

On the heresy of simony: Humbert of Moyenmoutier's letter to a Byzantine official

Translation based on J. Ryan, 'Letter of an anonymous French reformer to a Byzantine official in south Italy: de simoniaca heresi (Ms Vat lat. 3830)', *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953), 233-242. Ryan dates the document to 1050-54, and suspects it was written by Humbert of Moyenmoutier. The Latin is at some points difficult to translate precisely; comments and suggestions for improvement are very welcome.

MS: Vatican [Vat. Lat. 3830](#), 17r-19v. The text follows an extract from Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* dealing with the role of money in the church. More research on this manuscript – often mentioned in passing but not yet studied in depth – is required.

Draft translation by Charles West, November 2018

A certain Frankish-born Catholic, to the *kartularios* of the Calabrians, divinely appointed through the majesty of the holy emperor of Constantinople.

I thank God for many things and congratulate you in not a small way. But I am saddened by one stain alone, of a most unfitting and even very wicked crime, which is carried out under your rule, and whose sin, as Truth itself said, is so serious that it will not be forgiven either now or in the future. For to sin against the Son is forgiven, but to sin against the Holy Spirit is not. But so that we might not be swallowed up by desperation, He erased our sins by hanging on the cross, and swore 'As I live, I wish not for the death of the sinner but that he might turn, and live' [Ezekiel 33:11].

But let me say what crime I am talking about. It is said that the simoniacal heresy, which is specifically accused of polluting the purity of the holy church with the most sordid taint of cupidity against the Holy Spirit through venality of the gifts of that Spirit, flies throughout your provinces impudently and securely. Everywhere it rips out the guts of the innocent doves of Christ with its hooked claws, and cannot be fended off by any defence of imperial power. The Church, the bride of Christ, laments with no small grief, seeing her sons, whom she bore in faith to Christ, being led as captives by a predatory heresy. Now they are bound by the hard chains of demons, and hitherto Christians, now they are called simonists. While this is done, the rights of ecclesiastical dignity are sought in ambition and sold off for cash. For no one seeks the dominion of the churches of the saints without ambition, or obtains them without cash.

But so that I do not seem to be saying foolish things, let me bring the authority of Christ, whose sons we rejoice to be, into the centre. For he says about the shepherds 'I am the gate: whoever enter through me will be saved, and will find pasture when he passes through; who enters in any other way is a thief and a robber. The thief comes only to steal, ravage and destroy' [John 10:9-10]. Behold how salvation and protection and nourishment is promised to those entering through Christ. Those entering another way are impugned for theft, robbery, murder and destruction. What could be more suitable or clearer? For there is no one who can read who does not know that Christ is the gate of the church. The shepherd and the sheep enter that way; those climbing in through a different way are the heretics alone. The sheep and the shepherds seek salvation and protection and nourishment; the heretics carry out theft and robbery, murder and destruction, and this because they do not enter in through Christ, but proudly climb up through heresy. Whoever is worthy of ecclesiastical honour is considered not to enter in willingly, but unwillingly. But whoever is unworthy enters in even if pushed back, and offers a reward in seeking the dignity, from which he becomes a heretic [...].¹ And if everyone receives

¹ The ellipsis is for a passage on free will that is difficult to translate: *Quae omnia perfici, aut non perfici, libertas obtinet mundi, qui, dum in maligno positus est, quae sunt malignitate exercet et si gratiam Dei, qua*

what is owed to them by their works, whoever obtains ecclesiastical authority (*dominium*) through the simoniacal heresy will be condemned along with Simon Magus, whom no catholic doubts to be given over to hell.

But so that no one can be excused as innocent, let me explain what the simoniacal heresy is. The simoniacal heresy is to imitate Simon, by offering, giving, or taking money to acquire an ecclesiastical *honor*, or to believe that someone doing this is able to be a priest. So that this [definition] can be more truthfully believed, let us turn to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, in which is it written that Simon Magus, after he accepted baptism, offered money to the Apostle Paul, so that he by placing a hand upon him might transfer a position of ecclesiastical judgement (*censura*) through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Since this was unworthy and impossible, the Apostle at once imposed anathema upon him, because he thought that he could have such an honour by giving money. From this, anyone who tries to do something so nefarious loses the dignity of the name of Christian and is called a simonist. And therefore the holy fathers in the council of Chalcedon cast out from the church by degradation and anathema every person polluting any ecclesiastical ordination with such a terrible leprosy. Therefore the famous pope Gregory, aflame with the great fervour of God, struck this heresy with a divine sword, first at Rome and then in Gaul, and separated it from the holy church with a wall of anathema.

So it is easy to understand that no one remaining in this heresy is a catholic. And if he is not a catholic, then either he is a pagan or a Jew or a heretic. And to be a heretic is nothing except to believe badly. The Catholic church tolerates those in its midst who live badly, as Isidore attests, but exterminates those in its midst who believe badly. The bad belief of the simonists in this is that they trust that they can have the authority (*censura*) of ecclesiastical dignity, given by the Holy Spirit, which is only given to the holy and the humble, with the promise of money. This is absolutely impossible, as God Himself testifies through these prophets: ‘On whom does my Spirit rest except on the humble and meek who fear my word?’ [Isaiah 11:2] [...].²

Let this argument suffice for those who assert that he who acquires in some form an ecclesiastical honour after having paid money is not a heretic. If it is a heresy named after Simon to offer money in seeking the rights of ecclesiastical privilege, it follows that someone who offers it is a heretic. So he who offers money in ambition for ecclesiastical honour is a heretic. And if just offering makes a heretic, what do you think actually giving it does? For Simon, from whom this heresy took its origin, and who was condemned by the apostle for this crime, was accused of only thinking and offering. What more need I say? If the whole set of the Old and New Testament is closely read in diligent leisure, it will be seen that this plague has often been struck with divine vengeance [...].³

So let everyone who understands, and who does not wish to lose the divine grace that has been conceded to mortals, seek divine aid with constant prayers, weeping and lamenting, so that such a cruel prostitute (*meretrix*), who so secretly extinguishes all the work of the Christian name, may be driven off with divine power. This is so that such a dignity (*honor*), Christian in name and deed, may not be defrauded from the worshippers of Christ, bought by cheap and passing ambition. For as St Augustine says, ‘No alms, no good deed, not even martyrdom in the name of Christ will help the heretic, unless before the end of this life he is reintegrated and incorporated into the holy church’.

salvatus est, quae malitiae libertatem expellit. Velle namque et posse facere malum an bonum omnibus hominibus adest. Sed malorum merita evadere et bonorum praemia possidere nonisi ex opere proprio valet quilibet adipisci teste psalmista: et tibi domine misericordia quia tu reddes unicuique iuxta opera sua.

² Ellipsis representing another obscure passage: *Velle manere qui elevari ad terrenum honorem et honorari ab hominibus cupit.*

³ Ellipsis for an obscure passage: *quippe quae solummodo ad superbiam et vanam gloriam et cupiditatem et fucum omnis malignitatis antiqui hostis calliditate mundum perdens inventa est.*

Therefore through the most almighty mercy of the Divinity, I humbly beg the magnificence of Your Excellence that by your vigilant care such an infectious disease may be cast out from the entire province that you rule over, lest the church, blackened by the toxic poison, may be disdained by God; but rather shining in all purity, having neither a stain nor a wrinkle, and having obtained the marriage bed of Christ, it may remain in the yoke of union.⁴

⁴ A rough rendition of *Ecclesia... christi sortita thoro iugi permaneat foedere.*