

weeds of pagan customs has now been ploughed up and sown with the truth of the Gospel, producing an abundant harvest of souls.

In the same report you included a number of questions concerning the faith and teaching of the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church. This is a commendable practice, for here St. Peter the Apostle held his see and the episcopate had its beginning. And since you seek our advice on matters dealing with ecclesiastical discipline, we will state with all the authority of apostolic tradition what you must hold, though we speak not from our own insufficiency but relying on the grace of Him who opens the mouths of the dumb and makes eloquent the tongues of babes.

Your first question is: Within what degrees can marriage be solemnized? Our answer is that if the parties know themselves to be related by blood they should not marry; but since moderation weighs more with these savage people than strict legal duties, they should be allowed to marry after the fourth degree of consanguinity.

As to what a man shall do if his wife is unable through illness to allow him his marital rights, it would be better if he remained apart and practised continence. But since this is practicable only in the case of men of high ideals, the best course if he is unable to be continent would be for him to marry.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he should continue to support the woman who is sick, unless she has contracted the disease through her own fault.

As regards a priest or bishop who has been accused by the people, if the evidence for the charge against him is not substantiated by reliable witnesses he should protest his innocence on oath before God, from whom nothing is concealed, and retain the rank which is his due. For once a man has been ordained or consecrated he cannot be ordained or consecrated anew.

In the sacred ceremony of the Mass that rite must be observed which our Lord transmitted to His Disciples, for he took the chalice and gave it to them, saying: "This is the chalice of the New Testament in my blood: do this as often as you shall drink

<sup>1</sup> This legislation is recorded by Gratian, *Decreta*, pt. ii, ch. 32, q. 7, can. 18, but attributed to Gregory III.

POPE GREGORY II REPLIES TO QUESTIONS PUT BY BONIFACE  
(22 November 726)

Gregory, the servant of the servants of God, to Boniface, our most holy brother and colleague in the episcopate.

Your devout messenger Denual has brought us the welcome news that you are well and that, by the help of God, you are making progress in the work for which you were sent. He also delivered to us letters from you reporting that the field of the Lord which had long lain fallow and was overgrown with the

it." Therefore it is not fitting that two or three chalices should be placed on the altar during the celebration of Mass.

As to foods offered in sacrifice to idols, you ask whether a believer is permitted to eat them or not after he has first made a sign of the cross over them. A sufficient answer to this question is provided in the words of St. Paul when he said: "If any man says to you, This has been offered in sacrifice, eat not for the sake of the man who mentioned it and for conscience sake."

You ask further: If a father or mother gives a child during its early years to a monastery to be brought up in monastic discipline, is it lawful for that child, after reaching the age of puberty, to leave the cloister and enter into matrimony? This we strictly forbid, for it is an impious thing to allow children who have been offered to God by their parents to follow their baser instincts for pleasure.

You mention also that some have been baptized by adulterous and unworthy priests without being questioned on their belief in the articles of the Creed. In such cases you must hold fast to the ancient custom of the Church, because whoever is baptized in the name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost cannot be baptized again. For he has received this grace not in the name of the minister but in the name of the Trinity. Hold fast the teaching of the Apostles, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism". We require you to impart spiritual instruction to such people with particular earnestness.

As regards small children who have been separated from their parents and do not know whether they have been baptized or not, reason demands that you should baptize them, unless there is evidence to the contrary.

Lepers who belong to the Christian faith should be allowed to partake of the body and blood of the Lord, but they may not attend sacred functions with people in good health. In the case of a contagious disease or plague attacking a church or monastery you ask whether those who have not been infected may escape danger by flight. We declare this to be utterly foolish; no man can escape the hand of God.

At the end of your letter you state that some priests and bishops

are so vicious that their lives are a continual reproach to the priesthood and you enquire whether it would be lawful to eat and speak with them provided they are not heretics. We answer that you are to admonish and correct them with our apostolic authority and so bring them back to the purity of ecclesiastical discipline. If they obey, they will save their souls, and you, on your side, will attain your reward. Do not refuse to eat and speak with them at the same table. It often happens that where correction fails to bring men to an acknowledgment of the truth, the constant and gentle persuasion of their table companions leads them back to the paths of goodness. You should follow this same rule in dealing with the nobles who are of assistance to you.

This, my dear brother, is all that need be said with the authority of the Apostolic See. For the rest, we call upon the mercy of God, which has sent you, under our apostolic authority, to shed the light of truth on those regions of darkness, to crown your work with success so that you may receive the reward of your labours and the forgiveness of our sins.

May God keep you from all harm, most reverend brother.

Given on the tenth of the kalends of December in the tenth year of the reign of our august emperor Leo, in the seventh of his son Constantine the Great, the tenth indiction.

(Tangl, 26)

to the rules of prosody. I made them, not because I imagine myself to have great ability, but because I wished to exercise my budding talents. I hope you will help me with them. I learned how to do it from my mistress Eadburga, who continues with increasing perseverance in her study of the Scriptures.

Farewell; pray for me; may you enjoy a long life here and a happier life to come.

“Arbiter omnipotens, solus qui cuncta creavit,

In regno patris semper qui lumine fulget,

Qua iugiter flagrans sic regnet gloria Christi

Inlesum servet semper te iure perenni.”

(Tangl, 29)

18

BONIFACE THANKS ABBESS EADBURGA FOR SENDING  
HIM BOOKS

(735-6)

To his dear sister, Abbess Eadburga, long united to him by spiritual ties, Boniface, a servant of the servants of God, greetings in Christ without end.

May the Eternal Rewarder of good works give joy on high among the choirs of angels to my dearest sister, who has brought light and consolation to an exile in Germany by sending him gifts of spiritual books. For no man can shed light on these gloomy lurking-places of the German people and take heed of the snares that beset his path unless he have the Word of God as a lamp to guide his feet and a light to shine on his way.

Of your charity I earnestly beg you to pray for me, because as a penalty for my sins I am tossed about by the storms of this dangerous sea, begging God, who is high above us but stoops to regard the lowly, to give me words to speak my mind boldly that the Word of the Lord may run its triumphant course and the Gospel of Christ may be glorified among the heathen.

(Tangl, 30)

19

BONIFACE ASKS ARCHBISHOP NOTHELM OF CANTERBURY<sup>1</sup> TO  
FORWARD A COPY OF THE QUESTIONS SENT TO POPE GREGORY I  
BY AUGUSTINE, APOSTLE OF ENGLAND

(735)

To his beloved master, Archbishop Nothelm, invested with the insignia of the high priesthood, Boniface, a humble servant of the servants of God, sincere greetings of eternal love in Christ.

I earnestly beg you to remember me in your holy prayers and so bring peace to my mind, tossed as it is by the anxieties of this mission in Germany. Unite me to you in a bond of brotherhood such as was granted to me by your predecessor, Archbishop Bertwald, of revered memory, at the time I left my native country. May my brethren and the companions of my wanderings be counted worthy also to be united to you in the bond of the spirit, in the ties of love, in the faith of Christ and the sweetness of charity.

I pray you in the same way to obtain for me a copy of the letter containing, it is said, the questions of Augustine, first archbishop and apostle of the English, and the replies made to them by Pope Gregory I. In this letter it is stated among other things that marriages between Christians related in the third degree are lawful. Will you have a careful search made to discover whether or not this document has been proved to be an authentic work of St. Gregory? For the registrars say that it is not to be found in the archives of the Church at Rome among the other papers of the said Pope.

Further, I would like your advice as regards a sin which I have unwittingly committed by allowing a certain man to marry. It happened in this way. The man, like many others, had stood as godfather to the child of another man and then on the father's

<sup>1</sup>Nothelm was first archpriest of St. Paul's, London, and consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury in 735, receiving the pallium from Gregory III in the following year. He was a friend of Albinus, Abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury, and conveyed information from him to Bede about the ecclesiastical history of Kent. He died in October 739. Some writings have been attributed to him, but they are spurious.

death married the mother. The people in Rome say that this is a sin, even a mortal sin, and state that in such cases a divorce is necessary. They maintain that under the Christian emperors such a marriage was punishable by death or exile for life. If you find that this is considered so great a sin in the decrees of the Fathers and in the canons or even in Holy Scripture, tell me so, because I would like to understand and learn the authorities for such an opinion. I cannot understand how spiritual relationship in marriage can be so great a sin, when we know that through Baptism we all become sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in the Church.

Would you also let me know in what year the first missionaries sent by St. Gregory came to England?

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(Tangl, 33)

BONIFACE ASKS HIS FORMER PUPIL, ABBOT DUDDO,<sup>1</sup> TO SEND HIM CERTAIN MANUSCRIPTS

(735)

To his beloved son Abbot Duddo, Boniface also called Wynfrith, servant of the servants of God, heartfelt and loving greetings in Christ.

I hope, my dear son, that you recall the saying of a certain wise man, "keep thy old friend", and forget not in old age the early friendship we formed in youth and have kept up till now. Remember your father, now failing in strength and going the way of all flesh.

Though I was but poorly equipped as a teacher, yet I tried to be the most devoted of them all, as you yourself well know. Be mindful of my devotion and take pity on an old man worn out by troubles in this German land. Support me by your prayers to God, and help me by supplying me with the Sacred Writings and the inspired works of the Fathers. It is well known that books are most helpful to those who read the Holy Scriptures, so I beg you

<sup>1</sup> Duddo is known only through a rather suspect charter. He was probably abbot of a monastery in the west of England.

to procure for me as an aid to sacred learning part of the commentary on the Apostle Paul which I need. I have commentaries on two Epistles—that to the Romans and the First to the Corinthians. If you have anything in your monastic library which you think would be useful to me and of which I may not be aware, or of which I have no copy, pray let me know about it; help me as a loving son might an ignorant father, and send me also any notes of your own.

Let us also agree mutually to render such service to each other. In accordance with what my son, the priest Eoban,<sup>1</sup> the bearer of my letters, may tell you about the marriage of a woman to the godfather of her children, kindly search the records to find out by what authority this is held to be a capital crime at Rome. If you find in ecclesiastical writings any discussion of this sin, please let me know at once.

Health and prosperity in Christ.

(Tangl, 34)

21

BONIFACE ASKS ABBESS EADBURGA TO MAKE HIM A COPY OF THE EPISTLE OF ST. PETER IN LETTERS OF GOLD

(735)

To the most reverend and beloved sister, Abbess Eadburga, Boniface, least of the servants of God, loving greetings.

I pray Almighty God, the Rewarder of all good works, that when you reach the heavenly mansions and the everlasting tents He will repay you for all the generosity you have shown to me. For, many times, by your useful gifts of books and vestments, you have consoled and relieved me in my distress. And so I beg you to continue the good work you have begun by copying out for me in letters of gold the epistles of my lord, St. Peter, that a reverence and love of the Holy Scriptures may be impressed on the minds of the heathens to whom I preach, and that I may ever have before my gaze the words of him who guided me along this path.

<sup>1</sup> Eoban is probably to be identified with the Bishop Eoban of Utrecht, who later suffered martyrdom with Boniface at Dokkum.