

Four Bishops to Melitius of Lycopolis (CPG 1667)

<i>Reference:</i>	Mel. 1, CPG 1667, FNS 1
<i>Incipit:</i>	<i>Simpliciter ratione incerta uerba estimantes que de te audiebantur</i>
<i>Date:</i>	c. 303-306
<i>Greek Text:</i>	<i>Codex Veronensis</i> , lx, ed. M.J. Routh, <i>Reliquae Sacrae</i> , IV, 91-93; Migne, <i>P.G.</i> X, 1565-1568
<i>English Translation:</i>	<i>ANF</i> vol. 6, pp. 163f, adapted for FCC by SMT and JTS

This letter is dated to the earliest beginnings of the Melitian controversy. These four bishops, having known Melitius, refused for a time to believe the reports that Melitius broke ecclesiastical order and was ordaining ministers. However, after hearing multiple different reports, they wrote this letter to admonish him for breaking the tradition of their fathers and ignoring the proper procedures set in place.

The Greek text below is that of Routh as found in *Reliquae Sacrae*, IV, 91-93. The English translation has been adapted from *ANF* vol. 6, pp. 163f by SMT and JTS.

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Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus, Phileas, Meletio dilecto et comministro in Domino, salutem: Simplici ratione incerta uerba aestimantes, quae de te audiebantur; quibusdam ad nos peruenientibus, [nunciantur] aliena a more diuino, et regula ecclesiastica, quae a te conantur, immo magis fiunt, quae nec auribus suscipere uellemus, considerantes in magnitudine audaciam et conatus incertos. Sed quoniam in praesentia aduenientes multi his fidem imposuerunt, et contestari facta non dubitabant, nimis admirantes compulsi sumus has litteras conficere ad te. Qualem etiam commotionem et tristitiam [communiter] omnibus, et singillatim unicuique, praebuit a te facta ordinatio in paroeciis ad te minime pertinentibus, nec dicere etiam praeualemus. Pauca tamen te arguentes non cessauimus.	Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus, and Phileas, to Melitius, our friend and fellow-minister in the Lord, greetings. Some reports having reached us concerning you, which, on the testimony of certain individuals who came to us, spoke of certain things foreign to divine order and ecclesiastical rule which are being attempted, no, rather which are being done by you, we, in an ingenuous manner held them to be untrustworthy, regarding them to be such as we would not willingly credit, when we thought of the audacity implied in their magnitude and their uncertain attempts. But since many who are visiting us at the present time have lent some credibility to these reports, and have not hesitated to attest them as facts, we, to our exceeding surprise, have been compelled to write this letter to you. And what agitation and sadness have been caused to us all in common and to each of us individually by (the report of) the ordination carried through by you in parishes having no manner of connection with you, we are unable sufficiently to express. We have not delayed, however, by a short statement to prove your practice wrong.
Lex est patrum et propatrum, quam nec ipse ignoras, constituta secundum diuinum et	There is the law of our fathers and forefathers, of which neither are you yourself ignorant,

<p>ecclesiasticum ordinem; nam cuncta pro Dei placito et zelo meliorum ab ipsis est constitutum et fixum, in alienis paroeciis non licere alicui episcoporum, ordinationes celebrare. Quae lex bene nimis magna est, et cum sapientia adinuenta. Quoniam primum oportet conuersionem et uitam eorum, qui ordinantur, cum magna scrupulositate scrutari; deinde, ut omnis confusio et turbulentia auferatur; uix enim unusquisque paroeciam regere poterit suam, et magna sollicitudine multisque cogitationibus ministros reperire, cum quibus omne tempus uitae transegit, et in manibus eius sunt educati. Tu autem nihil horum considerans, nec futura contemplans, nec beatorum patrum nostrorum et Christo susceptorum per successiones legem; neque magni episcopi ac patris nostri Petri honorem, ex quo cuncti per spem, quam habemus in Domino Jesu Christo, pendemus; nec nostris incarcerationibus et temptationibus, et cotidianis ac multiplicatis opprobriis, nec oppressionibus et angustiis apud omnes, placatus, omnia pariter euertere ausus es. Pro quibus quae tibi excusationis occasio relinquetur?</p>	<p>established according to divine and ecclesiastical order; for it is all for the good pleasure of God and the zealous regard of better things. By them it has been established and settled that it is not lawful for any bishop to celebrate ordinations in other parishes than his own; a law which is exceedingly important and wisely devised. For, in the first place, it is but right that the conversation and life of those who are ordained should be examined with great care; and in the second place, that all confusion and turbulence should be done away with. For every one shall have enough to do in managing his own parish, and in finding with great care and many anxieties suitable subordinates among these with whom he has passed his whole life, and who have been trained under his hands. But you, neither making any account of these things, nor regarding the future, nor considering the law of our sainted fathers and those who have been taken to Christ time after time, nor the honor of our great bishop and father, Peter, on whom we all depend in the hope which we have in the Lord Jesus Christ, nor softened by our imprisonments and trials, and daily and multiplied reproach, have ventured on subverting all things at once. And what means will be left you for justifying yourself with respect to these things?</p>
<p>Sed forsitan dices; egentibus gregibus ac desolatis, pastore non subsistente, ne multorum incredulitate multi subtrahantur, ad hoc perueni. Sed certissimum est, illos non egere: primum quia multi sunt, circumeuntes et potentes uisitare; deinde et si quid ab ipsis negligentius agebatur, oportuerat ex populo properare, ac nos exigere merito. Sed sciebant se ministrorum non esse egenos, et ideo ad hos petendos non peruenerunt. Sciebant, quod monentes eos ab hac inquisitione aut dimittebamur, aut cum omni scrupulositate fiebat, quod utile uidebatur; fiebat enim sub arguente, et in manibus probitate constituta cogitabatur. Tu autem tam uiliter quorundam considerans deceptiones et inania uerba, subreptus ad ordinationes prosiluisti. Si enim adstringebant circumstantes te, et compellebant, ignorantes ordinem ecclesiasticum, oportuerat te sequentem regulam literis nos edocere, et ita, quod expedire uidebatur [fieret]. Si forte quidam persuadebant tibi dicentes, de nobis finem esse factum; quod nec tibi ipsi erat ignotum, quod essent multi euntes et redeuntes ad nos, qui</p>	<p>But perhaps you will say: I did this to prevent many being drawn away with the unbelief of many, because the flocks were in need and forsaken, there being no pastor with them. Well, but it is most certain that they are not in such destitution: in the first place, because there are many going about them and in a position to act as visitors; and in the second place, even if there was some measure of neglect on their side, then the proper way would have been for the representation to be made promptly by the people, and for us to take account of them according to their desert. But they knew that they were in no want of ministers, and therefore they did not come to seek them. They knew that we were wont to discharge them with an admonition from such inquisition for matter of complaint, or that everything was done with all carefulness which seemed to be for their profit; for all was done under correction, and all was considered with well-approved honesty. You, however, giving such worthless attention to the deceits of</p>

<p>poterant uisitare; etsi hoc fuisset, oportebat te maioris patris expectare iudicium et huius rei permissionem. Sed horum nihil cogitans, et aliud sperans, immo magis nostri curam non gerens, praepositos quosdam populo prouidisti; nam iam cognouimus et [schismata] fuisse, quod multis tua displicuit inrationabilis ordinatio.</p>	<p>certain parties and their vain words, have made a stealthy leap to the celebrating of ordinations. For if, indeed, those with you were constraining you to this, and in their ignorance were doing violence to ecclesiastical order, you ought to have followed the common rule and have informed us by letter; and in that way what seemed expedient would have been done. And if perchance some persuaded you to credit their story that it was all over with us,—a thing of which you could not have been ignorant, because there were many passing and repassing by us who might visit you,—even although, I say, this had been the case, yet you ought to have waited for the judgment of the superior father and for his allowance of this practice. But without giving any heed to these matters, but indulging a different expectation, no rather, indeed, denying all respect to us, you have provided certain rulers for the people. For now we have learned, too, that there were also divisions, because your unwarrantable exercise of the right of ordination displeased many.</p>
<p>Ad haec nec beatissimi prouisoris et induti Christum, omnium nostrum apostoli, Pauli uerbum suasit morari, et propositum facile continere, qui scribens acceptissimo filio Timotheo dicit, “Manus nemini cito imposueris, nec communicaueris peccatis alienis;” pariter suam erga illum demonstrans prouidentiam, et exemplum ac legem, qua cum omni scrupulositate et cautela eligantur [ordinandi. Adnuntiamus] imposterum tibi, ut regulae tutum et salubrem terminum confirmare [studeas].</p>	<p>And you were not persuaded to delay such procedure or restrain your purpose readily even by the word of the Apostle Paul, the most blessed seer, and the man who put on Christ, who is the Christ of all of us no less; for he, in writing to his dearly-beloved son Timothy, says: “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins [1 Tim 5:22].” And thus he at once shows his own anxious consideration for him, and gives him his example and exhibits the law according to which, with all carefulness and caution, parties are to be chosen for the honor of ordination. We make this declaration to you, that in future you may study to keep within the safe and salutary limits of the law.</p>

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