

0250-0350 – Phileas Thmuitanus – Epistle to Meletius

The Epistle of the Same Phileas of Thmuis to Meletius, Bishop of Lycopolis

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“He that sacrificeth to other gods,” it is said, “shall be utterly destroyed.”¹³²³ And again¹³²⁴ “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”¹³²⁵

The Epistle of the Same Phileas of Thmuis to Meletius, Bishop of Lycopolis.

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The Beginning of the Epistle of the Bishops.¹³²⁶

Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus, and Phileas, to Meletius, our friend and fellow-minister in the Lord, greeting. Some reports having reached us concerning thee, which, on the testimony of certain individuals who came to us, spake of certain things foreign to divine order and ecclesiastical rule which are being attempted, yea, rather which are being done by thee, 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 indite this letter to thee. 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 thee in parishes having no manner of connection with thee, we are unable sufficiently to express. We have not delayed, however, by a short statement to prove your practice wrong. There is the law of our fathers and forefathers, of which neither art thou thyself ignorant, established according to divine and ecclesiastical order; for it is all for the good pleasure of God and the zealous regard of better things.¹³²⁷ By them it has been established and settled that it is not lawful for any bishop to celebrate

¹³²³ Exod. xxii. 20.

¹³²⁴ Exod. xx. 3.

¹³²⁵ Eusebius, after quoting these passages, adds:—“These are the words of a true philosopher, and one who was no less a lover of God than of wisdom, which, before the final sentence of his judge, and while he lay yet in prison, he addressed to the brethren in his church, at once to represent to them in what condition he was himself, and to exhort them to maintain steadfastly, even after his speedy death, their piety towards Christ.”—Tr.

¹³²⁶ This epistle was first edited by Scipio Maffei from an ancient Verona manuscript in the *Osserv. Letter*, vol. iii. pp. 11–17, where is given the *Fragment of a History of the Meletian Schism*. See Neander’s important remarks on this whole document, *Church History*, iii. p. 310 (Bohn).—Tr.

¹³²⁷ *Zelo meliorum*.

ordinations in other parishes¹³²⁸ than his own; a law which is exceedingly important¹³²⁹ 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 thou, 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 honour of our great bishop and father,¹³³⁰ Peter,¹³³¹ 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, hast ventured on subverting all things at once. And what means will be left thee for justifying thyself with respect to these things? But perhaps thou wilt 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.¹³³² 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,¹³³³ and all was considered with well-approved honesty. Thou, however, giving such strenuous attention to the deceits of certain parties and their vain words, hast made a stealthy leap to the celebrating of ordinations. For if, indeed, those with thee were constraining thee to this, and in their ignorance were doing violence to ecclesiastical order, thou oughtest 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 thou couldst 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 thou oughtest to have waited for the judgment of the superior father and for his

1328 [Parishes = dioceses (so called now); but they were very small territorially, and every city had its "bishop." See Bingham, book ix. cap. 2, and Euseb., book v. cap. 23. Comp. note 1, p. 106, *supra*.]

1329 *Bene nimis magna.*

1330 [The bishops of Alexandria are called *popes* to this day, and were so from the beginning. See vol. v. p. 154.]

1331 [Peter succeeded Theonas as sixteenth bishop and primate of Alexandria. See vol. iv. p. 384; also Neale, *Pat of Alex.*, i. p. 90.]

1332 *Oportuerat ex populo properare ac nos exigere pro merito.*

1333 *Sub arguente.*

allowance of this practice. But without giving any heed to these matters, but indulging a different expectation, yea rather, indeed, denying all respect to us, thou hast provided certain rulers for the people. For now we have learned, too, that there were also divisions,¹³³⁴ because thy unwarrantable exercise of the right of ordination displeased many. And thou wert not persuaded to delay such procedure or restrain thy purpose readily even by the word of the Apostle Paul, the most blessed seer,¹³³⁵ 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.”¹³³⁶ And thus he at once shows his own anxious consideration for him,¹³³⁷ and gives him his example and exhibits the law according to which, with all carefulness and caution, parties are to be chosen for the honour of ordination.¹³³⁸ We make this declaration to thee, that in future thou mayest study¹³³⁹ to keep within the safe and salutary limits of the law.

The Conclusion of the Epistle of the Bishops.

After receiving and perusing this epistle, he neither wrote any reply nor repaired to them in the prison, nor went to the blessed Peter. But when all these bishops and presbyters and deacons had suffered martyrdom in the prison at Alexandria, he at once entered Alexandria. Now in that city there was a certain person, by name Isidorus, turbulent in character, and possessed with the ambition of being a teacher. And there was also a certain Arius, who wore the habit of piety, and was in like manner possessed with the ambition to be a teacher. And when they discovered the object of Meletius’s passion¹³⁴⁰ and what it was that he sought, hastening to him, and looking with an evil eye on the episcopal authority of the blessed Peter, that the aim and desire of Meletius might be made patent,¹³⁴¹ they discovered to Meletius certain presbyters, then in hiding, to whom the blessed Peter had given power to act as parish-visitors. And Meletius recommending them to improve the opportunity given them for rectifying their error, suspended them for the time, and by his own

1334 The manuscript reads *chrismata*, for which *schismata* is proposed.

1335 *Provisoris*—perhaps rather, THE PROVIDER—the saint who with careful forethought has mapped out our proper course in such matters.

1336 1 Tim. v. 22.

1337 *Erga illum providentiam.*

1338 The manuscript gives *ordinando adnuntias*, for which is proposed *ordinandi. Adnuntiamus.*

1339 Reading *studeas* for *studetur.*

1340 *Cupiditatem.*

1341 *Ut cogniscatur concupiscentia Meletii.*

authority ordained two persons in their place,¹³⁴² namely, one in prison and another in the mines. On learning these things the blessed Peter, with much endurance, wrote to the people of Alexandria an epistle in the following terms.¹³⁴³



Pamphilus.

Translator's Biographical Notice.

[A.D. 309.] According to the common account Pamphilus was a native of Berytus, the modern Beirut, and a member of a distinguished Phœnician family. Leaving Berytus, however, at an early period, he repaired to Alexandria and studied under Pierius, the well-known head of the Catechetical school there. At a subsequent period he went to the Palestinian Cæsareia, and was made a presbyter of the Church there under Bishop Agapius. In course of the persecutions of Diocletian he was thrown into prison by Urbanus, the governor of Palestine. This took place towards the end of the year 307 A.D., and his confinement lasted till the beginning of the year 309, when he suffered martyrdom by order of Firmilianus, who had succeeded Urbanus in the governorship of the country. During his imprisonment he enjoyed the affectionate attendance of Eusebius, the Church historian, and the tender friendship which subsisted long between the two is well known. It was as a memorial of that intimacy that Eusebius took the surname of Pamphili. Pamphilus appears to have given himself up with great enthusiasm to the promotion of Biblical studies, and is spoken of as the founder of a theological school in which special importance was attached to exposition. He busied himself also with the transcription and dissemination of the Scriptures and other writings, such as those of Origen, of whom he was a devoted follower. At Cæsareia he established a great public library,¹³⁴⁴ consisting mainly of ecclesiastical writers; and among the treasures of that library are mentioned the *Tetrapla* and *Hexapla* of Origen, from which, with the help of Eusebius, he produced a new and revised edition of the Septuagint. There is a statement in Jerome¹³⁴⁵ to the effect that, though he was so great a student of the writings of others, Pamphilus, through an excess of modesty, wrote no work of his own, with exception of some letters to his friends.¹³⁴⁶ But there is a work

¹³⁴² The text is—*Commendans ei occasionem Meletius, separavit eos, &c.*; on which see especially Neander, iii. p. 311 (Bohn).

¹³⁴³ This epistle is given elsewhere. [This volume, *infra*.]

¹³⁴⁴ [Another glorious product of the school of Alexandria.]

¹³⁴⁵ *Απολ. χοντρ. Ρυφ.*, βοοκ ι. νυμ. 9, Ωορκσ, ιι. π. 465.

¹³⁴⁶ *Proprii operis nihil omnino scripsit, exceptis epistolis quas ad amicos forte mittebat; in tantum se humilitate dejecerat.*