

333 **Constantine to Athanasius**

Constantine, Victor, Maximus, Augustus, to the pope Athanasius.

Having read the letters of your wisdom, I felt the inclination to write in return to your fortitude, and to exhort you that you would endeavor to restore the people of God to tranquility and merciful feelings. For in my own mind I hold these things to be of the greatest importance: that we should cultivate truth, and ever keep righteousness in our thoughts, and have pleasure especially in those who walk in the right way of life. But as concerning those who are deserving of all loathing, I mean the most perverse and ungodly Meletians, who have at last crippled themselves by their folly, and are now raising unreasonable commotions by envy, uproar, and tumult, thereby making manifest their own ungodly dispositions, I will say this much. You see that those who they pretended had been slain with the sword, are still among us and in the enjoyment of life. Now what could be a stronger presumption against them, and one so manifestly and clearly tending to their condemnation, as that those whom they declared to have been murdered, are yet in the enjoyment of life, and accordingly will be able to speak for themselves?

But this further accusation was advanced by these same Meletians. They positively affirmed that you, rushing in with lawless violence, had seized upon and broken a cup, which was deposited in the most Holy Place; than which there certainly could not be a more serious charge, nor a more grievous offense, had such a crime actually been perpetrated. But what manner of accusation is this? What is the meaning of this change and variation and difference in the circumstances of it, insomuch that they now transfer this same accusation to another person, a fact which makes it clearer, so to speak, than the light itself, that they designed to lay a plot to your wisdom? After this, who can be willing to follow them, men that have fabricated such charges to the injury of another, seeing too that they are hurrying themselves on to ruin, and are conscious that they are accusing you of false and feigned crimes? Who then, as I said, will follow after them, and thus go headlong in the way of destruction; in that way in which it seems they alone suppose that they have hope of safety and of help? But if they were willing to walk according to a pure conscience, and to be directed by the best wisdom, and to go in the way of a sound mind, they would easily perceive that no help can come to them from divine providence while they are given up to such doings, and tempt their own destruction. I should not call this a harsh judgment of them, but the simple truth.

And finally, I will add that I wish this letter to be read frequently by your wisdom in public, and it may thereby come to the knowledge of all men, and especially reach the ears of those who act in this manner and raise disturbances; for the judgment which is expressed by me according to the dictates of equity is confirmed also by real facts. Therefore, seeing that in such conduct there is so great an offense, let them understand that I have thus judged, and that I have come to this determination; that if they excite any further commotion of this kind, I will myself in person take cognizance of the matter, and not according to the ecclesiastical, but according to the civil law, and so I will in future find them out, because they clearly are robbers, so to speak, not only against human kind, but against the divine doctrine itself. May God ever preserve you, beloved brother!