

**0199-0217 – SS Zephyrinus – Decretalia ad Episcopos Per Siciliam Constitutos**

**The First Epistle  
To All the Bishops of Sicily**

**this file has been downloaded from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf08.html>**

fifty-nine letters and decrees of the twenty oldest popes from Clement to Melchiades,<sup>2691</sup> and the donation of Constantine;<sup>2692</sup> and in the third part, among the decrees of the popes and of the councils from Sylvester to Gregory II., thirty-nine false decrees, and the acts of several unauthentic councils.”<sup>2693</sup>

In regard to the authorship and date of the False Decretals, Dean Milman says: “The author or authors of this most audacious and elaborate of pious frauds are unknown; the date and place of its compilation are driven into such narrow limits that they may be determined within a few years, and within a very circumscribed region. The False Decretals came not from Rome; the time of their arrival at Rome, after they were known beyond the Alps, appears almost certain. In one year Nicholas I. is apparently ignorant of their existence; the next he speaks of them with full knowledge. They contain words manifestly used at the Council of Paris, a.d. 829, consequently are of later date. They were known to the Levite Benedict of Mentz, who composed a supplement to the collection of capitularies by Ansegise, between a.d. 840–847. The city of Mentz is designated with nearly equal certainty as the place in which, if not actually composed, they were first promulgated as the canon law of Christendom.”<sup>2694</sup>



## The Epistles of Zephyrinus.<sup>2695</sup>

### The First Epistle.

---

<sup>2691</sup> [Elucidation I.]

<sup>2692</sup> [Elucidation II.]

<sup>2693</sup> *History of Latin Christianity*, vol. iii. p. 191.

<sup>2694</sup> *History of Latin Christianity*, vol. iii. p. 193. [In the marvellous confusion of vol. ix. of the Edinburgh series, these Decretals are mixed up with genuine works as “Fragments of the Third Century.”]

<sup>2695</sup> The little that is known of Zephyrinus is derived from Eusebius. That historian states that Zephyrinus succeeded Victor in the presidency of the Roman church “about the ninth year of the reign of Severus” (a.d. 201), and that he died in the first year of the reign of Antoninus (Heliogabalus, a.d. 218). He is several times alluded to in the fragments ascribed to Caius, or in connection with them.

The two letters bearing his name are forgeries. They belong to the famous collection of False Decretals forged in the ninth century.

## To All the Bishops of Sicily.

*Of the final decision of the trials of bishops, and graver ecclesiastical cases in the seat of the apostles.*

Zephyrinus, archbishop of the city of Rome, to all the bishops settled in Sicily, in the Lord, greeting.

We ought to be mindful of the grace of God to us, which in His own merciful regard has raised us for this purpose to the summit of priestly honour, that, abiding by His commandments, and appointed in a certain supervision of His priests, we may prohibit things unlawful, and teach those that are to be followed. As night does not extinguish the stars of heaven, so the unrighteousness of the world does not blind the minds of the faithful that hold by the sure support of Scripture. Therefore we ought to consider well and attend carefully to the Scriptures, and the divine precepts which are contained in these Scriptures, in order that we may show ourselves not transgressors, but fulfillers of the law of God.

Now patriarchs and primates, in investigating the case of an accused bishop, should not pronounce a final decision until, supported by the authority of the apostles, they find that the person either confesses himself guilty, or is proved so by witnesses trustworthy and regularly examined, who should not be fewer in number than were those disciples whom the Lord directed to be chosen for the help of the apostles—that is, seventy-two. Detractors also, who are to be rooted out by divine authority, and the advisers of enemies (*auctores inimicorum*), we do not admit in the indictment of bishops or in evidence against them; nor should any one of superior rank be indicted or condemned on the accusations of inferiors. Nor in a doubtful case should a decisive judgment be pronounced; nor should any trial be held valid unless it has been conducted according to order. No one, moreover, should be judged in his absence, because both divine and human laws forbid that. The accusers of those persons should also be free of all suspicion, because the Lord has chosen that His pillars should stand firm, and not be shaken by any one who will. For a sentence should not bind any of them if it is not given by their proper judge, because even the laws of the world ordain that that be done. For any accused bishop may, if it be necessary, choose twelve judges by whom his case may be justly judged. Nor should he be heard or excommunicated or judged until these be chosen by him; and on his being regularly summoned at first to a council of his own bishops, his case should be justly heard by them, and investigated on sound principles. The end of his case, however, should be remitted to the seat of the apostles, that it may be finally decided there. Nor should it be finished, as has been decreed of old by the apostles or their successors, until it is sustained by its authority. To it also all, and especially the oppressed, should appeal and have recourse as to a mother, that they may be nourished by her breasts, defended by her authority, and relieved of their oppressions, because “a mother cannot,” and should not, “forget her son.”<sup>2696</sup> For

---

<sup>2696</sup> Isa. xlix. 15.



the trials of bishops and graver ecclesiastical cases, as the apostles and their holy successors have decreed, are to be finally decided along with other bishops<sup>2697</sup> by the seat of the apostles, and by no other; because, although they may be transferred to other bishops, it was yet to the blessed Apostle Peter these terms were addressed: “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”<sup>2698</sup> And the other privileges which have been granted to this holy seat alone are found embodied both in the constitutions of the apostles<sup>2699</sup> and their successors, and in very many others in harmony with these. For the apostles have prefixed seventy<sup>2700</sup> decrees, together with very many other bishops, and have appointed them to be kept. For to judge rashly of the secrets of another’s heart is sin; and it is unjust to reprove him on suspicion whose works seem not other than good, since God alone is Judge of those things which are unknown to men. He, however, “knoweth the secrets of the heart,”<sup>2701</sup> and not another. For unjust judgments are to be guarded against by all, especially however by the servants of God. “And the servant of the Lord must not strive,”<sup>2702</sup> nor harm any one. For bishops are to be borne by laity and clergy, and masters by servants, in order that, under the exercise of endurance, things temporal may be maintained, and things eternal hoped for. For that increases the worth of virtue, which does not violate the purpose of religion. You should be earnestly intent that none of your brothers be grievously injured or undone. Therefore you ought to succour the oppressed, and deliver them from the hand of their persecutors, in order that with the blessed Job you may say: “The blessing of him that was ready to perish will come upon me, and I consoled the widow’s heart. I put on righteousness, and clothed myself with a robe and a diadem, my judgment. I was eye to the blind, and foot to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not I searched out most carefully. I brake the grinders of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth;”<sup>2703</sup> and so forth. You, therefore, who have been placed in eminence by God, ought with all your power to check and repel those who prepare snares for brethren, or raise seditions and offences against them. For it is easy by word to deceive man, not however God. Therefore you ought to keep these off, and be on your guard against them, until such darkness is done away utterly, and the morning

---

<sup>2697</sup> The word “bishops” is omitted in ms.

<sup>2698</sup> Matt. xvi. 19.

<sup>2699</sup> This means the seventy-third apostolic canon, in which it is ordained that episcopal cases be not decided but by superior bishops, councils, or the Roman pontiff. [See note 1, p. 612.]

<sup>2700</sup> Another reading has sixty, and another fifty. Whatever be the reading, it is true that by these decrees are meant the apostolic canons: and although their number was only fifty, yet, because sometimes several decrees are comprehended in one canon, there would be no inconsistency between the number of sixty or seventy apostolic decrees and the number of fifty apostolic canons (Sev. Bin.).

<sup>2701</sup> Ps. xliv. 21.

<sup>2702</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 24.

<sup>2703</sup> Job xxix. 13–17, according to the Vulgate version.

star shines upon them, and gladness arises, most holy brethren. Given on the 20th September, in the consulship of the most illustrious Saturninus and Gallicanus.<sup>2704</sup>

---

## The Second Epistle.

To the Bishops of the Province of Egypt.

Zephyrinus, archbishop of the city of Rome, to the most beloved brethren who serve the Lord in Egypt.

So great trust have we received from the Lord, the Founder of this holy seat and of the apostolic church, and from the blessed Peter, chief of the apostles, that we may labour with unwearied affection<sup>2705</sup> for the universal Church which has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and aid all who serve the Lord, and give help to all who live piously by apostolic authority. All who will live<sup>2706</sup> piously in Christ must needs endure reproaches from the impious and aliens, and be despised as fools and madmen, that they may be made better and purer who lose the good things of time that they may gain those of eternity. But the contempt and ridicule of those who afflict and scorn them will be cast back upon themselves, when their abundance shall change to want, and their pride to confusion.

### I.

#### *On the Spoliation or Expulsion of certain Bishops.*

It has been reported at the seat of the apostles by your delegates,<sup>2707</sup> that certain of our brethren, bishops to wit, are being expelled from their churches and seats, and deprived of their goods, and summoned, thus destitute and spoiled, to trial; a thing which is void of all reason, since the constitutions of the apostles and their successors, and the statutes of emperors, and the regulations

---

<sup>2704</sup> Or, Gallus. But Saturninus and Gallus were consuls in the year 198, while Victor was yet alive.

<sup>2705</sup> Or, diligence. [See note 2, p. 612.]

<sup>2706</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 24.

<sup>2707</sup> By these *apocrisarii* are meant the deputies of the bishops, and their *locum tenentes*, as it were, who manage the affairs of the Church, hear the cases of individuals, and refer them to the bishops. They are therefore called *apocrisarii*, i.e., responders, from ἀποκρίνομαι, to respond. Mention is made of them in Justinian Novell., *Quomodo oporteat Episcopos*, chap. xii. Albericus understands by them the legates of the Pope. [Note 3.]