

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>	Kettler, <i>ZNW</i> , 35, 159–161; <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>	FCC: JTS, <i>ANF</i> vol. 6, 163f

This letter, a Latin translation of the lost Greek original, is one of the only extant letters containing information about the early 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 Latin text below is that of Kettler as found in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 35, 159–161. The English translation was produced by J. Sauer for FCC.

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Isychius Pachumius Theodorus Phyleas Meletio dilecto et conministro in domino salutem.	Isychius, Pachumius, Theodorus, and Phyleas to Melitius, our beloved and fellow minister in the Lord, greetings.
1. Simpliciter <r>atione incerta uerba estimantes que de te audiebantur quibusdam ad nos peruenientibus, nuntiantur aliena more diuino et regula ecclesiastica que a te conantur immo magis fiunt, que nec auribus suscipere uellemus, considerantes in magnitudine audaciam et connatus incertos. Sed quoniam in presentia aduenientes multi fidem his inposuerunt et contesta<r>i facta non dubitabant, nimis admirati compulsi sumus has litteras conficere ad te.	1. While simply appraising systematically the dubious reports which we heard about you from certain people who came to us, some matters were reported foreign to divine custom and ecclesiastical rule which are attempted, no, rather done by you that we do not want to receive by our ears while considering the audacity and dubious attempts in their magnitude. But because many entering into our presence placed faith in these things and did not hesitate to testify to them as facts, we are exceedingly amazed that we are forced to send this letter to you.
2. Qualem enim communionem et tristitiam communiter omnibus et singillatim unicuique prebuit a te facta ordinatio in paroeciis ad te minime pertinentibus, nec dicere etiam preualemus; pauca tamen te arguentes non cessauimus.	2. For what sort of communion and sadness universal to all and individual to each one has the ordination done by you brought in parishes having little to nothing to do with you we are not even able to say. However, we have not slowed a few words which denounce you.
3. Lex est patrum et propatrum quam nec ipse ignoras, constituta secundum diuinum et ecclesiasticum ordinem; nam cuncta pro dei placito et zelo m<a>iorum. Ab ipsis est constitutum et	3. There is the law of the fathers and forefathers of which even you yourself are not ignorant, established according to divine and ecclesiastical order. For the entire law is for God's delight and the zeal of greater things. It was constituted and

fixum in alienis paroeciis non licere alicui episcoporum ordinationes celebrare.	fixed by them that it is not permitted for any of the bishops to celebrate ordinations in parishes not his own.
4. Que lex bene nimis magna est et cum sapientia adinuenta, quoniam primum oportet conuersionem et uitam eorum qui ordinantur cum <m>agna <s>crupulositate scrutari, deinde ut omnis confusio et turbela auferatur. Vix enim unusquisque paroeciam regere poterit suam et magna sollicitudine multisque cogitationibus ministros reperire, cum quibus omne tempus uitae [t]ransegit, et in manibus eius sunt educa<ti>.	4. That law rightly is exceedingly great and devised with wisdom because first it is proper that the discourse and life of those who were ordained are thoroughly examined with great care, and second in order that that all confusion and turmoil be swept away. For each is only just able to manage his own parish and to find ministers with great care and many deliberations with whom he spent the entire time of his life and who were educated in his hands.
5. Tu autem nihil horum considerans nec futura contemplanis nec beatorum patrum nostrorum et XPO susceptorum per successiones legem neque magni episcopi ac patris nostri Petri honore<m> ex co cuncti per spem quam habemus in domino IHY XPO pendemus, nec nostris incarcerationibus et temptationibus et cottidianis ac multiplicatis obprobriis nec obpressionibus et angustiis apud omnes placatus omnia pariter euertere ausus es. Pro quibus que tibi excussationis occasio relinquetur?	5. However you, not examining any of these things and considering neither the future, nor the law of our blessed fathers and of those taken up to Christ time after time, nor the honor of our great bishop and father Peter upon whom we all depend by the hope which we have in the Lord Jesus Christ, nor appeased before everyone by our imprisonments, trials, and daily and multiple reproaches, nor by oppressions and distresses, you have dared to overthrow everything equally. What opportunity is left for you to excuse these things?
6. Sed forsitam dicis: egentibus gregibus ac desolat<i>s, pastore[s] non subsistente, ne multorum incredulitate ne multi subtrahantur, ad hoc perueneri. Sed certissimum est illos non egere, primum quia multi sunt circumeuntes et potentes uisitare.	6. But perhaps you say, "I came to this so because the flocks were in need and alone and no shepherds remained and so that they may not be taken away by the unbelief of many. But it is most certain that they do not have this need, first because many are traveling around and are able to visit.
7. Deinde etsi 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 dimittebamus aut cum omni scrupulositate fiebat quod utile uidebatur [fiebatur]; sub enim arguente et in manibus prouitate constituta cogitabatur.	7. Second, even if they were negligent, it would have been proper to hasten from the people and for us to examine by merit. But they knew that there was no need of ministers, and therefore they did not go to seek them. They knew that either we would send them away with a warning against this inquiry or that what seemed beneficial would happen with all care; for what was instituted was considered under argumentation and well known honesty.
8. Tu autem tam uiliter quorundam considerans deceptiones et inania uerba subreptus ad ordinationes prosiluisti; si enim adstringebant et suffocabant circumstantes te et conpellebant, ignorantes ordinem ecclesiasticum, oportuerat te sequenter regulam litteris nos edocere, et ita quod expetire uidebatur fiebat.	8. You, however, worthlessly considering the deceptions and empty words of certain people have stealthily leapt to ordinations; for if those around you bound, strangled, and compelled you while ignoring ecclesiastical order, it would have been proper for you to follow the rule and inform us by letter, and so what seemed to be preferred would happen.

9. S<i> forte persuadebant tibi quidam dicentes de nobis finem esse factum, quod nec tibi ipsi erat ignotum quod essent multi euntes et redeuntes ad nos qui poterant uisitare. Et si hoc fuisset oportebat te maiore patris expectare iudicium et huius rei permissione.	9. If by chance some have persuaded you saying that it was over with us, of which you were not ignorant since many were going out and returning to us who were able to visit. Even if this were true, it would have been proper for you to wait for the judgment of a greater father and his permission of this practice.
10. Sed horum nihil cogitans et aliut sperans immo magis nostri curam non gerens propositos quosdam populo prouidisti. Nam iam cognouimus et <sch>ismata fuisse, quod multis tua displicuit irrationabilis ordinatio.	10. But you, considering nothing of these things and hoping for something else, no rather, not upholding our office, have provided certain leaders for the people. For now we have learned that there are even divisions because your irrational ordination has displeased many.
11. Ad hec nec beatissimi prouisoris et induti XPM omnium nostrum apostoli Pauli uerbum suasit morari et propositum facile continere, qui scribens acceptissimo filio Timotheo dicit: » Manus nemini cito inposueris nec communicaueris peccatis alienis «, pariter suam erga illum demonstrans prouidentiam et exemplum ac legem, qui cum omni scrupulositate et cautela eligan[d]tur, ordinando. Adnuntias in posterum tui et regulae tutum et salubre terminum confirmare studetur.	11. To this matter, you were not persuaded to dealy this practice or readily limit your plan by the word of our Apostle Paul, sainted seer and one who put on the Christ of all of us, who wrote to his dear son Timothy, “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily nor participate in another’s sins [1 Tim 5:22],” at the same time demonstrating foreknowledge from his own experiences and an example and rule to ordain whoever was chosen with all care and caution. We tell you all this so that in the future you may study to confirm both the entirety and the healthy limit of the law.

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