? If they do, the number of the gods must now be infinite; and who is the most powerful among so many and such great beings, is unknown to mortals, so a man must be on his guard for fear of offending the strongest. Do they think the gods should be worshipped for temporal and present blessings, or for an eternal and future reward? If for a temporal, let them show in what respect the heathen are happier than the Christians. What again do the heathen mean to confer by their sacrifices upon their gods, who have all things under their sway; or why do the gods leave it in the power of those subject to them to decide what tribute to offer? If they need such things, why could they not themselves have made a better choice? If they do not need them, the people are wrong to suppose that the gods can be appeased with such offerings of victims.

These questions, and many like them, which it would take too long to enumerate, thou shouldst propose to

them in no irritating or offensive manner, but with the greater calmness and moderation. And from time to time their superstitions should be compared with our, that in Christian, dogma, and touched upon indirectly, so that the heathen more out of confusion than exasperation may bluish for their absurd opinions, and recognize that their detestable rites and legends do not escape our notice.

It would also be natural to infer that if their gods are omnipotent and beneficent and just, not only do they reward their worshippers, but punish those who despise them. But if they do both in the temporal order, why do they spare the Christians, who turn nearly the whole world from their worship and overthrow their statues? And these too, that is the Christians, possess the fertile lands and the provinces fruitful in wine and olives and overflowing with other riches, and have left them, that is, the heathen with their gods, only the frozen lands, in which these latter, banished from the whole world, are wrongly thought to hold sway.

There must be constantly brought before them the supremacy of the Christian world: by comparison, those who persevere in the old-time vanity are very few.

And that they may not boast of the sway of the gods over these people as legitimate and existing always from the beginning, point out to them that the whole world

was given over to the worship of idols until, illuminated by the knowledge of the Omnipotent God, its creator and ruler, it was vivified through the grace of Christ and reconciled to God. For when among Christians the children of the faithful are baptized daily, what do they do but purify themselves singly from the uncleanness and guilt of paganism in which the whole world was once involved?

These things I have sought out of love for thee to bring to thy notice, though I am so weakened by bodily illness, that I can fitly say with the psalmist: "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness has afflicted me." Wherefore do I the more earnestly entreat thy reverence to pour out, together with those who with thee serve Christ in the spirit, prayers and entreaties for me, that the Lord who made me drink the wine of sorrow may hasten with His tender mercy; that as He punished justly so He may graciously pardon, and of His goodness suffer me to sing with rejoicing the verse of the prophet: "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart Thy comforts have given joy to my soul."<sup>1</sup> I pray that thou mayst have given Christ and remember me, dear fellow-priest.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlvi. 19.

my dearest sister, nay, mother and sweet lady, to pray for me constantly, because for my sins I am worn out by tribulations and disturbed much more by anxiety and mental care than by bodily toil. Be assured that the old confidence between us never fails. Farewell in Christ.

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X

*Boniface commends himself to the love of Nothelm, Arch-bishop of Canterbury. He asks him to send the quarters of Saint Augustine and Saint Gregory's replet. He wishes to know if it is unlawful for a man to marry a woman for whose son he has stood sponsor at baptism, and in what year the first priests were sent by Saint Gregory into England. 735.*

To Archbishop Nothelm, dearly beloved master, wearing the robes of the highest priestly office, Boniface, poor servant of the servants of God, sends greetings of undying love in Christ.

I beseech your holy clemency with my most earnest entreaties, that you should deign to remember me in your holy prayers, and seek to make secure in a harbourage of unshakable rock the ship of my mind buffeted by the waves of many storms among the people of Germany, and that, just as your predecessor, Archbishop Bertwald of honoured memory, bestowed his parental love upon me

<sup>1</sup> 735-739.

when I was leaving my native country, so I may be bound to you in fraternal communion by a spiritual bond and tie of love, and together with my comrades in the mission may deserve to be joined always with you in the unity of the Catholic faith and the sweetness of spiritual affection.

Likewise I earnestly beg you to have sent to me a copy of that letter wherein, it is said, are contained the questions of Augustine, the first bishop and first missionary of the English, and the replies of the Pope Saint Gregory. Among other points, it mentions that the faithful of the third degree of relationship are allowed to marry. Would you examine too, with all possible care, whether this letter can be proven to be that of Saint Gregory or not, because it was not found with other copies of the Pope's letters, so the librarians say, in the library of the Roman Church?

Moreover, I seek your advice about a sin which I have committed unwittingly, by yielding to a man in regard to his marriage. The case was this: A man took a woman's son at baptism, as often happens, and raised him for his own son, and when the boy's mother afterwards became a widow he married her. This the Romans claim is a sin, and a mortal sin at that, and require divorce under such circumstances. They declare that during the time of the Christian emperors a crime of this sort was to be punished

by death or perpetual exile. Wherefore, if you can find this counted such a great sin in the decisions of the Catholic Fathers or in canon law or in Holy Scripture itself, inform me of the reference, that I may understand by my own judgment whose authority supports this decree; I can in no way comprehend why in one case spiritual kinship in marriage is such a great sin, when all of us become in baptism sons and daughters of Christ and the Church, and thereby brothers and sisters.

I must ask you also to tell me in what year from the birth of Christ, the first missionaries sent by Saint Gregory came to England. Farewell.

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XI

*Boniface sends gifts to Pehhelm, Bishop of Husium. He asks whether it is permitted for a man to marry a woman for whose son he has been sponsor at baptism. About 735.*

To his venerable and beloved fellow-bishop, Pehhelm, Boniface, humble servant of the servants of God, kind greetings of love in Christ.

With heartfelt entreaty, we beg of your parental clemency and goodness, that, as is needful amidst these dangers, we may be aided by your powerful prayers, and that since the German sea is dangerous for those who navigate it, we may come through your prayers and the guidance of the Lord, without spot or stain upon the soul, to the shore of eternal peace; and that while we are toiling to offer the light of the gospel-truth to the blind, who know not their own blindness and wish not to see, we may not be wrapped in the darkness of our own sins, nor run, nor have run in vain, but that, supported by your prayers, we may arrive in purity and light towards the splendour of eternity. We have sent you some small

gifts in token of our love, a sacrament cloth ornamented with white spots and a towel to wipe the feet of the servants of God. These we beg of you to accept as a remembrance of us.

About one thing too we wish to hear your counsel and judgment. The clergy through the whole of France and Gaul, as well as those who speak for them, declare, that a man is guilty of the greatest crime in marrying a widow for whose son he has stood sponsor in baptism. This kind of sin, if it really is one, I did not know of before, and I have not learned that in the canon law or in the decrees of the pontiffs, in the writings of the Fathers or the apostles it is put in the list of sins. Therefore, if you have found it discussed anywhere in the writings of the Church, be sure to tell me, and give me also your opinion on the matter.

That you may advance in all holy virtues and long enjoy health is my wish in Christ.

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XII

*Boniface reminds Abbot Duddo of their old friendship. He asks him to send treatises on Saint Paul, and to inquire why a man should be forbidden to marry a woman for whose son he has stood sponsor in baptism. 735.*

To his dear son Abbot Duddo, Boniface or Wynfrith, servant of the servants of God, kind greetings of love in Christ.

I desire thee, my beloved son, to remember the maxim of the wise man who said, "Hold fast to an old friend,"<sup>1</sup> and not to forget in age that old friendship, which we began and kept in youth, but to hold in mind thy father now grown feeble, whose limbs are turning into the way of all earthly things. Though I was a teacher too little learned, yet as thou didst thyself allow, I sought to be devoted to you above all. Mindful of that devotion, have pity on an old man worn out by the storms of the German sea which buffet him on all sides; raise me up with thy prayers poured out to God, and aid me

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiasticus ix. 14: Ne deficiatque amicum antiquum.*

with the Holy Scriptures, and especially with the spiritual treatises of the Fathers. The spiritual treatise is recognized as being the instructor of those who read the Sacred Scriptures. I ask thee to send me as an aid to my knowledge of divine things a part of a commentary on Saint Paul, which I lack. I have commentaries on two of his Epistles, the one to the Romans, and the first to the Corinthians. So too, whatever thou shouldst find in the library of thy church and think useful but unknown to me or not in my possession, inform me of it as a faithful son would an unlettered parent, and send me, as well, thine own notes. And should it please thee, let us so arrange between ourselves that whatever . . . my son, Eaba, the priest who carries my letter will tell thee about the marriage of a mother to a man who has stood sponsor for her son at baptism. Search in the Scriptures why this is judged by the Romans to be a capital crime; and if thou findest any discussion of this sin anywhere in the writings of the Church be sure to make it known to me.

I wish thee health and prosperity in Christ.



also, beloved, that Boniface, our archbishop, when he heard of our arrival, himself deigned to come far to meet us, and to receive us with great kindness. Be assured, indeed, my friends, that our toil is not vain in the Lord, and that the reward thereof will come to you, for the Omnipotent God, through His mercy and your merits, grants a good issue to our labour, though the life here is in every respect dangerous and hard, from hunger and thirst and cold, and the attacks of the heathen. Wherefore, I beg, pray diligently for us, "that utterance may be given unto us,"<sup>1</sup> and that our labours may abide and bring forth fruit.

Farewell in the Lord. Give my greetings to the brethren in the circle, especially to Abbot Ingeld and our community, and tell my mother Teta and her sisterhood of our safe journey. I beg of you one and all, with humble prayers, to alternate with us in earnest intercession, and wish that the divine clemency may keep you safe to pray for us.

<sup>1</sup> Eph. vi. 19.

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XXVI

*Boniface consulis Danici, Bishop of Winchester, about associating with bad priests. He asks that a volume of the prophets copied by Abbot Winbert be secured for him. He sends gifts, and offers his sympathy to Daniel, who is troubled with his eyes. 742-746.*

To his beloved master, Bishop Daniel, Boniface, servant of the servants of God, affectionate greetings of love in Christ.

It is a recognized custom among men, that when something sad and grievous has happened to them, they should seek solace or counsel for the anxious mind, from those in whose friendship or wisdom and attachment they put the greatest trust. Trusting after this manner in your proved wisdom and friendship I unfold the troubles of my weary mind and seek counsel and consolation from your piety. There befall us, not merely in the words of the apostle, "fightings without and fears within"<sup>1</sup> but fightings within as well as fears, due especially to false priests and hypocrites who are adversaries of God and rush into

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 5.

destruction themselves and mislead the people by countless scandals and varied errors, saying to the people in the words of the prophet, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace"<sup>1</sup>; and the seed of the word, taken from the bosom of the Catholic and Apostolic Church and entrusted to us, which we seek to sow, they strive to overrow with cockle and suffocate or to convert into a baneful weed. And that which we plant they do not water that it may grow, but try to tear up that it may die, offering and teaching to the people new acts and errors of divers kinds; some "abstaining from food which God hath created to be received"<sup>2</sup>; some, feeding only on honey and milk, reject bread and other food; some actually declaring, and this greatly harms the people, that homicides and adulterers, even though they persevere in their crimes, can yet become priests of God. The people, in the words of the apostle, "will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts will they heap to themselves teachers," and the rest.<sup>3</sup>

When seeking protection and aid in the court of the Franks, we cannot abstain from personal contact with such priests or keep apart from them as the canon enjoins, though during the celebration of the holy mass in the

<sup>1</sup> Jer. vi. 14.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 3.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 3.

sacred mysteries of the body and blood of the Lord we have no association with them. But their counsel and approval we avoid, for to such men our toil and struggles with the heathen and with a mixed and lowly multitude, seem quite alien. Nay more, when out of the fold of Mother Church any priest or deacon, cleric or monk departs from the way of faith and truth, then, together with the heathen they break out at once into abuse of the edns of the Church; and this is a terrible obstacle to the gospel of Christ's glory.

Wherefore, in all these things, that without injury to our edns we may complete the course of our ministry, we seek, first of all, the intercession of your paternity before God. And through Him we beg you with the most earnest prayers, to intercede for us that the merciful Consoler of those in sorrow may deign to keep our souls, amid such storms, unharmed and safe from sin.

Concerning the above mentioned intercourse with these priests I crave to hear and obey your wise counsel. Without the protection of the King of the Franks I can neither rule the people of the Church nor defend the priests and clergy, the monks and nuns of God; nor can I avail to check even the heathen rites and the worship of idols in Germany without his mandate, and the fear of him. But when, seeking aid for these causes, I come to him, I

cannot, as the canon law requires, by any means avoid personal contact with such men, even though I may not take counsel with them. I fear guilt from the intercourse, because I recall that, at the time of my ordination, according to the precepts of Gregory the Pope, I swore on the body of Saint Peter to avoid association with such if I could not turn them back to the canonical path. But I fear still more the loss of the teaching which I am bound to give to the people, if I do not come to the ruler of the Franks. Deign to point out in these matters what your paternity can decide and judge and advise for your dependent and hesitating son. I think I am really almost completely separated from them, in, where they are not canonical, I abstain from common counsel and deliberation with them and from participating with them in the services of the church.

Besides, if I may venture, I should like with earnest prayers to ask for one solace to my mission: that is, that you would send across to me the *Book of the Prophets*, which Winbert, of revered memory, once my abbot and master, left when departing this life to the Lord, and wherein the six prophets will be found written in the one volume in clear and finished letters. And if God inspires your heart to do this, you cannot send me anything which will be a greater comfort to my age, or a greater pledge

of your reward; because I cannot get in this hand such a book of the prophets as I desire, and with my eyes growing dim I cannot well distinguish minute and connected letters. I ask for this book since it is written in such clearly separated and finished characters.

Meanwhile I am sending you with the priest, Forthere, this letter and a small gift as a sign of true love, a coverlet, not silken, but shaggy, mixed with goat's-wool, to cover your feet.

But lately, of a priest who came from your presence to Germany, I heard of your blindness. You know well, my master, who said and through whom He said, "Whom the Lord loveth, He reproveth," and the rest<sup>1</sup>; and the apostle Paul: "For when I am weak, then am I strong," and "My power is made perfect in weakness"<sup>2</sup>; and the writer of the Psalms: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," and the rest.<sup>3</sup> You have, my father, as Antony of Didimus is related to have said, eyes, with which God and His angels can be seen, and the glorious delights of the heavenly Jerusalem. On this account, trusting in your wisdom and patience I believe that God has given you this illness, for the advance of your virtues and the increase of your merits, whereby you

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xiii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 10, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxxiii. 20.

may the better with the eyes of the spirit behold those things which God enjoys and loves and the less regard and crave what God does not love but has forbidden; for in this dangerous time what are the eyes of the body but, for the most part, if I may say so, truly windows of sin, through which we either look upon sins or at sinners, or what is worse, through beholding and desiring them draw the vices to ourselves.

It is my earnest wish that your holiness may have health and may pray for me.

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XXVII

*Daniel, Bishop of Winchester, replies to Boniface. He urges him to persevere. He discusses the prickly character of adulterers and murderers, and the unavoidable intercourse with false brethren. He thanks Boniface for his sympathy.*  
742-746.

To the most reverend lord, deserving of reverence from all orthodox Christians, conspicuously adorned with varied knowledge and the grace of many virtues, Archbishop Boniface, Daniel, servant of the people of God, the most sincere greetings in the Lord, who reigns supreme over all the suburbs of the heavens.

When we read thy letter we were much moved by sorrow because it seems intolerable to those who love, is a misfortune befalls those by whom they are beloved. But after much reflection we found consolation in this thought that the unfathomable guile of the crafty enemy would never have tried to storm the rites of your faith with such violence or such varied assaults of war or error through the persons of high-placed priests or any other reprobaters, if he did not recognise in it the excellence of

greater merit. And so it behooves you, first of all, to attend to it, that the glorious undertaking which is, in my opinion, to be compared with the struggles of the apostles, be not abandoned because of the snares of those, who, trained in guile, are accustomed to resist saving doctrine. But the burden of difficulties laid upon us must be the more willingly borne, the more certain we are that for the saints and martyrs there is in the world only distress, but in heaven, by the promise of the Lord, the most abundant recompense. If only we have patience in tribulation we shall deserve to have Him as our helper here, and there where we shall rejoice with the Lord, as the giver of our reward. Therefore, since thy love has deigned to seek advice from my weakness, we think it will be helpful, if with unconquered patience thou dost try to endure still further what cannot come without the providence of God. Wherefore, although the danger of attacks from without is cruel and terrible, a strife within works yet more fearful harm;—and at this I do not wonder, since Jesus Christ once declared that for His name's sake, brother must be delivered up to death by brother, and the child must be slain by his father and the parents by their children; though they seek to destroy the work of God by superstitious practices in the taking of food, which will perish as surely in the use of men, though, in the pursuit of false

gain, or to win flattery or praise for themselves, and abuse for you, they falsely promise the people safety, and with a feigned friendliness keep repeating the name of peace, and according to the prophecy of Isaiah, "call evil good and good evil" and the rest; though they try to choke the seed entrusted to you by sowing with it the barren cockle which, as we shall explain more fully below, it is forbidden to root out at any time before it ripens to the harvest;—though, I say, to deceive the hearts of the ignorant they bring forth doctrines hitherto unheard of, which, when introduced for the moment, are likely to escape you, excellently trained in the Holy Scriptures, as little as the arguments which may fittingly be used against them; although, and I shall put it briefly, not to delay thee longer by proceeding from point to point, they try every wicked and factious argument to harass and vanquish you, yet, following the example of the saints who have gone before, you must at least bear with perseverance what you cannot cure by correction.

Concerning the priestly character of homicides and adulterers, who without any repentance, stubbornly persist in their sins, the holy canons and the decrees of the pontiffs give you sufficient explanation. If to homicides, who at the end of their lives do instant penance, absolu-

<sup>1</sup> Iuz. v. 20.

tion, that is the grace of communion with Christ, is granted, how can the care of ruling a Christian community be entrusted to them while they are yet unchanged? But an adulterer, who even late in the day has not repented of his fault, how can he justly usurp the priestly office, when, according to the degrees of Pope Innocent and others, he who marries a widow or a second wife, must be barred, not only from the holding of ecclesiastical office, but even from the clerical state? And while concessions have been granted because of the weakness of the flesh, yet adultery is forbidden by all authorities.

From intercourse with false brethren or priests, what counsel could avail to separate thee in bodily things, unless perchance thou art to withdraw entirely from this world? These persons strive to push in everywhere and always! by such dangers the apostle Paul asserted that he was enamored. And other founders of the Christian religion confess that they have suffered the like or that it must be borne by penitency.

Thou sayest that thou keepst entirely apart from them in the offering of the holy sacrifice, lest thou mightest seem to give the host to dogs—what Saint Augustine thought on this we shall work in below with the rest of the argument—and that thou dost never dwell among them

freely, of thine own will and consent, but only from the force of necessity; concerning which Jerome<sup>1</sup> declares: "In the gospel the will is desired and even if it has not a result it does not lose its reward." But if, let us allow for argument's sake, thou must associate with these in the taking of food or in thy habitation, did not He, "who came not to call the just but sinners to repentance,"<sup>2</sup> go to the tables of sinners, that he might have the opportunity of teaching. So if thou must associate with these so far as sometimes to approach the king with them and beg for the peace of the Church, because these pretend generally like true shepherds to intercede for the sheep, let us first of all be assured that what was written must be fulfilled: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man"<sup>3</sup> and the rest,<sup>4</sup> and "to all the higher powers"<sup>5</sup> and the rest.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, it must be considered that the parable of the wheat and the tares is put before us to suggest the mixture of good men and bad. And, as Augustine remarks,<sup>5</sup> "clean and unclean animals are said to have entered into the ark. Nor did the unclean animals enter in at will through a broken corner of the ark, but undisturbed

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Matt. xl. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. ix. 13.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. xiii. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *De fide et operibus*, c. 49.

through one and the same door, which the builder had wrought. There is not given to the good," he says, "through these figures and analogies any counsel of sloth, by which they may neglect what they ought to check, but the counsel of patience, by which they are to bear, so long as the doctrine of truth is preserved, what they cannot change." And he says,<sup>1</sup> "Wherefore when we find in the Church evildoers, whom we cannot correct or repress by ecclesiastical discipline, then let there not ascend into our hearts an unholy and harmful presumption, whereby we think that we may be separated from these, so as not to be defiled by their sins, and that we must try to bring after us clean and holy disciples, withdrawn, as it were, by a common bond from the companionship with the wicked. Let there come into the mind those parables from Scripture, which show that the bad are mingled with the good in the Church and to the end of time and the Day of Judgment, and that no harm will come to the good from a union and share in the sacraments with them because they have not consented to their deeds."

"But since with those through whom the Church is ruled there rests, without prejudice to peace, the power of discipline to be exercised against the wicked and abandoned, then, lest we should sleep in supineness and

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *De fide et operibus*, c. 49.

neglect, we must be roused by the good spur of the other precepts which enjoin stern repression. As there is a method of dissembling and of tolerating the wicked in the Church, there is likewise a way of castigating and improving them, without losing or driving them from the fold<sup>1</sup>: so that we must not grow slack in the name of patience, nor show undue severity under the pretence of diligence."<sup>2</sup>

I shall tell thee, too, what I have gleaned from the works of ancient writers; in such dangerous and barbarous times it may usefully be committed to memory. If, perchance, in showing such toleration thou art falsely accused by any one for practising a kind of pretence or even deceit, we read that a useful simulation may be practised on occasion. Employing it Cephas "withdrew and separated himself, fearing them"<sup>3</sup> and the rest. And the vessel of election had his head shorn, and circumcised Timothy. The Son of God Himself made as though He would go farther, and as though He did not know what He knew, as it is written in the gospel, "Who is it that touched Me?"<sup>4</sup> and "Where have ye laid him?"<sup>5</sup> And the palmist changed his count-

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *De fide et operibus*, c. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. ii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> John xx. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* c. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* c. 45.

nance before Abimelech<sup>1</sup> ; and Joseph spoke in jest to his brothers. So, too, Israel covered his loins with goat skins. This he did that he might be thought to be another than he was ; which if studied diligently and faithfully becomes not a lie, but a mystery. By the goat skins are signified the sins and by him who concealed himself in them is denoted one who bears the sins of others.

These things we have written to thy love with much hesitation, not thinking thee unacquainted with the ancient authorities or in need of advice from our ignorance, but in order that we should not fail to meet thy wishes in anything, and because we had learned that thou hadst difficulties with powerful people. Yet we have spoken, urged on rather by love and obedience than through reliance on our own skill or courage, merely to explain, not to command. We should not wish to oppose in anything those who are beyond measure excellent.

Thine exhortations to bear patiently grievous bodily illness we have gladly received. And so far as our strength suffices, with the help of the Lord, who of His mercy has admonished us, we shall obey thy helpful words.

This in your loving kindness you should know, that

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxiv. 1.

though we are separated by a wide stretch of land, and the immensity of the sea, and the uneven climate of the sky, yet we are oppressed by the same burden of suffering. Satan's activity is the same here as there, and so I diligently beg you, that we vigorously fortify ourselves with a mutual interchange of prayer, remembering the words which the Lord has said : " For where two or three are gathered together," and the rest. <sup>1</sup>

Farwell, farwell, my hundredfold beloved. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> For the last words of the letter, *et alia manu*, referring possibly to a postscript in another hand, see *Nevese Archiep.* IX, 25, n. 2.



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XXVIII

*Boniface asks Eadburga, Abbess of Thanet, to pray for him and for the heathen. 742-746.*

To his sister, Abbess Eadburga, to be united with him by a golden bond of spiritual love and by the pure and holy kiss of charity, Boniface, bishop, legate of the Roman Church, greets in Christ.

We beseech your loving clemency with heartfelt prayers, deign to intercede for us with the Author of all. That you may not be ignorant of the cause of this prayer, know that because of our sins the course of our mission is threatened by many storms. Everywhere toil, everywhere sorrow. "Without, fightings, within, fears."<sup>1</sup> And most serious of all, the snares of false brethren surpass the malice of the heathen. Wherefore, entreat the sacred defender of my life, the one safe refuge of those in trouble, "the lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world,"<sup>2</sup> with His protecting hand to keep me unharmed, as I pass through the lairs of such wolves; that where there should be found the fair feet of

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 5

<sup>2</sup> John i. 29.

those who carry the lamp of the gospel of peace, there may not be discovered the footsteps of apostates who wander in darkness; but rather that the Father Most Holy, when our loins are girt up, may put burning lights in our hands and illumine the hearts of the Gentiles to behold the gospel of Christ's glory.

Meanwhile I pray you of your goodness to intercede for those heathen who have been entrusted to us by the Apostolic See; that the Saviour of the world may snatch them from the worship of idols and unite them with the sons of their true mother, the Catholic Church, to the praise and glory of His name "Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."<sup>1</sup>

Farewell.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 4.

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XL

*Boniface with the other bishops recall Ethelbald, King of the Mercians, to virtue. 745-746.*

To the dear lord, King Ethelbald, in the love of Christ to be put before all other kings, who wield the glorious sceptre of the empire of the English, Boniface, Archbishop, legate in Germany of the Roman Church, and Wera and Burghard and Werberh and Abel and Wilbath, fellow-bishops, send greetings of undying love in Christ.

We confess before God and the holy angels, that whenever we hear, through faithful messengers, of your prosperity and your faith in God and good works before God and men, then, rejoicing and praying for you, we return thanks to God, entreating and beseeching the Saviour of the world that He may long keep you safe, steadfast in faith and upright in good works before God to rule over Christian people. But when some harm has befallen you, either from the state of your kingdom or from the issue of war, or when, as is worse, the news of the perpetration of some crime dangerous to the safety

of souls has come to our ears, grief and sadness torture us: by the will of God we rejoice over your happiness and are saddened by your adversities.

We have heard that thou givest many alms, and upon this we congratulate thee, because those who bestow alms on the lowliest brethren in their need, by the truth of the Gospel will hear on the Judgment Day the merciful sentence of the Lord, saying: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me: come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."<sup>1</sup> We have heard too that thou dost strongly check theft and iniquity, perjury and rapine, and art known to be a defender of widows and the poor and hast peace established in thy kingdom. And in this too, praising God we have rejoiced, because Truth itself and our peace, which is Christ, has said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, because they shall be called the children of God."<sup>2</sup>

But among these reports one rumour of evil character concerning your highness' life has come to our hearing; we were cast down by it, and wish that it were not true. From many sources we have learned that thou hast never taken a wife in lawful marriage. But marriage was estab-

<sup>1</sup> *Mat.* xxv. 34, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Mat.* v. 9.

lished by God from the very beginning of the world, and has been enjoined anew by the apostle Paul, who teaches: "Nevertheless to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." <sup>1</sup> If thou hast determined to act thus because of chastity and abstinence, that thou mayst abstain from intercourse with a wife for the love and fear of God, and hast shown this to be something truly accomplished for God's sake, we rejoice theret; such a course deserves not blame, but praise. If, however, as many say—God forbid—thou hast never taken a lawful wife nor preserved a chaste abstinence for God's sake, but, under the sway of lust, thou hast destroyed by licence and adultery thy glory and renown before God and men, we are greatly grieved: such conduct must be regarded as criminal in the sight of God and destructive of your reputation before men. And what is worse, those who tell us this, add that this crime of deepest ignominy has been committed in convents with holy nuns and virgins consecrated to God. There can be no doubt that this is a twofold sin. How guilty, for instance, is the slave in the master's house who violates the master's wife! How much more guilty is he who has stained a spouse of Christ, the Creator of heaven and earth, with the defilement of his lust! As says the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 1.

apostle Paul: "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost? <sup>1</sup> and elsewhere: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." <sup>2</sup> And again when he mentions and enumerates the sins he joins adultery and fornication to the slavery of idolatry: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." <sup>3</sup>

Among the Greeks and Romans the candidate, before his ordination, was asked particularly about this sin, as though any one guilty of it had committed blasphemy against God, and if found guilty of having had intercourse with a nun veiled and consecrated to God, was barred from every rank of the priesthood. For this reason, beloved son, it must be carefully considered how grievous this sin is judged to be in the eyes of the Eternal Judge. He who is guilty of it is to stand among the slaves of idolatry and to be cast from the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 19.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

divine service of the altar, even though he has already done penance and been reconciled to God. For our bodies, consecrated to God through the offering of our own vows and the words of the priest, are called in the Holy Scripture temples of God. And so those who violate them are to be regarded, according to the apostle, as sons of perdition. Saint Peter, to check the voluptuous from just, says: "For the time past may suffice,"<sup>1</sup> and the rest. So it is written: "For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life."<sup>2</sup> And elsewhere, "Men do not despise a thief if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry: but if he is found, he shall restore sevenfold: he shall give all the substance of his house. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul."<sup>3</sup>

It would take too long to enumerate how many spiritual physicians denounced the dreaded poison of this sin and laid a terrible ban upon it. Fornication is more grave and repellent than almost any other sin and can truly be called a noose of death and a pit of hell and an abyss of perdition.

Wherefore, we beseech and appeal to thy clemency,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xxvi. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Prov. vi. 30-31.

beloved son, through Christ the Son of God and His coming and His Kingdom, that if it be true that thou livest in this guilt, thou mayest correct thy life by repentance and amend it by purification. And thou wilt reflect how improper it is for thee to change by licence the image of God created in thee to the image and likeness of a devil malignant, and for thee, whom not thine own desires, but the abundant goodness of God made king and ruler over many, to make thyself by self-indulgence a slave to the spirit of evil, since according to the words of the apostle whatsoever sin a man has committed, of this he is the servant.

Not only by Christians but even by pagans is this sin reckoned a disgrace and a shame. The very pagans who are ignorant of the true God, in this matter observe by instinct what is lawful and what God ordained from the beginning, because, while they preserve faithfully the tie of matrimony for their own wives, they punish fornicators and adulterers. In ancient Saxony if a virgin defiles her father's house by adultery, or if a married woman, breaking the marriage-tie, commits adultery, at times they force the woman to hang herself by her own hand and so to end her life; and above the pyre on which she has been burned and cremated they hang her defiler. Or at times a multitude of women gathers, and the matrons lead the

guilty woman bound through the village, beating her with sticks and cutting away her garments to the girdle; they cut and prick her whole body with their knives, and send her from house to house bloody and torn by the many wounds; new tormentors are always joining the band out of zeal for modesty and leave her dead or scarcely alive, so that others may have fear of adultery and wantonness. And the Wends, the most degraded and depraved race of men, observe the mutual love of the married state with such zeal, that a wife, when her husband dies, refuses to live; the wife is thought deserving of praise, who brings death with her own hand and burns on the one pile with her husband.

When, therefore, the Gentiles who, according to the word of the apostle, do not know God and have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law and "shew the work of the law written in their hearts,"<sup>1</sup> it is now time that, thou, beloved son, who bearest in addition the name of Christian and of a worshipper of the true God, if in the flower of thy youth thou hast been defiled by the filth of licence and rolled in the mire of adultery and plunged in the sink of lust, as in a pit of hell, shouldst, mindful of thy Lord, escape from the snares of the devil and wash thy soul, stained by foul impurity.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. II. 14, 15.

It is now time that, from fear of thy Creator, thou shouldst not presume to repeat such a sin and to defile thyself further. It is time that thou shouldst spare the multitude of perishing people, who, following the example of their erring ruler, fall into the pit of death. As many as we draw by good example to the life of the heavenly kingdom, or lead to perdition by bad example, for so many, beyond a doubt, we shall receive either punishment or reward from the Eternal Judge.

If indeed the race of the English—as is noised abroad through these provinces, and is cast up to us in France and in Italy, and made a reproach even by the heathen—spurn lawful wedlock and live a foul life in adultery and licence like the people of Sodom, from such intercourse with harlots, a people degenerate, unworthy, mad with lust, will be born, and in the end the whole nation, turning to lower and baser ways, will cease to be strong in war or steadfast in faith, or honourable before men or beloved of God, just as has happened to other peoples of Spain and Provence and Burgundy: who turned from God and yielded to lust, until the Omnipotent Judge of such crimes allowed avenging punishment to come and destroy them, through ignorance of the law of God, and through the Saracens.

And it must be noted that under this crime another

terrible evil lies concealed, which is homicide ; because when these harlots, whether in monasteries or in the world, have borne in sin children conceived in iniquity, they generally kill them ; they do not fill the churches of Christ with adopted sons, but crowd graves with bodies and hell with wretched souls.

Besides, we have been told that thou hast violated many privileges of churches and monasteries, and taken from them many revenues. And this, if it is true, must be regarded as a great sin, on the testimony of Holy Scripture, which says, "Whoso robbereth his father or his mother and saith, it is no transgression, the same is the companion of a destroyer." Our Father, without doubt, is God who created us, and our mother, the Church, which gave us spiritual regeneration in baptism. Wherefore, he who robs or plunders the money-bags of Christ and the church, will be judged a homicide in the sight of the Just Judge. Of him some one of the wise has said : "He who seizes the money of his neighbour commits a crime ; but he who takes the money of the church commits sacrilege."

And it is said that thy prefects and counts use greater violence and oppression towards monks and priests, than other Christian kings have ever done before. Wherefore, after the apostolic Pope Saint Gregory sent preachers of

the Catholic faith from the Apostolic See, and converted the race of the English to the true God, the privileges of the churches in the kingdom of the English remained untouched and unviolated up to the time of Coelred, King of the Mercians, and Oared, King of the Deirans and Bernicians. At the suggestion of the devil these two kings showed, by their accused example, that these two deadliest of sins could be committed publicly against the evangelical and apostolic precepts of our Saviour. And lingering in these sins, namely lust and adultery with nun and the destruction of monasteries, condemned by a just judgment of God, they were cast down from their royal thrones in this life, and surprised by an early and terrible death ; deprived of the light eternal they were plunged into the depths of hell and the bottom of the abyss. For while Coelred, your worthy highness' predecessor—as those who were present testify—was feasting splendidly among his nobles, an evil spirit, which by its persuasions had seduced him into the audacious course of breaking the law of God, suddenly turned him in his sin to madness ; so that without penitence and confession, insane and distraught, conversing with the devils and cursing the priests of God, he departed from this light awfully to the torments of hell. Oared, too, the spirit of licence drove to lust and the frenzied rape of consecrated

virgins in the convents of nuns, until by a mean and contemptible death he lost his glorious kingdom, his young life and impure soul.

Wherefore, beloved son, beware the pit, in which thou hast seen others fall before thine eyes. Beware the darts of the old enemy, by which thou hast seen thine own relatives fall wounded before thee. Keep from the toils of him in ambush, in which thou has beheld thy friends and comrades strangled and lose both this life and the life to come. Do not follow the course of these to perdition. For such, according to the prophecies of Holy Scripture, are those that have afflicted the just and taken away their labours. On the Day of Judgment they will say: "We have erred from the way of truth and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us"<sup>1</sup> and "The way of the Lord we have not known" and "What hath pride profited us; or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All these things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on, and as a ship that passeth through the waves, whereof the trace cannot be found: Or as when a bird flieth through the air."<sup>2</sup> And a little later: "So we also being born, forthwith ceased to be: we are consumed in our wickedness. Such things as

<sup>1</sup> Sap. v. 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Sap. v. 8-11.

these the sinners said in hell: for the hope of the wicked is as dust which is blown away with the wind, and as a thin froth which is dispersed by the storm; and a smoke that is scattered abroad by the wind; and as the remembrance of a guest of one day that passeth by." And elsewhere: "The number of the days of man as the most are a hundred years: as a drop of water of the sea are they esteemed."<sup>1</sup> All these things on the authority of Holy Scripture may very properly be compared. So too James, the brother of the Lord and an apostle, has declared concerning the unholy rich man: "As the flowers of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: as also shall the rich man fade away in his ways."<sup>2</sup> And Truth itself has set it forth in the gospel: "For what is a man profited, if he shall have the whole world and lose his own soul?"<sup>3</sup> Wherefore, dear son, we beseech thee with fatherly and humble prayers, not to despise the counsel of thy fathers, who, for the love of God, wish to appeal to thy highness. For nothing is more beneficial for a good king than that such deeds when they are proven against

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiasticus xviii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> James I. 10, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xvi. 26.

him should gladly be amended, for, as is said through the mouth of Solomon: "Whoso loveth instruction, loveth knowledge."<sup>1</sup> And so, beloved son, putting forth just counsel, we beg and pray through the living God and through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit, that thou mayst remember, how fugitive is this present life, and how short and momentary is the delight of the impure flesh, and how ignominious it is for a man with his short life to leave an evil example for ever to posterity. Begin, therefore, to order thy life by better laws and to correct the past errors of youth, so that here thou mayst have praise before men and for the future rejoice in glory eternal. That thy highness may fare well and advance in good morals is our wish.

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xii. 1.

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XLI

*Boniface urges Heretrith, a priest, to support the letter sent to Eichbold, King of the Mercians. He sends gifts.*  
744-747.

To his beloved and revered brother, Heretrith, priest, Boniface, servant of the servants of God, greetings of eternal love in Christ.

I beseech thy merciful clemency with the most earnest entreaties, that in thy holy prayers thou mayst deign to remember me, even as, from what those who come from thee tell me, thou hast done and will do. So that the words of Saint James the apostle may be fulfilled in us, when he said, "Pray for one another that ye may be healed;" and "The fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

We, the eight bishops who came together to a synod, and whose names are added below, in common entreat thee, beloved brother, that thou shouldst announce and explain the words of our admonition to Althelbald, King

<sup>1</sup> Acts v. 16.