

SAINT PATRICK'S EPISTLE TO COROTICUS

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TO THE CHRISTIAN
SUBJECTS OF THE
TYRANT COROTICUS



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St. Patrick's Epistle to the Christian Subjects of the Tyrant Coroticus.

I, Patrick, a sinner and unlearned, have been appointed a bishop in Ireland, and I accept from God what I am. I dwell amongst barbarians as a proselyte and a fugitive for the love of God. He will testify that it is so. It is not my wish to pour forth so many harsh and severe things; but I am forced by zeal for God and the truth of Christ, who raised me up for my neighbors and sons, for whom I have forsaken my country and parents, and would give up even life itself, if I were worthy. I have vowed to my God to teach these people, though I should be despised by them, to whom I have written with my own hand to be given to the soldiers to be sent to Coroticus—I do not say to my fellow-citizens, nor to the fellow-citizens of pious Romans, but to the fellow-citizens of the devil, through their evil deeds and hostile practices. They live in death, companions of the apostate Scots and Picts, blood-thirsty men, ever ready to redden themselves with the blood of innocent Christians, numbers of whom I have begotten to God and confirmed in Christ.

On the day following that in which they were clothed in white and received the chrism of neophytes, they were cruelly cut up and slain with the sword by the above mentioned; and I sent a letter by a holy priest, whom I have taught from his infancy, with some clerics, begging that they would restore some of the plunder or the baptized captives; but they laughed at them. Therefore I know not whether I should grieve most for those who were slain, or for those whom the devil insnared into the eternal pains of hell, where they will be chained like him. For whoever commits sin is the slave of sin, and is called the son of the devil.

Wherefore let every man know who fears God that they are estranged from me, and from Christ my God, whose ambassador I am—these patricides, fratricides, and ravening wolves, who devour the people of the Lord as if they were bread; as it is said: “The wicked have dissipated thy law,” wherein in these latter times Ireland has been well and prosperously

planted and instructed. Thanks be to God, I usurp nothing; I share with these whom He hath called and predestinated to preach the Gospel in much persecution, even to the ends of the earth. But the enemy hath acted invidiously towards me through the tyrant Coroticus, who fears neither God nor His priests whom He hath chosen, and committed to them the high, divine power: "Whomsoever they shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."

I beseech you, therefore, who are the holy ones of God and humble of heart, that you will not be flattered by them, and that you will neither eat nor drink with them, nor receive their alms, until they do penance with many tears, and liberate the servants of God and the baptized hand-maids of Christ, for whom he was crucified and died. "He that offereth sacrifice of the goods of the poor, is as one that sacrificeth the son in the presence of the father." "Riches, he saith, which the unjust accumulate shall be vomited forth from his belly, the angel of death shall drag him away, he shall be punished with the fury of dragons, the tongue of the adder shall slay him, inextinguishable fire shall consume him." Hence, "Woe to those who fill themselves with things which are not their own." And "what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?" It were too long to discuss one by one, or to select from the law, testimonies against such cupidity. Avarice is a mortal sin. "Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods." "Thou shall not kill." The homicide cannot dwell with Christ. "He who hateth his brother is a murderer," and "and he who loveth not his brother abideth in death." How much more guilty is he who hath defiled his hands with the blood of the sons of God, whom He hath recently acquired in the ends of the earth by our humble exhortations!

Did I come to Ireland according to God or according to the flesh? Who compelled me? I was led by the Spirit, that I should see my relatives no more. Have I not a pious mercy towards that nation which formerly took me captive? According to the flesh, I am of noble birth, my father being a Decurio. I do not regret or blush for having bartered my nobility for the good of others. I am a servant in Christ unto a foreign people for the ineffable glory of eternal life, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord; though

my own people do not acknowledge me: "A prophet is without honor in his own country." Are we not from one stock, and have we not one God for our Father? As He has said: "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." Is it not agreed that one pulleth down and another buildeth? I seek not my own.

Not to me be praise, but to God, who hath put into my heart this desire that I should be one of the hunters and fishers whom, of old, God hath announced should appear in the last days. I am reviled—what shall I do, O Lord? I am greatly despised. Lo! thy sheep are torn around me, and plundered by the above-mentioned robbers, aided by the soldiers of Coroticus: the betrayers of Christians into the hands of the Picts and Scots are far from the charity of God. Ravening wolves have scattered the flock of the Lord, which, with the greatest diligence, was increasing in Ireland; the sons of the Irish and the daughters of kings who are monks and virgins of Christ are too many to enumerate. Therefore the oppression of the great is not pleasing to thee now, and never shall be.

Who of the saints would not dread to share in the feasts or amusements of such persons? They fill their houses with the spoils of the Christian dead, they live by rapine, they know not the poison, the deadly food, which they present to their friends and children; as Eve did not understand that she offered death to her husband, so are all those who work evil: they labor to work out death and eternal punishment.

It is the custom of the Christians of Rome and Gaul to send holy men to the Franks and other nations, with many thousand solidi, to redeem baptized captives. You who slay them, and sell them to foreign nations ignorant of God, deliver the members of Christ, as it were, into a den of wolves. What hope have you in God? Whoever agrees with you, or commands you, God will judge him. I know not what I can say, or what I can speak more of the departed sons of God slain cruelly by the sword. It is written: "Weep with them that weep." And again: "If any member suffers anything, all the members suffer with it." Therefore the Church laments and bewails her sons and daughters, not slain by the sword, but sent away

to distant countries, where sin is more shameless and abounds. There free-born Christian men are sold and enslaved amongst the wicked, abandoned, and apostate Picts.

Therefore I cry out with grief and sorrow. O beautiful and well-beloved brethren and children! whom I have brought forth in Christ in such multitudes, what shall I do for you? I am not worthy before God or man to come to your assistance. The wicked have prevailed over us. We have become outcasts. It would seem that they do not think we have one baptism and one Father, God. They think it an indignity that we have been born in Ireland; as He said: "Have ye not one God? Why do ye each forsake his neighbor?" Therefore I grieve for you—I grieve, O my beloved ones! But, on the other hand, I congratulate myself I have not labored for nothing—my journey has not been in vain. This horrible and amazing crime has been permitted to take place. Thanks be to God, ye who have believed and have been baptized have gone from earth to paradise. Certainly, ye have begun to migrate where there is no night or death or sorrow; but ye shall exult like young bulls loosed from their bonds and tread down the wicked under your feet as dust.

Truly, you shall reign with the apostles and prophets and martyrs, and obtain the eternal kingdom, as He hath testified, saying: "They shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and murderers, and liars, and perjurers, and they shall have their part in the everlasting lake of fire. Nor does the apostle say without reason: "If the just are scarcely saved, where shall the sinner, the impious, and the transgressor of the law appear?" Where will Coroticus and his wicked rebels against Christ find themselves when they shall see rewards distributed amongst the baptized women? What will he think of his miserable kingdom, which shall pass away in a moment, like clouds or smoke, which are dispersed by the wind? So shall deceitful sinners perish before the face of the Lord, and the just shall feast with great confidence with Christ, and judge the nations, and rule over unjust kings, for ever and ever. Amen.

I testify before God and His angels that it shall be so, as He hath intimated to my ignorance. These are not my words that I have set forth in Latin, but those of God and the prophets and apostles, who never lied: "He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned."

God hath said it. I entreat whosoever is a servant of God that he be a willing bearer of this letter, that he be not drawn aside by any one, but that he shall see it read before all the people in the presence of Coroticus himself, that, if God inspire them, they may some time return to God, and repent, though late; that they may liberate the baptized captives, and repent for their homicides of the Lord's brethren; so that they may deserve of God to live and to be whole here and hereafter. The peace of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

