

0200-0258 – Cyprianus Carthaginensis – Exhortatio ad Poenitentiam

Exhortation to Repentance

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Exhortation to Repentance.⁴⁸⁸⁶

That all sins may be forgiven him who has turned to God with his whole heart.

In the eighty-eighth Psalm: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments, and keep not my commandments, I will visit their iniquities with a rod, and their sins with stripes; nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not scatter away from them."⁴⁸⁸⁷

Also in Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, When thou shalt turn and mourn, then thou shalt be saved, and shalt know where thou wast."⁴⁸⁸⁸

Also in the same place: "Woe unto you, children of desertion, saith the Lord! ye have made counsel not by me, and my covenant not by my Spirit, to add sin to sin."⁴⁸⁸⁹

Also in Jeremiah: "Withdraw thy foot from a rough way, and thy face from thirst. But she said, I will be comforted, I am willing; for she loved strangers, and went after them."⁴⁸⁹⁰

Also in Isaiah: "Be ye converted, because ye devise a deep and wicked counsel."⁴⁸⁹¹

Also in the same place: "I am He, I am He that blotteth out thy iniquities, and will not remember them; but do thou remember them, and let us be judged together; do thou first tell thine unrighteousnesses."⁴⁸⁹²

Also in the same: "Seek the Lord; and when ye shall have found Him, call upon Him. But when He has drawn near to you, let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him be converted to the Lord, and mercy shall be prepared for him, because He does not much⁴⁸⁹³ forgive your sins."⁴⁸⁹⁴

Also in the same: "Remember these things, O Jacob and Israel, because thou art my servant. I have called thee my servant; and thou, Israel, forget me not. Lo, I have washed away thy unrighteousness as, . . . and thy sins as a raincloud. Be converted to me, and I will redeem thee."⁴⁸⁹⁵

⁴⁸⁸⁶ [Almost wholly made up of Scripture, and useful in any age to all Christians. Whatever its origin, it breathes a truly primitive spirit. Compare Tertullian, vol. iii. p. 657.]

⁴⁸⁸⁷ Ps. lxxxix. 30.

⁴⁸⁸⁸ Isa. xxx. 15, LXX.

⁴⁸⁸⁹ Isa. xxx. 1, LXX.

⁴⁸⁹⁰ Jer. ii. 25, LXX.

⁴⁸⁹¹ Isa. xxxi. 6, LXX.

⁴⁸⁹² Isa. xliii. 25, LXX.

⁴⁸⁹³ Non multum remittit—probably a misprint for "permultum."

⁴⁸⁹⁴ Isa. lv. 6, 7, LXX.

⁴⁸⁹⁵ Isa. xlv. 21, 22, LXX.

Also in the same: "Have these things in mind, and groan. Repent, ye that have been seduced; be converted in heart unto me, and have in mind the former ages, because I am God."⁴⁸⁹⁶

Also in the same: "For a very little season I have forsaken thee, and with great mercy I will pity thee. In a very little wrath I turned away my face from thee; in everlasting mercy I will pity thee."⁴⁸⁹⁷

Also in the same: "Thus said the Most High, who dwelleth on high, for ever Holy in the holies, His name is the Lord, the Most High, resting in the holy places, and giving calmness of mind to the faint-hearted, and giving life to those that are broken-hearted: I am not angry with you for ever, neither will I be avenged in all things on you: for my Spirit shall go forth from me, and I have made all inspiration; and on account of a very little sin I have grieved him, and have turned away my face from him; and he has suffered the vile man, and has gone away sadly in his ways. I have seen his ways, and have healed him, and I have comforted him, and I have given to him the true consolation, and peace upon peace to those who are afar off, and to those that are near. And the Lord said, I have healed them; but the unrighteous, as a troubled sea, are thus tossed about and cannot rest. There is no joy to the wicked, saith the Lord."⁴⁸⁹⁸

Also in Jeremiah: "Shall a bride forget her adornment, or⁴⁸⁹⁹ a virgin the girdle of her breast? But my people has forgotten my days,⁴⁹⁰⁰ whereof there is no number."⁴⁹⁰¹

Also in the same: "For a decree, I will speak upon the nation or upon the kingdom, or I will take them away and destroy them. And if the nation should be converted from its evils, I will repent of the ills which⁴⁹⁰² I have thought to do unto them. And I will speak the decree upon the nation or the people, that I should rebuild it and plant it; and they will do evil before me, that they should not hearken to my voice, and I will repent of the good things which I spoke of doing to them."⁴⁹⁰³

Also in the same: "Return to me, O dwelling of Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not harden my face upon you; because I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not be angry against you for ever."⁴⁹⁰⁴

Also in the same: "Be converted, ye children that have departed, saith the Lord; because I will rule over you, and will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you into Sion: and I will give you shepherds after my heart, and they shall feed you, feeding you with discipline."⁴⁹⁰⁵

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⁴⁸⁹⁶ Isa. xlvi. 8, LXX.

⁴⁸⁹⁷ Isa. liv. 7, 8, LXX.

⁴⁸⁹⁸ Isa. lvii. 15 et seq., LXX.

⁴⁸⁹⁹ It is taken for granted that the "ut" of the original is a misprint for "aut."

⁴⁹⁰⁰ Otherwise, "has forgotten me days without number."

⁴⁹⁰¹ Jer. ii. 32, LXX.

⁴⁹⁰² Here also the emendation of "quæ" for "quod" is obviously necessary.

⁴⁹⁰³ Jer. xviii. 7.

⁴⁹⁰⁴ Jer. iii. 12, LXX.

⁴⁹⁰⁵ Jer. iii. 14, LXX.

Also in the same: “Be converted, ye children who are turning, and I will heal your affliction.”⁴⁹⁰⁶

Also in the same: “Wash thine heart from wickedness, O Jerusalem, that thou mayest be healed: how long shall there be in thee thoughts of thy sorrows?”⁴⁹⁰⁷

Also in the same: “Thus saith the Lord, Does not he that falleth arise? or he that turns away, shall he not be turned back? Because this people hath turned itself away by a shameless vision, and they have persisted in their presumption, and would not be converted.”⁴⁹⁰⁸

Also in the same: “There is no man that repenteth of his iniquity, saying, What have I done? The runner has failed from his course, as the sweating horse in his neighing.”⁴⁹⁰⁹

Also in the same: “Therefore let every one of you turn from his evil way, and make your desires better. And they said, We will be comforted, because we will go after your⁴⁹¹⁰ inventions, and every one of us will do the sins which please his own heart.”⁴⁹¹¹

Also in the same: “Pour down as a torrent tears, day and night give thyself no rest, let not the pupil of thine eye be silent.”⁴⁹¹²

Also in the same: “Let us search out our ways, and be turned to the Lord. Let us purge our hearts with our hands, and let us look unto the Lord who dwelleth in the heavens. We have sinned, and we have provoked Thee, and Thou hast not been propitiated.”⁴⁹¹³

Also in the same: “And the Lord said to me in the days of Josias the king, Thou hast seen what the dwelling of the house,⁴⁹¹⁴ the house of Israel, has done to me. It has gone away upon every lofty mountain, and has gone under every shady⁴⁹¹⁵ tree, and has committed fornication there; and I said, after she had committed all these fornications, Return unto me, and she has not returned.”⁴⁹¹⁶

Also in the same: “The Lord will not reject for ever; and when He has made low, He will have pity according to the multitude of His mercy. Because He will not bring low from His whole heart, neither will He reject the children of men.”⁴⁹¹⁷

⁴⁹⁰⁶ Jer. iii. 22, LXX.

⁴⁹⁰⁷ Jer. iv. 14, LXX.

⁴⁹⁰⁸ Jer. viii. 4, LXX.

⁴⁹⁰⁹ Jer. viii. 6, LXX.

⁴⁹¹⁰ Otherwise “our.”

⁴⁹¹¹ Jer. xviii. 12, LXX.

⁴⁹¹² Lam. ii. 18, LXX.

⁴⁹¹³ Lam. iii. 40.

⁴⁹¹⁴ There is evident confusion here, and no place can be found for the word “vocem.”

⁴⁹¹⁵ It has been taken for granted that “numerosum” is a misprint for “nemorosum.”

⁴⁹¹⁶ Jer. iii. 6, LXX.

⁴⁹¹⁷ Lam. iii. 31, LXX.

Also in Ezekiel: “And the righteous shall not be able to be saved in the day of transgression. When I shall say to the righteous, Thou shalt surely live; but⁴⁹¹⁸ he will trust to his own righteousness, and will do iniquity: all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; in his iniquity which he has done, in that he shall die. And when I shall say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and he turns himself from his sin, and doeth righteousness and judgment, and restoreth to the debtor his pledge, and giveth back his robbery, and walketh in the precepts of life, that he may do no iniquity, he shall surely live, and shall not die; none of his sins which he hath sinned shall be stirred up against him: because he hath done justice and judgment, he shall live in them.”⁴⁹¹⁹

Also in the same: “I am the Lord, because I bring low the high tree, and exalt the low tree, and dry up the green tree, and cause the dry tree to flourish.”⁴⁹²⁰

Also in the same: “And thou, son of man, say unto the house of Israel, Even as ye have spoken, saying, Our errors and our iniquities are in us, and we waste away in them, and how shall we live? Say unto them, I live, saith the Lord: if I will the death of a sinner, only let him turn from his way, and he shall live.”⁴⁹²¹

Also in the same: “I the Lord have built up the ruined places, and have planted the wasted places.”⁴⁹²²

Also in the same: “And the wicked man, if he turn himself from all his iniquities that he has done, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment, and justice, and mercy, shall surely live, and shall not die. None of his sins which he has committed shall be in remembrance; in his righteousness which he hath done he shall live. Do I willingly desire the death of the unrighteous man, saith Adonai the Lord, rather than that he should turn him from his evil way, that he should live?”⁴⁹²³

Also in the same: “Be ye converted, and turn you from all your wickedneses, and they shall not be to you for a punishment. Cast away from you all your iniquities which ye have wickedly committed against me, and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit; and why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith Adonai the Lord.”⁴⁹²⁴

Also in Daniel: “And after the end of the days, I Nabuchodonosor lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my sense returned to me, and I praised the Most High, and blessed the King of heaven, and

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⁴⁹¹⁸ Trombellius suggests “if” instead of “but.”

⁴⁹¹⁹ Ezek. xxxii. 12, etc., LXX.

⁴⁹²⁰ Ezek. xvii. 24, LXX.

⁴⁹²¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 10, LXX.

⁴⁹²² Ezek. xxxvi. 36, LXX.

⁴⁹²³ Ezek. xviii. 21, LXX.

⁴⁹²⁴ Ezek. xviii. 30, LXX.

praised Him that liveth for ever: because His power is eternal, His kingdom is for generations,⁴⁹²⁵ and all who inhabit the earth are as nothing.”⁴⁹²⁶

Also in Micah: “Alas for me, O my soul, because truth has perished from the earth, and among all there is none that correcteth; all judge in blood. Every one treadeth down his neighbour with tribulation; they prepare their hands for evil.”⁴⁹²⁷

Also in the same: “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, because I have fallen, but I shall arise: because although I shall sit in darkness, the Lord will give me light: I will bear the Lord’s anger, because I have sinned against Him, until He justify my cause.”⁴⁹²⁸

Also in Zephaniah: “Come ye together and pray, O undisciplined people; before ye be made as a flower that passeth away, before the anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord’s fury come upon you, seek ye the Lord, all ye humble ones of the earth; do judgment and seek justice, and seek for gentleness; and answer ye to Him that ye may be protected in the day of the Lord’s anger.”⁴⁹²⁹

Also in Zechariah: “Be ye converted unto me, and I will be turned unto you.”⁴⁹³⁰

Also in Hosea: “Be thou converted, O Israel, to the Lord thy God, because thou art weakened by thine iniquities. Take many with you, and be converted to the Lord your God; worship Him, and say, Thou art mighty to put away our sins; that ye may not receive iniquity, but that ye may receive good things.”⁴⁹³¹

Also in Ecclesiasticus: “Be thou turned to the Lord, and forsake thy sins, and exceedingly hate cursing, and know righteousness and God’s judgments, and stand in the lot of the propitiation of the Most High: and go into the portion of life with the living, and those that make confession. Delay not in the error of the wicked. Confession perisheth from the dead man, as if it were nothing. Living and sound, thou shalt confess to the Lord, and thou shalt glory in His mercies; for great is the mercy of the Lord, and His propitiation unto such as turn unto Him.”⁴⁹³²

Also in the same: “How good is it for a true heart to show forth repentance! For thus shalt thou escape voluntary sin.”⁴⁹³³

Also in the Acts of the Apostles: “But Peter saith unto him, thy money perish with thee, because thou thinkest to be able to obtain the grace of God by money. Thou hast no part nor lot in this faith,

⁴⁹²⁵ “In generatione.”

⁴⁹²⁶ Dan. iv. 34.

⁴⁹²⁷ Mic. vii. 1, 2, 3, LXX.

⁴⁹²⁸ Mic. vii. 8, LXX.

⁴⁹²⁹ Zeph. ii. 1, LXX.

⁴⁹³⁰ Zech. i. 3.

⁴⁹³¹ Hos. xiv. 2.

⁴⁹³² Eccclus. xvii. 26.

⁴⁹³³ Eccclus. xx. 3.

for thy heart is not right with God. Therefore repent of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if haply the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee. For I see that thou art in the bond of iniquity, and in the bitterness of gall.”⁴⁹³⁴

Also in the second Epistle of the blessed⁴⁹³⁵ Paul to the Corinthians: “For the sorrow which is according to God worketh a stedfast repentance unto salvation, but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”⁴⁹³⁶

Also in the same place of this very matter: “But if ye have forgiven anything to any one, I also forgive him; for I also forgave what I have forgiven for your sakes in the person of Christ, that we may not be circumvented by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his wiles.”⁴⁹³⁷

Also in the same: “But I fear lest perchance, when I come to you, God may again humble me among you, and I shall bewail many of those who have sinned before, and have not repented, for that they have committed fornication and lasciviousness.”⁴⁹³⁸

Also in the same: “I told you before, and foretell you as I sit present; and absent now from those who before have sinned, and to all others; as, if I shall come again, I will not spare.”⁴⁹³⁹

Also in the second to Timothy: “But shun profane novelties of words, for they are of much advantage to impiety. And their word creeps as a cancer: of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened, and have subverted the faith of certain ones. But the foundation of God standeth firm, having this seal, God knoweth them that are His. And, Every one who nameth the name of the Lord shall depart from all iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of clay; and some indeed for honour, and some for contempt. Therefore if any one shall amend⁴⁹⁴⁰ himself from these things, he shall be a vessel sanctified for honour, and useful for the Lord, prepared for every good work. Moreover, flee youthful lusts: but follow after righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call upon the Lord from a pure heart. But avoid questions that are foolish and without learning, knowing that they beget strifes. And the servant of the Lord ought not to strive; but to be gentle, docile to all men, patient with modesty, correcting those who resist, lest at any time God may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth, and recover themselves from the snares of the devil, by whom they are held captive at his will.”⁴⁹⁴¹

⁴⁹³⁴ Acts viii. 20, etc.

⁴⁹³⁵ The original has only “ben,” which Trombellius reasonably assumes to be meant for “benedicti.”

⁴⁹³⁶ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

⁴⁹³⁷ 2 Cor. ii. 10.

⁴⁹³⁸ 2 Cor. xii. 21.

⁴⁹³⁹ 2 Cor. xiii. 2.

⁴⁹⁴⁰ “Emendaverit,” probably a mistake for “emundaverit,” “shall purge,” as in the Vulg.; *scil.* ἐκκαθάρη.

⁴⁹⁴¹ 2 Tim. ii. 16. [On true penitence see Epistle xxv. p. 304 *supra*.]

Also in the Apocalypse: "Remember whence thou hast fallen, and repent; but if not, I will come to thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of its place."⁴⁹⁴²

Elucidations.

I.

(Maintained by consent, and caressed by excuses, p. 557.)

THE severer discipline of early Christianity must not be discarded by those who claim it for the canon of Scripture; for modes of baptism, confirmation, and other rites; for Church polity, in short; and for the Christian year. Let us note that the whole spirit of antiquity is opposed to *worldliness*. It reflects the precept, "Be not conformed to this world," and in nothing more emphatically than in hostility to theatrical amusements, which in our days are re-asserting the deadly influence over Christians which Cyprian and Tertullian and other Fathers so solemnly denounced. If they were "maintained by consent, and caressed by excuses," even in the martyr-age, no wonder that in our Laodicean period they baffle all exertions of faithful watchmen, who enforce the baptismal vow against "*pomps* and vanities," always understood of theatrical shows, and hence part of that "world, the flesh, and the devil" which Christians have renounced.

II.

(Now is the axe laid to the root, p. 586.)

Matt. iii. 10. "*Securis ad radicem arboris posita est,*" says Cyprian, quoting the Old Latin, with which the Vulgate substantially agrees.⁴⁹⁴³ A very diligent biblical scholar directs attention to the vulgar abuse of this saying,⁴⁹⁴⁴ which turns upon a confusion of the active verb *to lay*, with the neuter verb *to lie*.⁴⁹⁴⁵ It is quoted as if it read, *Lay the axe to the root*, and is "interpreted, popularly,

⁴⁹⁴² Rev. ii. 5. [This selection of texts seems made on the same principle which dictated the compilation of texts against the Jews: a *breviarium*, the author calls it,—*quædam utilia collecta et digesta*,—to be read with readiness, and frequently referred to.]

⁴⁹⁴³ It has *arborum*, however, instead of the singular.

⁴⁹⁴⁴ *Theopneuston*, by Samuel Hanson Cox, D.D., New York, 1842.

⁴⁹⁴⁵ Note, an extraordinary instance, *Childe Harold*, Canto iv. st. 180.