



## A FEW MORE LETTERS OF ISIDORE OF PELUSIUM – 102-116

Ten years ago I attempted to get English translations made of letters of Isidore of Pelusium. Each attempt failed for one reason or another. This translation of letters 102-116 was made by Clive Sweeting in 2010, but never received a final revision, and was never published. This seems a pity, so I post it here.

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LETTER 102 – To Timothy the Reader. Against the Theopaschites and those who affirm one nature in Christ.

Just as sailors hide the hook with bait and thus catch unsuspecting fish, even so wicked allies of heresies, covering their evil designs with fair words, fatally ensnare the more simple-minded[1]. With all care therefore guard your heart lest in any respect you accept Christ's nature after the Incarnation as an appearance[2]. For assent to one nature involves a denial of the other –(for) either the divine nature is subject to change or our (humanity) is diminished. This is the Charybdis of Manes, by means of which he strove to lead (us) all to Gehenna.

LETTER 103 – To the Same. Why Our Lord after His Resurrection questioned Peter three times about love.

Our Lord's threefold questioning of Peter about love is not a reason to suspect ignorance on the part of the Master (let certain persons not think amiss in this way), but the good Healer expelled the threefold denial by means of the threefold assent.

LETTER 104 – To Leontios. On those who unworthy aspirations touch on ordination as a bishop.

It does not for just anyone to set his sights on a bishopric, my dear fellow, but to those whose lives are governed by the laws of Paul[3]. If then you perceive that degree of scrupulousness within yourself, proceed cheerfully towards the ascent to such an elevated position, but if you do not possess this (quality), until you acquire it, do not touch that which is untouchable[4]. Beware of approaching the fire which consumes matter.[5]

LETTER 105 – To Eutonios the Deacon. Why John called the Jews generations of vipers[6].

John called the Jews "generations of vipers" as being more wicked than the offspring of wicked parents. For it is recounted that this wild species[7] devours the maternal womb when they are hatched. Since then they abandoned God who gave them birth and they mortified all the grace given to them through failing to make use of it, he quite reasonably likens them to those poisonous creatures, who negate their benefactions through ingratitude, or to put it otherwise devour them.

LETTER 106 – To Timothy the Reader. On the saying, "Do not make my Father's house a house of trade"[8].

You will need to reply to the searching enquirer. For he speaks, it is said, to the ears of those who hear.[9] Also "He who has ears to hear, let him hear". Our Lord said, "Do not

make my Father's house a house of trade" to the sellers of doves, but with the priests who sell off the gifts of the Holy Spirit in mind. Since the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, this is an insult to those who trade in God. As for "Take these away from here", he means that there is no longer any need for blood (sacrifices); for I grant bloodless forgiveness of sins; from now on I wish the Spirit alone to make propitiation. The law of flesh is fulfilled, let the law of the Spirit prevail, and that of salvation commence.

LETTER 107- To the Same. On the harmony of the Testaments.

The Son of God introduced no novelty of beliefs, dear friend, into the Law and the Prophets, but placed a term to those things which had been revealed of old concerning Him. If you open[10] the Old Testament with the utmost attentiveness, you will find the whole of the New Testament announced therein. For those then who rely on the Law and consider the way of the Gospel strange, from the words of the Law He clarifies the truth of the beliefs (communicated by) grace. Thus they will (come to) see the intrinsic harmony of both Testaments.

LETTER 108 - To Prohairesios the scholasticos[11]? On the living Word.

You have in your possession, I am informed, a collection of discourses which delight the ear, but which do not nourish the soul. You are in need of the Living Word, which he who lacks is a (mere) sounding brass [12]. If then you acquire this, it is a sweet-sounding instrument for God and well - tuned for men.

LETTER 109 - To the monk Marathonios. Against the Macedonians or Spirit-Contesters.

If our God and Saviour after becoming Incarnate transmitted the Most Holy Spirit, counted as completing the Holy Trinity and by His invocation in Holy Baptism as freeing from sins, but on the Sacramental Table revealing ordinary bread to be His own Body in Taking Flesh, how is it then that you teach, you crackbrained fellow, that (the Spirit) is made or created or belongs to subject nature and is not parent to and of the same substance as the royal nature? For if subject, let it not be counted with the Master. And if it is a creature, let it not be compounded with the Creator. But it is united and counted together, since an exact exponent of such belief must believe Christ, when He teaches infallibly concerning His own substance, even if you do not accept it, as one who would be wiser and boasts of knowing heavenly (realities) better than God or who rather prates insolently against God.

LETTER 110 - To the monk Crato. That he who has promised spiritual effort, must willingly embrace all its difficulties.

He who wishes to undertake spiritual effort and desires salvation readily embraces all its difficulties, whatever and how many they are. He who thinks he acts in a way contrary to his dignity in performing spiritual effort or in the acts of service it involves is endued with exterior pride, which it is not possible to discard - unless he keeps in mind his body, from where it has come into existence and where again it is dissolved.[13]

LETTER 111 - To Zosimos the Priest. Concerning one ordained by means of money payment.

You have received the priesthood unholily, O unholy one, having stolen a heavenly article by means of payment, a second Caiaphas, receiving that of which one may not speak by means of silver. But there a hope exists that you will be changed towards goodness. For I do not wish to speak against you.

LETTER 112 - To Bishop Eusebios. Whatever we say we priests should do.

In church you teach with fair words, oh but it were rather so in act. For you resemble someone throwing stones into the air and aiming[14] at the directness of their fall and (thereby) bringing[15] them down upon himself. For if the refutation of sins is perceived amongst us as denying its words by its acts, not only do we fail to prevent hearers from acting badly, but we also incur mockery teaching one thing yet doing another.

LETTER 113 - To the Same. That he has sold the priesthood for payment.

You are building the church fabric with useless stones, with lawless or rather with your impious resources. For you received the price of priesthood, as one who sells priestly office, and you gave this to Zosimos. The news is thus being spread throughout the entire area, so that both ears of all who hear it are buzzing.

LETTER 114 - To Timothy the Reader.

This is the explanation of the three periods of day and night of Our Lord's entombment. It is written "Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights; so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. He who promised fulfilling the prefiguration (type) of Jonah and who understands it accurately, since He was present with Jonah when he was thrown into the deep, and when he was vomited forth from the depth, fulfilled Jonah unfailingly, dwelling in the tomb as long as Jonah (did) in the whale; If you seek a second figure, this is it: At the sixth hour of Friday the Lord was crucified. From then until the ninth there was darkness; Take this from me to be night. Again from the ninth hour; this is again day. Then there is the Friday night, then the Sabbath. The night of the Sabbath is the morning of Sunday, according to the Evangelist who states "When it dawned on the first day of the week" If you wish to learn a third reason, (it is) as follows. On the Friday the Lord gave up His spirit; this is one day. He passed the whole of the Sabbath in the grave; then there is the night belonging to the Sabbath. When Sunday dawned, He rose from the tomb, and this is day. Since, as you know, from knowing a part the whole is known[16]. For in this way we are accustomed to perform the remembrance of those who die. At whatever hour of the day someone dies, the following day only is omitted, and on the next day from dawn we hold the third day of his (commemoration). You have, I think, the solution to what you were seeking. For if those who fight dishonestly ask for three complete days and nights, reply that, if the emperor was receiving the supplication and petition of those in the mines or in prison and promised to give them release after the third day, and in advance of the set date granted them their freedom, it was rather by his rapidity that he declared the truth (of his intention). The Master, rising more swiftly than He had promised, will appropriately be worshipped by all.

LETTER 115 - To the monk Elias.

"What have you to do with the way to Egypt with a view to drinking Nile[17] water?", the prophet said to the turnabout people, or rather God by means of him. What have you to do with the confusion from which you were separated by God's mighty hand and outstretched arm? How is it that having laid hold on virtue and tasted the summit of philosophy, you revert to wickedness, and do not have in mind the word of Scripture, that "He who turns away from justice towards sin, the Lord will prepare him for the sword. Flee the billow and flee the waves. Christ has rebuked the wind[18], and no experience of storm will engulf you, if you hold fast to Christ, the harbour.[19]

LETTER 116 - To Ausonius[20] the Corrector.

Possessing a wise means of discovering truth, namely the many-shaped device of torments, use fear with regard to judgment, since divine legislation[21] has established you as a fear

for the wicked.

[1] Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, letter 101,7 (Grégoire de Nazianze, *Lettres théologiques, Sources Chrétiennes*, no. 208,38)

[2] With the alteration 'one' (nature) featuring in place of 'appearance' this injunction is specifically ascribed to Isidore by one of his earlier testimonia, See P.T.R. Gray: *Leontius of Jerusalem: Against the Monophysites; Testimonies of the Saints and Aphorismata* (Oxford Early Christian Texts), 2006, 84.

[3] I Tim. 3,2 - 7; Tit. 1, 7 -9

[4] cf. I Sam. 7,1.

[5] cf. Ex. 3,5

[6] Mt. 3,7

[7] Isidore's treatment differs substantially from the *Physiologus*.

[8] Jn. 2,16

[9] Mt. 11,15

[10] lit; unfold

[11] A term for professor of rhetoric.

[12] 1 Cor. 13,1

[13] cf. Gen., 3,19

[14] *diakonti* - perhaps a corruption of a present participle (dative masc. sing.) although LSJ (and Bailly) quote the middle form *diakontizomai*. Alternatively participle. *dioikounti*.

[15] Lit.calling.

[16] *synecdoche*

[17] Following Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1, 39, Hesychius glosses Geon (Gihon, Gen. 2,13) as the Nile.

[18] Lc.8,24

[19] Less frequent among the many navigational metaphors of salvation. cf. Heb.6,19

[20] In this short selection of letters, only Ausonius' existence (not even that of bishop Eusebius) is confirmed in J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, Vol. II, A.D.395-527, but on the evidence alone of a fair number of letters addressed by Isidore to Ausonius or to a slightly varying homonym.

[21] Rom.13,4.

End.

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