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A Correction of the Text of Athanasius of Alexandria's *Epistula ad monachos* (CPG 2108)*

Abstract: A reading of the direct tradition of Athanasius' *Epistula ad monachos*, *συνερχομένους*, must be corrected into *συνευχομένους*, which is the reading both of the *Florilegium Coislinianum* (9th–10th c.) and of an old Latin translation of the epistle. In order to justify this correction, the *Epistula* and its textual tradition is analysed and briefly set in its historical context.

This article aims to show that a particular reading of Athanasius' *Epistula ad monachos* must be corrected with the help of a 9th or 10th c. Byzantine anthology, the *Florilegium Coislinianum* (*FC*).¹ Where Montfaucon, the first editor of this epistle, prints *συνερχομένους*,² the *FC* has *συνευχομένους*; this last reading also coincides with an old Latin translation.³ My goal is, first of all, to report this fact, for the reading of the *FC* was hitherto unknown; secondly, I purport to justify why this reading is to be preferred. In passing, a number of other questions concerning some pieces of the indirect tradition will be discussed briefly. This may seem to be too long a detour, but it is none the less indispensable for a correct assessment of the relative value of the different readings that must be analysed. Indeed, the reader will soon realise that the textual tradition of this short yet widely circulated letter⁴ is extraordinarily complex. I would also like to underline, incidentally, that the work with which this article deals should not be confused with another epistle, also by Athanasius, which bears the same title (*CPG* 2126).⁵

In what follows, the Latin translation of the *Epistula* will first be considered (1). Secondly, I will examine a Greek inscription at Thebes which also contains part of the epistle (2). After this, I will consider the *FC* in more detail, paying special attention to its textual reliability (3). Finally, some further remarks will be made, and the main points of the present article will be reviewed briefly (4).

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¹ The foundational work on this anthology is M. RICHARD, *Florilèges spirituels grecs*, in: *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, V. Paris 1962, 484–486 (reprinted in: M. RICHARD, *Opera minora*, I. Turnhout–Leuven 1976, n° 1). The bibliography on the *FC* has been steadily growing over the last few years. See for instance: I. DE VOS *et alii*, *L'art de compiler à Byzance: la lettre Γ du Florilège Coislin*. *Byz* 78 (2008) 159–223; IDEM, *La lettre B du Florilège Coislin: editio princeps*. *Byz* 80 (2010) 72–120; IDEM, *La continuation de l'exploration du Florilegium Coislinianum: la lettre èta*. *Byz* 81 (2011) 74–126. For the edition of letter A see below, n. 22.

² B. DE MONTEFAUCON, *Collectio nova Patrum et Scriptorum Graecorum*, II. Parisiis 1707. This edition was based on manuscripts of the Laurentian Library and on the Reg. 2423 (now Par. gr. 201) According to Montfaucon, the manuscript dates to the 10th c. According to Omont, to the 11th c.; see H. OMONT, *Inventaire sommaire des manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque nationale et des autres bibliothèques de Paris et des départements*, I. Paris 1898, 23. The text has been reprinted in *PG* 26, 1188, 15.

³ *PG* 26, 1187–1188, 6th line of the “*Vetus interpretatio*”.

⁴ Cf. the just remarks of G. DE JERPHANION, *La vraie teneur d'un texte de saint Athanase rétablie par l'épigraphie: l'Epistula ad monachos*. *Recherches de science religieuse* 20 (1930) 529–544, here 534: “Depuis la publication de Migne, l'*Epistula* a été fréquemment citée par les historiens ou les théologiens qui ont eu à s'occuper de Saint Athanase.” Doubtlessly, its intrinsic interest accounts for this and, simultaneously, for the diversity of its indirect tradition, which will be analysed presently.

⁵ *Epistula ad monachos*, edited by H.-G. OPITZ, *Athanasius Werke*, II/1. Die Apologien. Berlin 1940, 181–182. A non-critical edition of the text can be found in *PG* 25, 692–693.

For the convenience of the reader, the Greek text of the *FC* as I have edited it on the basis of all known manuscripts, together with its corresponding part in the old Latin translation as published by Saltet, are included as an appendix at the end of this contribution.

1. THE LATIN TRANSLATION⁶

This ancient version, first published by du Tillet in 1568, contains a number of divergences from the Greek text. Most of them are minor, but two of them are not. I quote Saltet, who wrote extensively on this Latin text:

[...] à deux endroits, la traduction latine contient une phrase qui manque dans le texte grec. [...] Une question se pose : le texte primitif comprenait-il les deux phrases qui se trouvent dans la traduction latine ? Si, oui, il faut admettre que le texte grec actuel est mutilé. Si, non, il s'ensuit que les deux phrases spéciales à la traduction latine sont des interpolations. Cette seconde hypothèse est seule acceptable.⁷

According to Saltet, the reason for this interpolation would have been to strengthen the opinions of the Luciferian sect: “Dans ses interpolations, en mentionnant, à deux reprises, la preuve scripturaire, il donnait un caractère dogmatique à la lettre, toute de circonstance, écrite par saint Athanase.”⁸ Finally, Saltet closes the circle with a mild *petitio principii*:

Ces constatations vérifient notre première conjecture que le *Vaticanus* 133 représente un dossier d'origine luciférienne. L'archétype de ce manuscrit remonte bien au IV^e siècle. [...] L'auteur luciférien, d'origine latine, qui a constitué l'archétype du *Vaticanus* 133 a traduit l'*Epistola Athanasii* [= our *Epistula ad monachos*] et l'a interpolée.⁹

Saltet's argument, which is of some historical importance, may need further clarification. His contentions, though related, are very different in their implications. His main hypotheses are four. I present them in no particular order: (1) the extra phrases in the Latin version are interpolations; (2) they are *interested* interpolations, with a dogmatic intention; (3) the interpolator was a Luciferian; (4) he was Latin (*dubitanter*).

The first hypothesis needs a somewhat detailed discussion, and it will be tackled toward the end of this article, when other pieces of relevant information have also been presented.¹⁰ I begin, therefore, with the second and third hypotheses, which require shorter discussions. First of all, it must be remarked that the supplementary phrases of the Latin translation¹¹ are not quite as useful to the Luciferian sect as Saltet seems to believe. They do not alter the original formulation of Athanasius on any fundamental point. Rather, they amplify some aspects that had only been mentioned *en passant*, adding a biblical parallel (in the first addition); or they state that many more citations from the Bible could be adduced to justify the point in question (in the second addition). By consulting the Latin

⁶ For a more detailed account of the manuscript where this translation, along with other works related to Lucifer of Cagliari, is preserved, see DE JERPHANION, *Vraie teneur* 529–530. Also useful is L. SALTET, *Fraudes littéraires des schismatiques lucifériens aux IV^e et V^e siècles*. *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* (1906) 300–326, esp. 301–305. The manuscript in question is Reg. lat. 133 (9th–10th c.)

⁷ SALTET, *Fraudes* 302–303. The two interpolations can be found in the Appendix at the end of the present article: they are the sections in italics in the Latin text.

⁸ SALTET, *Fraudes* 304.

⁹ SALTET, *Fraudes* 304–305. This scholar considers later the possibility that there were two Luciferians, one who interpolated the original epistle by Athanasius, and a second that composed the compilation of the Reg. lat. 133. This is, however, even more far-fetched, and there is no need whatsoever to believe that, even if we admit we are in the presence of interpolations, this interpolation is due to any Luciferian.

¹⁰ See below, § 3, *in fine*. In what follows, I may call the supplementary words “additions” or even “interpolations.” The reason why I believe they are indeed interpolations will be found below.

¹¹ And of the Greek inscription, which, as we will see below in § 2, contained at least one of these supposed “interpolations.”

translation in the Appendix below, the reader can see for him or herself that these additions imply no blatant theological bias. All in all, the two added phrases are absolutely insufficient to postulate an interested work of interpolation on the part of *any* sect, let alone of the Luciferians specifically. They could be ascribed, for instance, to a scribe who wanted to amplify rhetorically. The two added phrases *may* be interpolations, but there is no reason to believe they were produced with a goal of diffusing theological propaganda. As Saltet himself states, Luciferians were intransigent Catholics unwilling to forgive the members of the clergy who, despite refusing it now, had once admitted the Arian heresy.¹² In this, the Luciferians acted contrary to the decisions of the Council of Alexandria (362), where it was established that “repented” Arians should be accepted as orthodox Catholics. Yet the additions in the Latin translation in no way imply that former Arians should be excluded; they do not fortify the Luciferian cause at all. This is why the postulation of an interested interpolation can safely be dismissed.

As for Saltet's fourth hypothesis, that the “interpolator” might have been a Latin, it can simply be proven wrong because later on it was shown that the “interpolation,” if it really was one, was already to be found in a Greek epigraphical witness (see § 2) and, consequently, it cannot be attributed to any Latin writer. For this, we must turn to a Greek inscription found at Thebes.

2. THE THEBAN INSCRIPTION

Between 1912 and 1914, archaeologists from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City found a Greek painted inscription in the monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, long thought to have been lost, of the *Epistula ad monachos*.¹³ The painted inscription seems to date to the 7th c. It evidently represents an independent branch of the tradition. The history of the discovery does not interest us here. It must be noted, however, that the inscription might be very unfaithful,¹⁴ and that its state is extremely fragmentary, so that in some passages it is not certain whether or not it once contained a given word or phrase. It is sure, however, as the reconstruction of the text done by de Jerphanion shows (240–241), that this inscription did contain what, according to Saltet, was the second “interpolation” in the ancient Latin translation, from *formam huiusmodi doctrinae* to *confidens quia* (the words before these are missing in the inscription). As we have seen, this dispels what I have called the fourth of Saltet's hypotheses: the added phrase was not due to a Latin interpolator, for it already existed in a Greek redaction of the text. We have already discussed why it is not necessary to suppose, either, that the interpolator – if indeed there was one – was a Luciferian. De Jerphanion's conclusion is categorical: “[...] c'est la vieille version latine qui a conservé la teneur authentique. Elle n'est pas interpolée. Au contraire, la recension grecque est abrégée.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, he does not discuss Saltet's arguments, even though, obviously enough, the interpolation could have been present in the (hypothetical) common model of the Theban inscription and the Latin translation: the fact that they coincide in a given point does not prove *per se* that theirs is the authentic text.

¹² SALTET, *Fraudes* 300.

¹³ DE JERPHANION, *Vraie teneur* 535–539. It should be noted that this scholar does not seem to be aware of the existence of Saltet's article. See also W. E. CRUM – H. G. EVELYN WHITE, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes. Part II, Coptic Ostraca and Papyri / Greek Ostraca and Papyri*. New York 1926, 306–307, 126 (reconstruction of the Greek text) and 383 (illustrations of the extant fragments). A useful bibliography is appended on 306. For a recent article on this monastery, with updated bibliography, see C. THIRARD, *Le monastère d'Épiphanie à Thèbes: nouvelle interprétation chronologique*, in: *Études coptes IX. Onzième journée d'études*, ed. A. Boud'hors – J. Gascou – D. Vaillancourt. Paris 2006.

¹⁴ DE JERPHANION, *Vraie teneur* 540: “il semble que l'auteur de l'inscription ait écrit de mémoire. En un point [...], il résume et ne garde que le sens de ce qui semble avoir été la leçon authentique. Ailleurs [...], il a remplacé par un mot usuel un terme scripturaire et théologique.”

¹⁵ DE JERPHANION, *Vraie teneur* 539.

3. THE FLORILEGIUM COISLINIANUM (*FC*)

The picture is already quite complex. Now, to the direct Greek tradition, an ancient Latin translation and a Theban inscription, a fourth element must be added, and it is precisely when dealing with it that this article has any claim of presenting something hitherto unknown. This fourth element is the *FC*, in which about half of the *Epistula ad monachos* (34 lines in the *PG*) is preserved. This is not the place to describe, even succinctly, this Byzantine compilation called *Florilegium Coislinianum (FC)* by M. Richard in his epoch-making article on Greek spiritual florilegia.¹⁶ Suffice it to say that its excerpts are usually *verbatim* quotations from the primary source, with almost no paraphrasing. In what follows, I will discuss almost exclusively the part of the letter preserved in the *FC* (see the Appendix below).

In the *FC*, the epistle begins *in medias res*, as the tenth excerpt of a chapter (35th of letter Alpha of the *FC*) entitled Περὶ ἀνδρῶν ἀσεβῶν καὶ περὶ αἰρετικῶν, ὅτι δεῖ χωρίζεσθαι ἀπ' αὐτῶν. This is why the reader of the *FC*, when confronted with this epistle, has no way to know Athanasius is referring to the Arians until about half way through it, where the name of the heretics is mentioned for the first time – whereas in the full epistle they are mentioned from the beginning. This procedure may be called “typical” of the anthology as a whole; on a chapter on heretics, a letter concerning a particular kind of heterodoxy is quoted, yet not in full, for the first lines of it are not especially relevant. With this omission, also the reference to Arianism goes missing, but this is not a problem since the value of the epistle, so many years after its original socio-cultural context, is the useful advice it gives to repel *any* kind of heretics. Nevertheless, Arians do get mentioned afterwards, and their name is kept, because, on the one hand, they might still be recognized as a model of heretics – even though they do not pose a real threat any longer in the time of the *FC* –, and because, on the other hand, the compiler only rarely modifies the text he is quoting, as we have already observed.

I have anticipated that the direct tradition and the *FC* differ in one reading only: where the first reads συνερχομένους,¹⁷ the latter has συνευχομένους. This is also the reading of the ancient Latin translation, which reads *cum eis pariter orare*.¹⁸ The Theban inscription is unfortunately illegible in this passage. Is συνευχομένους the authentic reading? One would be tempted to think so. First of all, it is confirmed by the Latin translation, which is very old, and possibly even older than the hyparchetype of the Greek direct tradition. Obviously enough, this particular reading must have been present in the exemplar from which the translation was performed.¹⁹ On internal grounds, this reading also seems better; συνερχομένους is too vague to be satisfying. It will not be superfluous to add that, as can easily be gathered, συνευχομένους also seems the *lectio difficilior*, since συνέρχομαι is a much more common verb than συνεύχομαι. It must be added, however, that the idea of “praying together” was already conveyed in the same letter: μετ' αὐτῶν εὐχόμενοι (*PG* 26, col. 1188, 8); *pariter orant* (Latin version); ΣΥΝΕΥ[χομενοι] (the Theban inscription; the missing part of the word can be restored with relative certainty). In as circumstantial a letter as this, a *uariatio* between συνεύχομαι (or μετ' αὐτῶν εὐχομαι) and συνέρχομαι can hardly be postulated – though, in this regard, *this* would constitute the *lectio difficilior*. Praying together with the heretics was the problematic point, which included both an act of volition on the part of the subject, and the performance of a religious ceremony.

¹⁶ M. RICHARD, *Florilèges spirituels grecs*; see above, n. 1.

¹⁷ *PG* 26, 1188, 15.

¹⁸ About the general unreliability of the Latin translation, which should not be taken to mean that its individual readings are always wrong, see below, § 4.

¹⁹ Note that even if the Latin letter had been interpolated, as Saltet thought, this particular point would not have been called into question, for the difference between the ρ and the υ would not have been beneficial – or prejudicial – to any sect.

Was the tradition of the *FC* independent from the textual branch to which all the manuscripts of the Greek tradition belong? The answer must be yes, if *συνευχομένου* is indeed the authentic reading. Provided this – and if Montfaucon's edition is to be trusted – all of the manuscripts of the direct tradition must have had the (apparently) wrong *συνερχομένου*.

Finally, a word must be said about the words present in the Latin translation but not in the Greek direct tradition. As we have already seen, the second of them is also to be found in the Theban inscription, yet none is present in the *FC*. Are they indeed interpolations, or is the Greek text mutilated, including the common model that the direct tradition and the *FC* would then necessarily have? It can be argued that Saltet's claim about the two long added groups of words being interpolations is exceedingly convincing; nevertheless, its conclusion that the interpolations are due to a theological falsification must be strongly rejected. It must also be remembered that the fact that one of the missing phrases is present in the inscription at Thebes does not prove *per se* they are not interpolated. The general impression that they are indeed interpolations is reinforced by small amplifications to which no sufficient attention has been paid. To name only one of them, instead of *καθαρὰν τὴν πίστιν* (see below in the last paragraph of the Appendix), the Latin translation has *puram sinceramque fidem*.²⁰ It is much easier to explain why the simple adjective would have been duplicated by a quasi-synonymous word than vice versa. Incidentally, this case shows how little the interpolations had to do with theological matters, but were rather of a purely rhetoric nature. This conviction may help decide on other occasions, where both possibilities are strictly equivalent on philological grounds. A perfect example is the one which, in another of its implications, has been discussed above; whereas the Greek text reads *μετ' αὐτῶν συνευχομένου καὶ κοινωνούντας*, the Latin favours *communicare cum talibus uel cum eis pariter orare*. There is no theological reason why such a change should be made. The text as printed by Montfaucon – except for the genuine *συνευχομένου* preserved in the *FC* – has to be defended because of (1) the unreliability of the Latin translation, and (2) the reinforcement of an independent witness, namely the *FC*.²¹

4. FINAL REMARKS

To conclude, I would like to underscore that the general unreliability of the Latin translation – or its Greek model, on which the Theban inscription was also based – does not imply that its divergent readings are consistently wrong. Indeed, where the Latin text does not deliberately amplify or rearrange, there is no reason to suspect that it or its Greek model is mistaken. In the case analysed above, there is no reason why *συνερχομένου* should have been turned into *συνευχομένου*. Consequently, the Greek equivalent of *cum eis pariter orare* must actually be the correct reading. However, had the *FC* not existed, perhaps it would have been too adventurous to accept the reading of the Latin translation, unsupported by any independent evidence. Finally, I might be accused of incurring a vicious circle: the *FC* would prove that the Latin translation was right, whereas the Latin translation, in turn, would prove that the *FC* had the correct reading. I believe that this would be a mirage. The reading of the *FC* also should have been accepted even if the Latin translation had not survived. Yet the fact

²⁰ In DE JEPHARNION'S reconstruction, the inscription of Thebes had *καθαρά[ν καὶ ἀκεραῖον]*, which further proves that the interpolation was already present in the Greek original before its being translated into Latin.

²¹ DE JERPHANION, *Vraie teneur* 540–541, blindly trusting the Latin translation, restored the Greek inscription as follows: *[κοινωνούντας ἢ συ]ν[ευχομένου]*. For the reasons stated above, this solution is not acceptable, and the order both of the direct tradition and the *FC* must be followed. This author was convinced that whenever the Latin translation and the inscription coincided, this must be the authentic reading. This further convinced him that when the Latin translation did not agree with the direct tradition, there was a strong possibility that the translation was right (since he thought to have already proven that the direct tradition was at fault in numerous occasions).

that the *FC* did survive, and had that reading – which cannot be suspected of being a product of the fantasy of a fanciful interpolator – actually proves that the Latin translation may be relied upon at a local level. Conversely, the latter might fortify the reading of the *FC*, but only in cases such as this, wherein the translation is not suspected of having altered the original text.

In the case dealt with by this article, the first conviction over why *συνευχουμένου* is to be preferred was reached while comparing the text of the *FC* with the Latin translation. Later on, this translation was put to closer scrutiny, where many of its shortcomings become apparent. Yet these shortcomings do not disprove the sustainability of the reading of the *FC*, which is, of course, absolutely autonomous. Once this certainty is reached, the fact that the readings of the *FC* and the Latin translation coincide only adds to this basic core – not because each of them proves that the other is right, but because each reflects, in its independent context, an independent historical reality.

To sum up, the goal of this article has been to deal with the set of variant readings *συνευχουμένου* / *συνερχομένου* in Athanasius' *Epistula*, and to show that the former is to be preferred, even if the latter is preserved by the direct tradition. In this particular instance, the Latin translation kept the genuine reading, together with a fine representative of the indirect tradition, namely the *FC*, which – just as it did here – has proven useful to editors of Byzantine texts on many other occasions. The Greek direct tradition should be emended accordingly. In passing, an attempt has been made to demonstrate that the added phrases of the Latin translation – and, to some extent, the inscription at Thebes – are rhetorically motivated interpolations.

APPENDIX: THE GREEK TEXT OF THE *EPISTULA* AS PRESERVED IN THE *FC*, TOGETHER WITH THE
CORRESPONDING PART OF THE OLD LATIN TRANSLATION

The texts presented below are merely intended to allow the reader to obtain a clearer picture of the subjects discussed in the body of the article. Note that a full critical edition of the Greek fragment is not necessary because it coincides with the already-edited text in everything but one reading, *συνευχουμένου*, already sufficiently discussed above.²² Neither is it necessary to present the full text of the Greek epistle or of the Latin translation because the relevant passages are all to be found in the part also preserved by the *FC*. The passages in italics in the Latin text are those not to be found in the Greek direct tradition or in the *FC*; however, some of them are preserved in the inscription at Thebes, as has already been detailed.

²² The whole of letter Alpha, which also comprises this fragment, will be published as a volume in the *Series Graeca* of *Corpus Christianorum* (ed. FERNÁNDEZ: forthcoming in 2013.) There, the interested reader may find all the variant readings of the different manuscripts, which, in this case, are not significant.

Ἰαθανασίου Ἰαλεξανδρείας
Ἰεκ τῆς πρὸς μονάζοντας ἐπιστολῆς

ἸΌταν γάρ τινες ὑμᾶς τοὺς ἐν Χριστῷ πιστοὺς θεωρήσαντες μετ' αὐτῶν συνευχομένους καὶ κοινωνοῦντας, πάντως ὑπονοήσαντες ἀδιάφορον εἶναι τὸ τοιοῦτον, εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀσεβείας ἐμπεσοῦνται βόρβορον. ἸἮν' οὖν μὴ τοῦτο γένηται, θελήσατε, ἀγαπητοί, τοὺς μὲν φανερώς φρονοῦντας τὰ τῆς ἀσεβείας ἀποστρέφεσθαι, τοὺς δὲ νομίζοντας τὰ ἸΑρείου μὴ φρονεῖν, κοινωνοῦντας δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἀσεβῶν φυλάττεσθαι· καὶ μάλιστα ὦν τὸ φρόνημα ἀποστρεφόμεθα, τοῦτους ἀπὸ τῆς κοινωνίας προσήκει φεύγειν.

Εἰ δὲ τις προσποιεῖται μὲν ὁμολογεῖν ὀρθὴν πίστιν, φαίνεται δὲ κοινωνῶν ἐκείνοις, τὸν τοιοῦτον προτρέψασθε ἀπέχεσθαι τῆς τοιαύτης συνηθείας· καὶ ἐὰν μὲν ἐπαγγέλληται, ἔχετε τὸν τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀδελφόν, ἐὰν δὲ φιλονείκως ἐπιμένῃ, τὸν τοιοῦτον παραιτεῖσθε.

Οὔτω γάρ διατελοῦντες, καθαρὰν τὴν πίστιν διατηρήσετε, κἀκεῖνοι βλέποντες ὑμᾶς, ὠφελήθησονται.

ATHANASIVS SOLITARIAE VITAE
STVDENTIBVS

[...] cum enim quis uos in Christo fideles uiderit communicare cum talibus uel cum eis pariter orare, utique opinantes indiscretum hoc esse incidunt in caenum impietatis. ut ergo nihil tale fiat, sit ue<stra cura, fratres> carissimi, eos quidem qui sapiunt quae sunt impieta<titis Arianae a>uertere, eos autem qui putantur quidem non sapere quae sunt Arii, orant autem cum impiis deuitare, et maxime quia quorum sensus execramur horum etiam communionem conuenit fugere. *si quis itaque uenit ad uos, si quidem adfert secundum beatum Iohannem rectam doctrinam, dicite huic aue et sicuti fratrem hunc talem suscipite*: si quis autem simulat quidem confiteri se rectam fidem, apparet autem communicare illis, huiusmodi hominem hortamini quidem abstinere se a tali consuetudine et si quidem promiserit habetote et hunc quasi fratrem. si uero contentioso animo perseuerauerit, et hunc quoque uitate. *possibile quidem erat mihi etiam per multa extendere epistulam adponenti ex scripturis diuinis formam huiusmodi doctrinae, sed quia prudentes existentes praeuenitis eos qui scribunt et magis abstinentiae intenti idonei estis et alios docere, propterea breuiter tamquam diligens ad diligentes dictaui, confidens quia sic degentes puram sinceramque fidem seruabitis et illi iam uidentes quod non cum eis pariter oratis percipient utilitatem [...].*

