

*THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA*

**THE DEANS  
OF THE  
SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA**

# **POPE PETER OF ALEXANDRIA**

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# 1

## *HIS LIFE*

“Love is strong as death” Song 8:6. Love is neither a verbal action, nor a sentiment, rather is a positive action of self-giving, and self-sacrificing on behalf of the beloved one! Accordingly our father, the blessed Peter who acknowledged God as the true Love, he loved men, suffering many troubles from both the inside and outside church for the sake of the salvation of his people.

St. Peter was tortured because of the persecution that befell his children, first under Diocletian and, later, under Maximin Daia. He suffered death every day for the sake of Christ. His spirit was bitter for the schism of the church that occurred by Melitius of Lycopolis (Asyout). He was in agony because of the heresies, especially of the Arians who denied the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote to the emperor while he was in prison expecting his execution, not to flatter him, but to ask him not to submit to his own thoughts, as he gave himself over to the demons. Finally, when almost all the Alexandrian believers went out to prison to die for their Pope (Archbishop), he gave his life secretly, asking God that his blood would be the last that is shed in Egypt under the Roman rule.

In the “*Encomium*”<sup>1</sup>, attributed to his disciple Pope Alexander of Alexandria, he was likened to the prophets, high-priests, apostles, and the evangelists:

*“O glorious, excellent one, you who were born as a consequence of a vow as was John the Baptist!*

*O, you who were given as a gift from God like the prophet Samuel, being worthy like that one of the gift of prophecy and wondrous revelations from the time of your childhood!*

*O you who were called to the high priesthood like the priest Aaron - or rather (you who) have been exalted above Aaron, for he was (a priest) figuratively, while you are one in truth.*

*O you who were worthy of the gift of healing, like Peter... your namesake, from whom you have inherited the power which he was given of binding and loosing in heaven!*

*O you who, like Paul, have preached, strengthening also the hearts*

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<sup>1</sup>A seventh-century (?) Coptic (Bohairic) manuscript, translated from the text edited by Henri Hyvernat, “*Les Acts des martyrs de l’ Egypte*” (Hildesheim and New York, 1977), 247- 62. Dr. Tim Vivian translated it in his book, “*St. Peter of Alexandria, Bishop and Martyr*” (Philadelphia, 1988), Appendix 4, p. 79.

*of your flock by your catholic letters!*

*O you who, like John the Theologian, have closed the mouths of heretics!*

*O you who, like James the holy apostle, were killed by the sword for Christ, you are likened to him when he willingly went before the Jewish officials, saying to them, "I am the one whom you seek," giving his life for his sheep. You have taken the likeness of this one in everything, laying down your life for your flock by robbing it from them and entrusting it to the sword for them.*

*Come now, let us provide the conclusion, O my faithful children, just as we have heard and seen."*

## **SON OF PRAYER**

On entering the Alexandrian Cathedral to participate in the Apostles Feast (5th of Abeebe, 12th of July); Sophia, the wife of the Alexandrian proto-priest (*protopresbyters*) Theodosius, began to weep. It seems that she came from Alexandrian nobility, for she is mentioned in the *Encomium* that she was "of those who are honored<sup>1</sup>." She could see everybody gathering around the icon of the Apostles, anointing their children with the oil of the candle hanging in front of the icon<sup>2</sup>. She lifted up her heart towards God and sighed in humbleness, asking Him in the prayers of His Apostles to grant her a child that would serve Him all his life, saying:

*"Almighty God, who do all things in abundance, more than the things we ask, who heard his servant Hanna. And gave her Samuel the Prophet whom she in return dedicated him to your holy temple. Listen to Your servant request, give me offspring, and I believe that he will be for you a servant as well.."*

She repeated this prayer three times, and in the fear of God she received the holy communion.

At the same night, while Sophia was asleep, she saw two persons wearing white garments, who said to her: "*Do not be sad! The Lord heard your prayer, and will give you a child who shall be a father of many nations. His name will be as great as Samuel the Prophet, for he is too a son of promise! Thus when you wake up in the morning, go and see the Archbishop Theonas and tell him the story, and he shall pray for you.*"

The woman woke up in joy, and told her husband about the vision, and he asked her to hurry to the Pope.

The Pope blessed her and said, "*Let what heaven told you become*

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<sup>1</sup>Tim Vivian, p.10; *Encomium*, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Kamel Saleh Nakhla: *History of Pope Peter I, July 1947*, p. 6 (in Arabic).

*fulfilled, for God is faithful in His promises. He is Almighty, and His works are wonders in His saints. May it be done just as you have believed. May the Lord Jesus Christ fulfill your request just as He did with (Hanna's), the mother of the prophet Samuel.*" Upon hearing this she went away from him in peace.

On the following Apostles' feast, Sophia gave birth to a baby boy, and informed the Pope who shared the parents' joy and told them: "*Call him 'Peter,' that he may obtain the blessings of the feast's saint (St. Peter)*<sup>1</sup>."

### **IN THE CHURCH'S BOSOM**

Three years later, the parents took their child Peter, whom they nursed in the warmth of their faith, and visited the Pope, and said to him<sup>2</sup>, "*This is the son of your prayers and the fruit of your blessings.*" The Pope bore the child, baptized him, and blessed him and his parents.

Peter grew in stature and favor. At the age of five, his parents sent him to learn religion and ecclesiastics. When he was seven years old, they dedicated him as a gift to the church like the prophet Samuel. And they said to the Pope, "*Here is the child of your prayers; may he always be as a servant of God and Your people like Peter the apostle.*"

And in this way the Pope received Peter as a beloved son. Then he made him a lector (*Oghnostos*) and kept him near, in a tranquil place, so he could learn by heart the Old and New Testaments, and, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit filled the child. He knew how to recite in such a way that everyone came early to church because of the sweetness and spirituality with which he read the lessons.

St. Alexander relates how the young lector had a gift of the exorcism of evil spirits. He said that one day a woman suffering from an unclean spirit came to the church. The spirit cried out in her, "Unless Peter the lector comes and prays, I will not leave." The Pope called him and said to him, "Peter, go and heal the woman." But he wept, saying, "Forgive me, my holy father, I have not yet attained that degree (of perfection); this demon is mocking me."

The Pope said to him, "Listen to me, my son, and do not disobey me." Then St. Peter, in humility of heart, and as one completing an act of obedience, took water, had the Pope bless it with the sign of the holy cross, went out, and threw it on the woman, saying, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, who was crucified to save the

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<sup>1</sup>*History of Patriarchs for Ibn-el (The son of) Mekafaa, Manuscript No. 13 History at the Patrarchate Library, p. 39, 40 (in Arabic). Al-Mayamer, Manuscript No. 40, History at the Patrarchate Library, p. 158 (in Arabic).*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

whole world, and by the prayers of my holy father, come out of her and never be able to come back to her!” And immediately the demon, like a flaming fire, left her, while everyone watched him, and those who were watching glorified God, saying, “Truly, the hand of the Lord is with this child!”

By the age of twelve Peter was ordained a deacon, serving the church in a pious and ascetic spirit. He kept close to the church day and night, devoting his time to his studies and behaving in humbleness.

The whole church loved him, and he was ordained priest at the age of sixteen<sup>1</sup>. From time to time, St. Peter would withdraw himself from priestly duties to study the Holy Bible. Thus, he was qualified to be appointed as the director of the School of Alexandria<sup>2</sup>, and deserved to be called: ‘The excellent doctor’ in Christianity<sup>3</sup>.

### **WITH BISHOP SABELLIUS**

Sabellius was the bishop of Ptolemais<sup>4</sup>, a port that belongs to the “Five Western Cities,” or “*Pentapolis*,” which were wedged between Tripoli and the Egyptian province of Mareotis in the western desert. It is believed that this bishop contributed to the heresy of “*Sabellianism*,” which denies the Three *Hypostaseis* (Persons) of the divine essence. Instead, they considered that the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are only descriptions given to the three roles of the One God, or the three modes of His self-manifestation. For this reason this heresy was also known as “*modalism*,” or in Latin as “*patripassions*,” i.e., passions of the Father, because this doctrine led to the conclusion that the Father was subjected to the sufferings of the cross in the model of the Son. Sabellius came to Alexandria to discuss his idea with the Pope, who selected presbyter Peter for the job. At first the bishop despised the young priest, but as the discussion went on he was conquered distinctly, and it was said that the bishop became seriously ill and died instantaneously, and all his followers were demolished<sup>5</sup>.

Then the Pope sent a decree throughout all Egypt: “May he who says that the Holy Trinity - Father, Son, Holy Spirit - is a single Person be anathema! As for us, we say: The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are indeed three Persons, but they are a single divinity, one essence, one

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>2</sup>*Jurgens; The Faith of The Early Fathers, 1970, P 259.*

<sup>3</sup>*Guettee; Histoire De L'Eglise, Paris et Bruxelles, 1886, t.11, p. 228.*

<sup>4</sup>*Pentapolis means the “ Five Cities.”*

<sup>5</sup>*See H.H. Pope Shenouda III: St.Mark, May 1975, p 44 - 47. Ebn-el-Mekafaa, p. 41, Al-Mayamer, Manuscript No. 40, p. 159*

Lordship, a Trinity in unity<sup>1</sup>.”

## **HIS MIRACLES**

According to the *Encomium* which is attributed to Pope Alexander it is said: “O how many were the gifts of healing which God granted him because of the purity of his body and his soul and his spirit, so that many times he was worthy to see the Son of the living God upon the holy altar, giving (the communion) by the hand of the Pope to those who deserved it.”

Once he saw the Lord’s Hand forbid Pope Theonas from giving Communion to an unrepentant person<sup>2</sup>. The Pope said to the man, “*My son, you cannot receive these fearful mysteries if you have not first been purified from such and such sin. As often, therefore, as the good God, out of his love for men, grants you repentance, purify yourself first before you approach this place, lest you receive great punishment instead of pardon.*” No one saw this wonder revealed except the Pope and St. Peter.

The same gift was granted to him after his ordination as a priest and also as the Archbishop.

Once as the believers were leaving the church, after the service of a feast, they were confronted with a man possessed by an evil spirit, roaring like a lion and throwing stones at them. They hurried back to church in fear and informed the Pope who asked presbyter Peter to exorcise that evil spirit. The priest brought a vessel, filled it with water, and gave it to the Pope to sign it with the cross and blow in it. He then took some of the water and sprinkled it on the face of the sick man, saying, “In the Name of my Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Son of God, who exorcised ‘*legion,*’ and healed the sick, get out of the man, by the prayers of my father St. Theonas the Patriarch, and do not return in him again.” Soon the evil spirit left him, and the man returned to normal and became calm. This is one of the many miracles that God accomplished through this Saint<sup>3</sup>.

There was a man in the city whose hands were crippled (twisted so that he could not straighten them at all). As there was a service, he went to the church and desired to receive the holy mysteries from the hands of the Pope, and because his hands were crippled he opened his mouth to receive them. The Pope said to him, “My son, stretch forth your hands and take for yourself.” Immediately his hands became straight and he stretched them forth and received the holy mysteries, and glorified God.

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<sup>1</sup>*Encomium*

<sup>2</sup>*St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, Alexandria: St. Peter the First (in Arabic).*

<sup>3</sup>*Ebn-el-mekafaa 41; Al-Mayamer, p. 160; Manuscript 608 at the Patriarchate Library (year 1558 A.D) contains the miracles performed by St. Peter the First.*

## ON ST. MARK'S THRONE

When time drew near for the departure of Pope Theonas, the presbyters and the people gathered around their shepherd weeping over him, and saying, "Our father, you are departing, and we shall be left like orphans after you!" The Pope smiled in modesty, and pointed at Peter and said, "That is your father who shall shepherd you after me. Let me tell you something strange that I cannot hide. Once as I was praying the psalms at night, lying down because of my sickness, I asked the Lord to send a good shepherd to take care of His flock, according to His will, during this persecution<sup>1</sup>. The King, Lord of Glory, appeared to me and said, 'Do not be afraid, O gardener of the spiritual Paradise and do not be worried. Hand it over to Peter the Presbyter to water it, and come here to rest with your fathers.'"

Pope Theonas then looked at his disciple Peter, and said, "Be encouraged my son, because God is with you. Take good care of the farm (God's flocks)." And all who were present cried out together, saying. "(*Axious*) Worthy, worthy, worthy, for he is truly worthy of the rank of the Patriarchate."

According to Severus Ebn-al-Maqafaa, the assembled priests approved the choice by the laying of hands. This passage has been cited as an evidence for papal election by the priests of Alexandria up to the election of St. Alexander, whom the bishops chose.

St. Peter wept and knelt before his father, saying, "*I am not worthy and have no strength for such a great work.*" The Pope replied, "It is Christ who commands you. Let no one oppose the One who has chosen you."

The Pope took leave of his children, gave them peace, and lifted his eyes towards heaven and whispered, "Behold! The King of Glory and His saintly angels are coming!." He gave up his last breath on 2nd of Touba in the year 18 of the Coptic calendar (28th of December 301 A.D).

The presbyter Peter was consecrated as the 17th Patriarch of Alexandria, in the presence of members of the clergy and the people on Amsheer 1st, 18 (January 25th, 302 A.D).

He succeeded in inciting his people to be involved in the holy commandments, especially practising charity. He made the poor equal to the rich through their (the Rich's) charity, and the rich differed not at all from the poor in all the good things which pleased the Lord, according to what is written.

## THE DIOCLETIAN PERSECUTION

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<sup>1</sup>Which occurred by Diocletian.

After about 3 years of St. Peter's Patriarchate<sup>1</sup>, a fierce storm of persecution was stirred up by Emperor Diocletian and one of his assistants, Maximin. Calamities befell the believers, many were killed, others fled to the desert, many bishops were imprisoned and churches were destroyed.

Duane W.H. Arnold says, "This most lengthy and serious persecution which the Christian church had endured was initiated by Diocletian in February A.D 303. It was most severe in Africa and the eastern portion of the empire, under Maximian and Constantius (the father of Constantine). Very little was done to promulgate the persecution or, indeed, the other decrees issued by Diocletian<sup>2</sup>. In Egypt, however, the persecution was intense and martyrdom was common. Upon Diocletian's retirement in 305 A.D, the situation became markedly worse with the accession of Galerius and his appointment of Maximin as Caesar over the civil diocese of Oriens which included Egypt and the Palestinian and Syrian littoral. The severity of the persecution in Egypt continued unabated under Maximin apart from a brief interruption in the spring of 311 A.D as Galerius himself was dying. Maximin, however, resumed his efforts against the churches in the east by the autumn of that same year. The persecution in Egypt finally came to an end in 313 A.D after Licinius seized control of the empire in the east<sup>3</sup>."

The first edict of Diocletian was issued in the imperial city of Nicomedia, in 23 February 303 A.D. The second was in the early summer of 303 A.D against the leaders of the churches. The order was given in the early summer of 303 A.D that all the headleaders of the churches should be first committed to prison, then afterwards compelled by every kind of sacrifice devices to sacrifice<sup>4</sup>.

According to the *Encomium* attributed to the Pope Alexander<sup>5</sup>:

[Because of this persecution, therefore, St. Peter fled to Mesopotamia with me (Pope Alexander) and my father, Achillas.

Now, when he had come into a city in order to rest there, the ruler found out (about it) and he sent for us. He asked the Pope, "What is your profession? Why have you come here?" St. Peter said to him, "*I am a general going from place to place, arming soldiers for Christ, my King.*" The ruler said to him, "Where are the provisions which you give to them,

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<sup>1</sup>Eusebius: H.E. 7:32:30.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, London 1981, 11, for other examples of decrees not being promulgated in the West despite Diocletian's issuance of such decrees "in the name of all the emperors" and his speaking "as if legislating for the whole empire."

<sup>3</sup>Duane Wade-Hampton Arnold: *The Early Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, Indiana 1991, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Eusebius: 8:2:4. .

<sup>5</sup>*Encomium*, 83

and the arms of your army? (Where is) your king?" The blessed Archbishop said to him, "*The arms of our army are the holy seal and the baptism of "rebirth," and the provisions that He (God) gives to them now are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit according to what is profitable for men: to one, a word of wisdom; to another, a word of knowledge; to yet another, gifts of healing. When they have finished their struggle, then He gives them the good things of heaven, for he Himself, my King, is in heaven.*"

The ruler of all (the people of) that city said, "Since you have said that your king gives the gift of healing, behold, we will bring to you a blind man. If you open his eyes, we will believe in Christ-all of us." And they brought the blind man. Then St. Peter touched his eyes, saying, "*In the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, see!*" His eyes were opened.

*Oh, how great was the shouting there! Everyone cried out, "One is Christ, the God of the Christians is the only (God)! Give us the seal of Christ! Arm us (as) soldiers for him, the true king, Jesus Christ our Lord!"* And he spent the rest of that day instructing all of them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (On that day) 10,000 souls (were gained in our Lord's flocks).]

Christians were then considered as enemies of the state. Many were jailed - including at Alexandria the bishops Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus, and Phileas, all of whom were later martyred. Some apostasies undoubtedly took place. Many fled, one of them was St. Peter<sup>1</sup>. According to "*The Martyrdom of Saint Peter*," "Peter, avoiding the madness of the persecutors, went as a fugitive from place to place. Hiding himself, he passed most of the time in Mesopotamia, and in like manner concealed himself in Syria or Phoenicia. He continued his wandering for a longer time in Palestine, and then stayed for some time in the islands. In all these places he did not cease from writing by night or day, strengthening not only the clergy but also the laity in the unity of Christ<sup>2</sup>."

Pope Alexander says, "While we were still in that place, Satan raised up yet a little trouble against the church, for there was a certain Melitius, a bishop of Lycopolis - he wished to seize the arch bishopric<sup>3</sup>."

When there was a little peace, St. Peter returned to Alexandria and threw Melitius out.

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<sup>1</sup>W.H.C. Frend: *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, p. 498, and Vivian state that St. Peter fled after the fourth edict, at the beginning of 304. Bardenhewre prefers to place his flight in 303 after the second edict.

<sup>2</sup>W. Telfer: "*St. Peter of Alexandria and Arius*", p. 126; Vivian, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>*Encomium*, 83.

## THE MELITIAN SCHISM

What made this severe persecution unbearable was the inner schism caused by Melitius, the bishop of Lycopolis (Asiout) in Upper-Egypt. According to St. Epiphanius, “Melitius was also thought to be preeminent throughout Egypt and was second only to Peter in the arch bishopric (of Egypt)<sup>1</sup>.”

*The real cause of this schism is still obscure.*

1. Egyptian manuscripts, the Coptic historians and some of the western historians rely on St. Athanasius, who wrote on the subject some fifty years later<sup>2</sup>. He stated that Melitius sacrificed to the idols during the period of persecution to save his life, and when the Pope imposed a punishment on him he disputed. The Pope then assembled a council of bishops in Alexandria, and Melitius was convicted and deposed. Melitius did not try to appeal to another council, nor did he attempt to justify his behavior to the council of bishops, but rather he created a schism and took upon himself, not only to ordain priests, but to consecrate bishops as well.

2. However, the majority of historians rely on the writings of St. Epiphanius<sup>3</sup>, and they reckon that during the year 304 A.D a number of Egyptian bishops including the Pope and Melitius were imprisoned for a period of time. During the time a dispute arose among them on how the church would treat the “lapsed brothers.” On one side Melitius held a vigorous attitude against them. He insisted that they should be banned from the church forever, as traitors or coward soldiers escaped from the battlefield<sup>4</sup>. As for the lapsed clergy they should be replaced by others<sup>5</sup>.

On the other side, the Pope held a milder attitude towards them, and could not tolerate blocking the doors of salvation in front of the thousands forever! The quarrel grew bitter, and according to St. Epiphanius, “*When Archbishop Peter saw that the Melitians opposed his counsel of brotherly love and bore an excessive godly zeal, he himself, by spreading out his himation, that is, his cloak or pallium, set up a curtain dividing their prison and proclaimed through his deacon, “Let those who are of my opinion come forward to me and let those who hold the view of Melitius go to him.” The majority of the bishops and monks and elders and those of other orders sided with Melitius, Only a few altogether went with Archbishop Peter, a few bishops and some others.*” The Pope chose to lose his relation with the

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<sup>1</sup>Advers. Haer. 68:1.

<sup>2</sup>Apol. against Arians 59, 61.

<sup>3</sup>Advers.Haer. 68:1.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce : *The Spreading Flame*, 1970, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup>Schwartz: *Zur Geshichte des Athanasius*, p. 173.

bishop and his followers for a while, and not to lose the salvation of many souls forever. The two groups ceased to talk to each other.

In any case when the Pope fled to Mesopotamia and some bishops were in prison, Melitius went on ordaining clergy in dioceses other than his own in 305 A.D. It resulted that four bishops directed to him the following letter before their martyrdom in prison, accusing him that he had taken liberties in ordaining priests in their dioceses during their absence contrary to the church canons and tradition.

*[Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus and Phileas, to Melitius our beloved and fellow-minister in the Lord, greetings.*

*In simplicity of mind we have heard rumors about you to be unreliable. Visitors have told us of certain attempts, and even completed actions which are strange to the divine orders and rules of the church. These we would not believe because of the daring and rashness involved.*

*But since we have received many visitors recently, and they have certified the truth of these reports, and did not hesitate to verify them as facts, we have been utterly shocked and have no choice but to write this letter to you.*

*We cannot express the disturbance and sadness that have been caused to all of us as a group and as individuals by the report of the ordinations that were carried through by you in parishes wholly unconnected to you.*

*There is a law of our fathers and forefathers, of which you are not ignorant yourself, established according to divine and church's order. For it has been established and settled with due regard to the good pleasure of God and zealous anxiety for better things, that it is not lawful for any bishop to celebrate ordinations in parishes other than his own. That is a law which is exceedingly important and wisely devised, for these reasons:*

*1. The life of the ordinances should be examined with great care.*

*2. In order to stop any confusion or turbulence that may rise. For everyone of us has enough to do in managing his own parish, and in finding with great care and many anxieties suitable ministers among those whom he has lived with, and who have been trained under his hands. But you are neither taking any account of these things, and with no regard for the future, and the law throughout of our blessed fathers and those who have been taken to Christ in succession, nor the honor of our great bishop and father Peter, on whom we all depend in the hope which we have in the Lord Jesus Christ, nor softened by our imprisonment's and trials, and by the disgrace heaped daily upon us, and by the overwhelming pressures that we are all subject to.*

*What chance of excuse have you got for such acts? Perhaps you will*

say “I did this to prevent many from being drawn away with the unbelief of many, or because the flocks were in need and have no pastor with them.”

It is most certain that they are not in such a situation:

1. Because there are many pastors who go about them and in a position to act as visitors.

2. Even if they were neglected to some extent, then the proper way was to arrange for our duties by them. But they knew that they were in no need of ministers, and therefore they did not come to seek them. They knew that if we made due inquiry, our course, embodied in advice to them, was to dismiss the case, or to have everything done which seemed to be expedient; for all was done under correction, and all was considered with well-approved honesty. You, however, have listened to the deceits of certain parties and their vain words, conducting illegitimate actions in the dark. For if those were indeed constraining you to do this, and in their ignorance were doing violence to church orders, you ought to have followed the common rule and have informed us by letter, and in that way what seemed reasonable would have been done.

If some have persuaded you to believe in their story that it was all over with us (a thing which you could not have been ignored, because there were many going to and returning from us who could visit you), even though, I say, this had been the case, yet you ought to have waited for the judgment of the superior father (i.e., Peter of Alexandria), and for his permission to do this. But without giving any concern to these matters, indulging in a different expectation, and indeed denying all respect to us, you have provided certain rulers for the people. For already we have learned too that there have been also divisions, because your unwarrantable exercise of the right of ordination displeased many.

You were not persuaded to delay such procedure of restraining your purpose readily even by the word of the Apostle Paul, the most blessed seer, and the man who put on Christ, who is the Apostle of all of us, for he, in writing to his dearly-beloved son Timothy, says “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins.” And thus he at once shows his own anxious consideration for him, and gives him his example and exhibits the law according to which, with all carefulness and caution, persons are to be chosen for ordination. He speaks with a view to the more distant future. We make this declaration to you that you may study to keep within the safe and salutary limits of the rule<sup>1</sup>.]

Although the language of the letter was strong, it does not appear

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<sup>1</sup>Latin text in Codex Veronensis LX, in Turner: *Ecclesia Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima*, vol.1, p. 634-5; Routh: *Reliquiae Sacrae*, ed 2, IV,p 91 - 3.

that the bishops had any intention of breaking relations with him<sup>1</sup>. The letter would seem to be better understood as a warning which had arisen out of troubled times<sup>2</sup>.

On receiving this letter, Melitius neither replied, nor did he talk it over with the bishops in prison, nor did he meet the blessed Peter. Instead he entered Alexandria<sup>3</sup>. There his ambition to take over the control of the Church of Alexandria was sighted by Arius and Isidore, so they rushed to him. Immediately he ordained two priests; one in prison and the other in the mines<sup>4</sup>, and assumed the Episcopal function in Alexandria in the absence of its canonical bishop.

When blessed Peter heard of these things, he wrote the following letter to the people of Alexandria :

*[Peter, to his beloved brethren, established in the faith of God, greetings.*

*Since I have found out that Melitius' acts are in no way for the common good, for he never responded to the letter of the most holy bishops and martyrs, but rather invaded my parish and assumed so much to himself as to attempt to separate the presbyters and those who had been trusted with visiting the needy from my authority, and giving proof of his desire for preeminence by ordaining several presbyters in prison for himself. Now take careful attention to this and hold no communication with him until I meet him in company with some wise and discreet men, and see what his desire have been. Farewell<sup>5</sup>.]*

Melitius' followers believed that his behavior was of an absolute necessity because of the escape of Pope Peter from his post, and the imprisonment of the majority of the northern bishops<sup>6</sup>.

St. Peter's hashly returned to Alexandria, convened a synod, and excommunicated Melitius<sup>7</sup>. His resistance to Melitius caused a crisis and schism that lasted for a long time, until the times of St. Athanasius.

More fuel was added to the crisis, during the quiet period that followed Diocletian's abdication. The reason for this was the issue of a fourteen canons letter on Easter 306 A.D governing the treatment of the lapsed, published by the Pope in his encyclical letter, which was called

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p.49; F.H. Kettler: *Der melitianische Streit in Agypten, in Zeitschrift fur die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der alteren Kirche*, 35 (1936), p.160.

<sup>2</sup> *Arnold*, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Stevenson: A New Eusebius*, p. 292.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 293.

<sup>6</sup> *Butcher : Story of the Church of Egypt, London 1897, v.1, p. 135.*

<sup>7</sup> *Athanas. Apol. c. Ar. 59.1.*

“Canonical Letter” or “*Epistuala Canonica*.” These canons show sympathy for the fate of the fallen.

As for Melitius, he continued performing his own ordinations of priests and consecrations of bishops<sup>1</sup> in spite of his deposition by an Alexandrian Synod. He found support among the confessors<sup>2</sup>. The number of bishops that followed Melitius reached 28 by 325 A.D, as declared by Pope Athanasius<sup>3</sup>.

Arnold says,

[In any case, following the renewal of the persecution by Maximum and the martyrdom of Bishop Peter on 25 November 311 A.D, disorder reigned in lower Egypt and there appears to have been a vacancy, of disputed length, before the accession of Achillas as bishop of Alexandria. If we give weight to the later reports of Athanasius, the Melitians maintained an active opposition to Achillas during his short episcopate and continued to develop a separate organization throughout Egypt. Their subsequent relations with Alexander after his accession to the see of Alexandria are also problematic as we have only the accounts of Epiphanius and Athanasius to depend upon for information relative to the period<sup>4</sup>.]

After the martyrdom of St. Peter, Melitius and many others were banished and exiled to the mines of Phainos, where the schism remained and even grew among the Christian prisoners until the ultimate release of Melitius under the temporary edict of toleration promulgated by Galerius in 311 A.D.

According to St. Epiphanius ,Melitius and his followers founded their own churches. Those who succeeded Peter, in possession of what was ancient in the church, called theirs the Catholic Church; the Melitians called theirs the Church of Martyrs “or: Witnesses.” Therefore, Melitius himself, as he traveled, ordained many men in Eleutheropolis and in Gaza and in Aelia (Jerusalem). It happened that he spent time in the above-mentioned mines. But afterwards the confessors were freed from the mines, those of Peter’s party - for there were still many - and those of Melitius’s. They did not have fellowship with each other in the mines, nor did they pray together; however, Melitius’ followers never had any importance except that they acted as a background influence in the first stages of the

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<sup>1</sup>Epiphanius, *Haer.* 68:3.

<sup>2</sup>The confessor is that person who was imprisoned or underwent sufferings for the sake of the Christian faith, and was not martyred.

<sup>3</sup>Athans, *Apol.c.Arian* 71; Epiphanius: *Haer.* 68.

<sup>4</sup>Arnold, p. 50.

Arian controversy and a nuisance to Athanasius<sup>1</sup>. They seriously assisted the Arians against St. Athanasius when they accused him of false charges to harm his reputation.

The Melitian schism was brought up at the first Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325 A.D, which attempted to reintegrate the Melitian clergy into the catholic church of Egypt. Decisions taken were published as letters addressed from the council to the bishops of Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis<sup>2</sup>. In these letters they were indulgent with Melitius, for they accepted him as an authorized bishop within the limits of his parish (Lycopolis), but with no authority to ordain or consecrate in the future. As for the priests that were already ordained by him, they were to be re-ordained again, and work under the authority of the bishop of Alexandria. Any Parish that would be in need of a bishop, one of those whom Melitius consecrated would be re-consecrated for that parish. Recommendations were also given that in future, three bishops must be present and share in the consecration of a new bishop<sup>3</sup>.

### **WITH ARIUS**

It seems that Arius had a Libyan origin, and was born about year 270 A.D. Whether or not he ever met or listened to Lucian of Antioch is questionable. However, he copied many of his ideas and followed his tracks, considering him as his master<sup>4</sup>.

Arius was a knowledgeable theologian, ascetic in his temperament, with a finite zeal, determination and an extraordinary ability for preaching<sup>5</sup>.

During the episcopate of St. Peter, he joined Melitius for some time, but after separating from him, he managed to get himself ordained as a deacon by the blessed Peter<sup>6</sup>. Eventually he was ordained as a priest in the church at Baucalia at Alexandria.

The Pope Peter noticed that Arius was repeating some expressions in his sermons, which could give the impression that he denies the divinity of Christ and ignores His equality to the Father. He tried to explain to Arius his doctrinal errors, but the priest who now became popular refused to hear! The Pope then had no choice but to assemble an Alexandrian council to depose him, but Arius continued in spreading his doctrines.

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<sup>1</sup>*Frend: Early Church, p. 147-9.*

<sup>2</sup>*Socrates: H.E.1:9:6.*

<sup>3</sup>*Stevenson : A New Eusebius; Wand : A History of Early Church, p159.*

<sup>4</sup>*Furgens, p. 275.*

<sup>5</sup>*Atya: History of Eastern Christianity.*

<sup>6</sup>*Sozomen: H.E.1:15:2.*

## IN PRISON

St. Peter was captured and sent to prison perhaps for one of the following two reasons:

1. Publishing his first writings against paganism which was taken by the emperor as a personal challenge.

2. The complaint raised to the emperor by Socrates, a nobleman from Antioch.

Socrates was a friend of the martyr Abadir<sup>1</sup>, but denied faith and sacrificed to the idols to please Diocletian. He was asked by his wife to take her to Alexandria to baptize their two sons, but he severely objected claiming that the Emperor would be very upset if he heard about it. At once the woman took her kids and a couple of servants and sailed towards Alexandria. Two days afterwards a heavy cyclone blew up and the mother feared that her sons might drown unbaptized, so she stretched her hands, faced eastwards and prayed:

*[O God, who knows everything before its existence, You know my inner heart, that when I left home, I loved you, my Savior, more than my husband, my wealth and even more than myself and my children! And now we are sinking in the middle of the sea. O Lord, my God, Savior of my body and soul, for the sake of your Holy name, have mercy on my sons who will become orphans! Let them not die unbaptized<sup>2</sup>!]*

After that she wounded her right breast and anointed their foreheads with her blood. Then she immersed them, one after the other in the water, saying: *“I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”* She embraced her children murmuring: *“Now if I die with my sons I shall be in peace.”*

God looked at the mother’s faith and quieted the wind, and the ship reached Alexandria safely after three days (on baptism Sunday).

The woman took her children to the church, and when the Pope bore her sons to baptize them, the water froze. The Pope went on baptizing other children and came back to her kids, but water froze again. The same thing occurred on the third time, so he asked the woman about her story. She told him what happened, and the Pope praised God and said to her, *“Let your heart be strengthened my daughter, and do not be afraid because the Lord is with you. At the moment you wounded your breast, and in faith anointed*

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<sup>1</sup>The son of Waselides of Antioch, who was martyred at Alexandria together with his sister Erani.

<sup>2</sup>Sinaxarium, 24 Tout; Kamel Saleh Nakhla, p. 30.

*your sons with your blood, God, the Incarnate Word who was pierced in His side upon the cross, and water and blood flooded out, He Himself crossed your sons by His divine hand; and when you immersed them in the sea, He Himself baptized them.”*

The Pope prayed for the kids and anointed them with the Chrism (Mayroun). He later wrote a treatise in that respect, saying: “*God have mercy upon the people.*” He gave them Communion and kept them at Alexandria until Easter, then the woman and her sons returned to their home<sup>1</sup>.

Back at home, Socrates related what happened to the emperor accusing his wife of adultery. She was then called by the emperor and he gave orders that her hands be tied at her back and the two kids put on her belly and the three of them be burned. Facing eastward and praying, the three of them received their crowns of martyrdom.

As for the Pope, orders were given to the ruler of Alexandria to arrest the Pope who baptized the two sons. At that time he was outside the city visiting and supporting his children, but eventually he was captured and imprisoned in the year 311 A.D.

### **ARIUS’ ENDEAVORS**

Expecting that St. Peter would be martyred, Arius did his best to obtain his own absolution, in order that he would replace him. He sent some noblemen to the imprisoned Pope to intercede for him, but the Pope said to them, “*Let Arius be excommunicated from the holy Church of God, and be deprived of the glory of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Living Son of God, now and forever!*”

### **HIS VISION**

Pope Peter took his disciples Archellius and Alexander the presbyters, and said to them privately,

*[May the Lord, God of heaven, help me to accomplish my witnesses to His Name. You Archellius the presbyter will replace me in this bishopric and your brother Alexander will take over after you.*

*Do not say that I am unjust because of my behavior towards Arius, for I did not depose him by my own will, but Christ Himself deposed him.*

*Last night, after I finished my prayers and slept, I saw myself as if I were praying in my cell. All of a sudden a youth entered my cell. His face was illuminating like the sun, so that he lightened the whole house. He wore a white garment but it was torn in the middle, and he held its two sides with his hands. A puzzle overwhelmed me and I shouted, “Who tore your garment my Lord?” “Arius did,” He replied. “Do not accept him, nor*

<sup>1</sup>Ebn-el-Mekafaa, p. 42-44; El-Mayammer, No. 40, p.162-166.

*be in communion with him. Today some people will ask you on his behalf, but give him no peace, no absolution and even interdict him more and more. I say that to you and to your disciples Archellius and Alexander who sit on your throne after you.”*

*The vision came to an end by Him informing me that I shall receive the crown of martyrdom.*

*I am sure that the two of you realize how I lived among you in modesty and humbleness all my life, and aware of all the excessive tribulations that befell me from the pagans. You know how I was running away from one place to another, the islands, Phoenicia, cities of Syria and Palestine. However in spite of all that I kept on writing to you secretly and openly and never neglected the flock whom was entrusted to me. Day and night I shepherd them to the best of my ability, and my heart was always feeling for them.*

*You also know that I never forgot Bishops Phileas, Hesychius, Pachomius and Theodorus, who were imprisoned because of their faith in Christ, and became worthy to acquire the grace of God (martyrdom). I wrote to them regularly from Persia and always mentioned them in my letters hoping that nothing would befall them as it happened to the imprisoned presbyters and the six hundred and sixty persons<sup>1</sup>.*

*When I heard about their martyrdom, I glorified Christ for He bestowed upon them a strength in their faith, firmness in their Christianity and granted them the crowns of glory and triumph. I ask him to make me worthy to be among them....*

*Not only that but you have also witnessed the evils that befall me because of Melitius of Lycopolis, who divided the Church whom Christ had bought with His precious Blood and honorable Body, giving Himself as a ransom for Her (the church)..*

*For a long time the rulers have been conspiring against my life and now they are about to carry out their execution orders on me. I am not frightened, but on the contrary I long for terminating my efforts which I was put in charge of by the Living Lord. May God help me to fulfill my ministry which I received from Him.*

*After this day you shall not see me in flesh, but I have told you everything, explained all matters and instructed you of what you must do. For this I am acquitted of every wickedness.*

*Now take good care of the flock you have received from the Holy Spirit and watch the Church of God whom He bought with His Blood.*

*No doubt that after my departure someone will speak with blasphe-*

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly means the whole medical group who was all martyred with high bravery.

*my, mislead and divide the Church, as Melitius has done. Thus be alarmed, for endless troubles and temptations will befall you. Always keep in mind the sufferings of our fathers and forefathers who suffered for the sake of our immortal Church. What shall I talk to you about father Theonas who brought me up, and all the hard times that he went through?! I hope to receive the same grace which he obtained by his good deeds. Or Dionysius and his running away from one place to the other because of Sabellius the heretic. What shall I say about the blessed Yarouklas and Demetrius the Vine-dresser who were subjected to all those pressures because the grace of God accompanied them and helped them.*

*Now, I leave you in the hands of God, through the word of grace, for He can protect you and His own flock<sup>1</sup>.]*

At this, the Pope knelt, prayed and bowed together with his two disciples, giving thanks to God. He embraced them while they kept on weeping, and kissing his hands, especially when he said that they would not see him again.

Finally, he returned to those who came to visit him in prison. He strengthened them, blessed them and gave them peace before they left<sup>2</sup>.

## **MUTUAL LOVE**

After his return, the blessed Peter, through his teaching, separated many from the worship of idols and united them to the church of Christ. Certain persons reported to Maximin concerning him that he was the leader and standard-bearer of Christianity. At that very moment Maximin ordered a tribune to the city of Alexandria. He found the blessed Peter, who was celebrating the commemoration of the holy martyrs with a great multitude of Christians. After the dismissal and perfection of the faithful, as he was leaving the church, the tribunes came up to him and seized him, saying, "The emperor, the ruler of the world, has need of you." St. Peter said to them, "*Let us go, my children, wherever you wish. Let us go. Only, may the will of the Lord be done.*"

On hearing about the imprisonment of their popular Pope, the people of Alexandria gathered around the prison to save him. Their intentions were to prevent his execution, even if it meant the massacre of all of them. They were crying out, saying, "Why are you taking St. Peter away from us our chief priest and good shepherd?" Therefore, because all of the people of the city stirred up no small riot, the tribune ordered him to

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<sup>1</sup>*El-Mayammer, No. 40, p.168-171. Ebn-el-Mekafaa, p. 44-47.*

<sup>2</sup>*Kamel Saleh Nakhlah, p. 43; El-Mayammer, No. 40, p. 172; Ebn-el-Mekafaa, p. 47.*

be guarded in the jail near the most holy church until they could tell the emperor everything that had happened concerning him. While they turned back and went off to the emperor, the whole city stood outside the gates of the prison in nightly vigil, performing services and glorifying God on his behalf.

When the emperor heard from the tribune about the riot and disturbance caused by all the people concerning the blessed man, he became very angry and sent them a second time, commanding them with the words, "Go immediately and behead the bishop! And if any of the Christians oppose the command or speak a single word concerning him, severely strike them down right there. So that they, might learn not to oppose the laws of the emperor!" The tribune received the emperor's order and hastened to execute it.

Pope Peter could not tolerate any harm to fall on his people for his sake, so he called one of his entrusted elders and asked him to go to the ruler. The message to the ruler was: if he can arrange for someone to come at night to the southern wall of the prison which was deserted, and listen for a knock from the inner side. At that spot they should open a hole in the wall quietly, and the Pope will be right in their hands for the execution orders.

The plan worked out fine, and the Pope gave himself peacefully in their hands, resembling the steps of his Lord who gave His life up for His sheep. His words were: "*It is better for me to be assassinated as a ransom for my people, and let nobody be injured*<sup>1</sup>."

#### **AT ST. MARK'S TOMB**

Pope Peter asked if he could be permitted to visit the tomb of St. Mark to obtain his blessing. There he dropped on his knees and began to talk to his ancestor.

*[O my Evangelist father who preached about Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, and witnessed His sufferings. You are the first bishop of this See and also the first martyr. Christ, the True Holy One, chose you to preach in His Name, and you did with enthusiasm and vigilance in this city, the country of Egypt and the surrounding countries. Not only that, but you also terminated your efforts by receiving the crown of martyrdom. For these reasons you became entitled to behold God the Word, and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

*You selected the blessed Anianous to replace you because he deserved it, and Melitus and all the others after them. Then came the fathers Demetrius, Yarouklas, Dionysius, Maximus and my father Theonas*

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<sup>1</sup>El-Mayammer, No. 40, p.172-3; Ebn-el-Mekafaa, p. 47.

*who raised me until I received this ministry after him. Only the mercies of Christ have granted me this honor, though I am a sinner and unworthy of it.*

*May you (St. Mark) intercede for me that I become a true martyr and be entitled to participate in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ!*

*May the odor of the living faith emanate from me, and the shedding of my blood in His holy Name be accepted as a good incense descent to our Lord!*

*I asked for the prayers, that my life be terminated without being double hearted or double-intended, and that the Lord may strengthen me till I depart from this world.*

*Now, I commit to you the flock which I have received by succession, and of whom you were put in charge, directly from the hands of our God and Savior.*

*May you be with me and all of your children whom Christ gave you. Amen<sup>1</sup>.]*

Following this lovely speech with his father, St. Mark, Pope Peter stood up, and stretched his arms out towards heaven and said:

*“O Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, I ask you to put an end to this persecution which befall your people.*

*May the shedding of my blood, I your servant, be the end of the persecution against your articulate flock<sup>2</sup>.”*

At that time, a virgin was praying late in the vicinity, heard a voice saying, *“Peter is the Last of the martyrs of this persecution!”*

When the prayer was finished, St. Peter kissed the tomb, and delivered himself to the guards who dared not to speak to him. Apparently his face was illuminating like an angel, and none of the five soldiers who were to assassinate him dared to use his sword. The Pope pleaded to them to get it done with, before the morning so as to avoid any possible disturbance among the people. Eventually they decided to collect five golden pieces from each one of them, and the soldier who did the job would collect the sum. Finally, one of them dared and beheaded the Saint., and the Pope received the crown of martyrdom on the 29th of Hatour (25th of November 311 A.D.)

## **ON ST. MARK’S THRONE**

On the following morning, the news spread everywhere, and the

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<sup>1</sup>*El-Mayammer, No. 40, p.173; Ebn-el-Mekafaa, p. 48; Manuscript concerning the history of the Patriarchs by bishop Yousab, p. 19.*

<sup>2</sup>*Hyvernat: Actes des Martyres, 1886, p 263-286.*

people of Alexandria hurried to the place where their Pope was martyred. The clergy wrapped the body and the head in a sheet of leather, and could hardly keep the people away from them. Everybody wanted to obtain a piece of his clothes for blessing.

In the church, they put on him the vestment of the service, and insisted to seat him on St. Mark's chair, for he never sat on it in his life, because of his humbleness, but would use the stairs instead.

It was said that the believers often disapproved this behavior. On feasts, as he went up to give them peace, the people could not take it, and yelled: "*Sit on the throne, O Pope, at the place in which you were consecrated!*" The clergy also pleaded to him to listen to the petitions of the people, but he kept silent for a while, until the church returned to its calmness, then he sat on the stairs. After the service, he talked to his clergymen privately saying, "*Why do you add to my sufferings as well as the people? Everytime I stand there, I see as if an illuminating holy power is occupying the throne. Although this power strengthens and pleases me, all my bones tremble also, but I cannot tell the people about it.*"

The homily "*On Epiphany*" attributed to him explains how he felt awesome toward the church's, her sacraments and its building, especially the altar.

*[For I also told you this on another occasion, at the time when I drew back, (choosing) not to sit upon the throne because of the fearful thing that I saw in the holy place resembling a flame of fire. Because of this my conscience blames me, and I also fear to advance toward (the throne) because I am disgraced on account of my sins.*

*O my children, he who sits there is not a man like I, but he is the living God<sup>1</sup>.]*

*[For this reason, therefore, brethren, the time has come for us to advance toward the sacrament with fear and trembling.*

*For indeed our God is a consuming fire.*

*I say to you, if our eyes were to see those who are at the altar, we would be afraid and tremble and be terrified and fall down before the Holy of Holies.*

*For indeed the entire ordinance of the liturgy in the holy place which is manifest is also there in the liturgy as a hidden flame of fire which we do not see<sup>2</sup>.*"

*"I exhort you, O my beloved, that we approach with fear the altar*

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<sup>1</sup>On Epiphany, 29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 27.

*that is full of fear and trembling*<sup>1</sup>.]

### **HIS BURIAL**

When all the believers kissed him, a problem was created about where he should be buried. Some wanted to bury him at Theonas's church where St. Peter was raised, but others preferred to bury him where he was martyred at St. Mark's place. Apparently St. Peter had built himself a tomb on the sea-shore in a place called "*Locoptis*," and that is where his body was taken by a boat and buried with great respect. Many miracles were performed from his tomb, and a church was erected there at the time of Constantine, which existed until the Arab Conquest.

### **CELEBRATION OF HIS FEAST**

The early historian Sozomen mentions that the Alexandrians used to celebrate "St. Peter's feast" every year, in which the bishop of Alexandria performed a Eucharistic liturgy on the 29th of Hatour, followed by an *agape* meal (Loving feast) on the seashore.

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

# 2

## ***ST. PETER THE MARTYR, POPE AND THE THEOLOGIAN***

In the introduction of his book, “*St. Peter of Alexandria, Bishop and Martyr*,” Dr. Tim Vivian says. “Athanasius in his *Life of Antony* probably initiated the Coptic interest in Peter and exalted him as a ‘martyr of blessed memory’ (*Life* 47). This definition of Peter as martyr, not theologian, is the one that came down in the Coptic church: Peter was remembered primarily as pious and humble pastor, one who gave up his life for his flock<sup>1</sup>.” In the “Commemoration of the Saints” in the Coptic Anaphora of St. Basil, and in the Coptic “Hymn,” or “*Tasbeha*,” he is mentioned as the high-priest, and the martyr.”

We cannot ignore St. Peter’s role in early Christian theology, but the Coptic Church concentrates on his pastoral work and his martyrdom for the following reasons:

1. His martyrdom was unique, for although he asks the clergy and the people not to expose themselves voluntarily instead of waiting to be arrested<sup>2</sup>, he himself sent a messenger to the ruler, and put a plan to present himself to be martyred, to save his people who gathered around the prison to save him. He gave an example for true shepherdhood.

2. In the Melitian schism which started in his days, many theologians and clergymen thought of St. Peter’s as a model of mercy and love, issued from a very pious and kind heart but they considered the Melitian view was the correct one, regardless of the life of Melitius himself and his conduct, especially the ordination of priests and bishops for other bishoprics. According to the words of St. Epiphanius,

*[Some (the Melitians) were saying that those who fell once and denied Christ and because of their lack of bravery did not put up a struggle should not be considered worthy of repentance. (They said this) so that those who still remained steadfast would not swerve from the path and join*

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<sup>1</sup>Tim Vivian: *St. Peter of Alexandria, Bishop and Martyr*, Philadelphia, 1988, p.4.

<sup>2</sup>Canons 9 and 10.

*the God-denying and impious idolaters, paying little heed to penance and seeing how swiftly forgiveness could be obtained....*

*The most holy Peter, since he was merciful and was the father of all, pleaded and entreated (on their behalf), saying, "Let us receive them as repentants and set penance for them, so they might remain in communion with the church. And, since the Word has come to us and embraces us, let us not turn them away, not even the clergy, for fear that those who through cowardice and weakness were at one time set upon and shaken loose (from the faith) by the devil be irrevocably turned away and never healed. As it is written, "do not turn away the lame, but rather heal them." 'Peter's words were words of mercy and love for his fellow man; Melitius's and those with him were words of truth and zeal<sup>1</sup>.]*

3. St. Peter was contemporary to Diocletian's reign, in which the church some millions of martyrs were offered to Christ as sacred sacrifices, and for this reason the church started the Coptic calendar by the beginning of Diocletian's reign, in 284 A.D, calling it "*Anno Martyri*<sup>2</sup>." At that time I think the church - clergymen and laity - was almost absorbed in preparing the believers for witnessing to the gospel by receiving sufferings joyfully rather than being involved in theological dialogues.

4. The circumstances of St. Peter were totally different than those of St. Athanasius, although the two entered in dialogue with Arius. The first entered in personal dialogue with Arius, and there was no need to write against Arianism, for it was not spread at that time, and the Pope wanted to deal with it on a limited level, while St. Athanasius felt his responsibility to write about it as it was wide spread, even among some bishops in many countries.

The same thing concerning "Sabellianism," for as we have seen he entered in dialogue with Sabellius and his followers orally. There was no need to write about it, as it did not represent any danger to the faith of the church in Egypt.

Concerning "Origenism," he alluded to its error without mentioning the name of Origen or Origenism, perhaps because he desired to gain the simple believers who currently accepted some doctrines of Origenism. Unfortunately, Eusebius does not mention anything about St. Peter's writings, most probably because Peter was anti-Origenist.

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<sup>1</sup>*Advers. Haer.* 68:2,3.

<sup>2</sup>*The author: Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church, Alexandria, 1993, p. 24-25.*

# 3

## *HIS WRITINGS*

### **FIRST: LETTERS**

Dr. Vavian states,

[It is interesting to note that except for the Canonical Letter, none of the works (the letters) just discussed has survived in Greek; the one “Veronese fragment” is in Latin, and the remainder survive only in Coptic translations. Exactly the opposite is true with those writings attributed to Peter that deal with theological subjects: they survive in Greek, Syriac, and Latin; none has come down in Coptic<sup>1</sup>.]

#### **a. THE PASCHAL EPISTLE**

St. Peter’s chief work is the “*Paschal Epistle*,” known as the “*Canonical Epistle*,” for it contains fourteen penitential canons governing the future of the lapsed brothers. The opening clause of the first canon is: “*Since the fourth Pasch of the persecution is at hand...*” This indicates that the above-mentioned letter was issued on Easter 306 A.D, and that it was a *Paschal Epistle*, but was more likely an encyclical letter. It was not a true letter, but a treatise “*On Penitence*.” It is of considerable importance to the history of the church teaching on apostasy and penance.

The two fragments which are included in the Syriac translation, published by Paul Lagrade<sup>2</sup> in 1856, and translated into English by Dr. Vivian<sup>3</sup>, explains the aim and concepts of St. Peter concerning these canons:

a. These canons are issued for opening the doors of hope to those who lapsed during the persecution. The church must deal with them in love and mercy.

*“In order that we might make them repent finally and willingly of their own accord, those who have fallen into the snare(s) of the devil.*

*Those who were caught by him (the devil) according to his will-let us (the church) restore those who with all (their) might flee him, praying especially for them to have faith in God and a good conscience in Jesus Christ our Lord who said, “Be merciful, even as your heavenly Father is*

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<sup>1</sup>Vivian, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>P. Lagrade: *Reliquiae iuris ecclesiastici antiquissimae*, Leipzig, 1856. (Translated from Paris Syriac codex 62.)

<sup>3</sup>Dr. Vivian, p. 193-5.

*merciful. Judge not, that it might be forgiven to you; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, running over, will be put in your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” Luke 6:36-38” Frag.1.*

b. The church as a true mother must assist the lost flock(fallen persons) by its prayers and tears.

*“These things I have written with great urgency, brothers, groaning and weeping greatly over the evils that have happened...*

*Just as (Jesus said) for the sake of Simon the leper, I say to you: Your sins, which are many, are forgiven, for you have loved much. But he to whom little is forgiven, also loves little (cf. Luke 7:47).” Frag 2.*

c. The church must be very firm with the lapsed clergy, for they must be good models to the people, but at the same time the door of their salvation must not be closed before them.

*“For the divine Word wishes those in authority over the people to be without reproach (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2,10) and the teaching through works is very clear and precise for the teacher. (Jesus) himself says, “He who does (the least of these commandments) and teaches (them), this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19).” Frag.2.*

The tone of the fragment is very similar to Dionysius writings on repentance<sup>1</sup>.

**The fourteen canons are listed below in brief:**

1. Those who, at the commencement of the persecution, were imprisoned. At first, they endured intolerable tortures and unbearable whippings and many other hardships, but they had lapsed under extreme torture. They were willingly betrayed by the weakness of the flesh, had shown their repentance in grievous mornings during the three previous years, would be received at the coming Easter, after a strict fast of forty years.

The Council of Elvira considered apostasy a “capital offense,” and the offender is not to be allowed to receive the holy communion, even at the end of his life (Canons 1 and 2).

2. Those who had endured only the trial of imprisonment and had given way before suffering actual torture through a great lack of will power and some sort of blindness, and without the hardship of struggle became captives. They must undergo another year of penance before being received into the church again.

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<sup>1</sup>See Feltoe: *St. Dionysius of Alexandria: Letters and Treatises*, London, 1918, p. 62.

3. Those who endured nothing but from fear only deserted faith, who have shown none of the fruit of faith, rather, of their own free will they have gone over to evil, and then looked towards repentance, must do penance for four years. (*Three years the Lord came to the fig-tree seeking fruit and found nothing, but the vine-dresser replies: Lord, let it alone this year also*).

4. Not a canon, but a lamentation over the lapsed who out of despair have not repented. St. Cyprian says that those who refuse to do penance are completely cut off from the hope of communion and peace<sup>1</sup>.

5. Those who had escaped from sacrificing to the idols by using dissimulation or tricks (like pretending to approach the altars, or writing what seems to be a denial of their faith, but did not openly offer sacrifices or write down a denial), must do penance for six months more. They look like David, betrayed by cowardice and fear, when he pretended to have an epileptic fit (1 Sam. 21:13).

6. Slaves who under the threats of their masters offered sacrifice instead of them, must do penance for a year, learning for the future, as the slaves of Christ, to do the will of Christ and to fear Him. They will especially listen to this, “Whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is slave or free,” Eph. 6:8.

7. Masters who had thus acted with their fellow slaves must do penance for three years. They have not heeded the apostle, who wishes masters to treat their slaves as they treat themselves (Eph. 6:9; Rom.. 2:11).

8. Those who had lapsed, and then in repentance returned of their own accord again to the trial of persecution enduring imprisonment and tortures may be received with a joyful heart into communion and counted worthy of the heavenly kingdom without punishment.

9. Those who voluntarily exposed themselves instead of waiting to be arrested are not to be condemned, but reminded that Christ and His disciples did not do so (Matt. 26:41; 6:13; John 11:54).

*[They bring upon themselves a temptation which is like fighting against the sea and its waves, or rather, they are as it were heaping up coals to inflame the sinners against the brethren...]*

*And perhaps they also do not know that our Master and Teacher*

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<sup>1</sup>1. Epistle 55:23.

*withdrew many times from those who wished to set traps for Him, and that there were many times when He did not walk about openly because of these people cf. John 11:54 . Even when the time of His passion drew near, he did not hand himself over, but rather waited until they came for Him with “swords and clubs,” Matt. 26:55 . He said to them, “Have you come out against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?” and they delivered him ,” the Gospel says, “to Pilate,” Matt 27:2...*

*He says “they will deliver you up,” and not “you shall deliver yourselves up,” Matt. 10:17 , and “you will be brought before governors and kings on account of my name,” Matt 10:18 ,and not “you shall bring yourselves....”*

*He also wishes us to move about from place to place when we were being persecuted for his name, as we again hear him saying : “And when they persecute you from this town, flee to the next,” Matt. 10:23 . For he does not wish us of our own accord to go over to the supporters and accomplices of the devil, for if we did so we would become the cause of many deaths and would be forcing them to become harsher and to carry out their works of death.”*

*Rather, He wishes us to wait patiently and to take heed for ourselves, to watch and pray so that we may not enter into temptation. Thus Stephen, following in his footsteps, was the first to suffer martyrdom. He was seized by lawbreakers in Jerusalem and brought before the council; when he was stoned he was glorified in the name of Christ, and crying out he said: “Lord, do not hold this against them,” Acts 7:59; cf. Luke 23:24 “*

*Thus James, the second martyr , was seized by Herod and beheaded with a sword. In the same way Peter, the first-chosen among the apostles, was often seized and thrown into prison and 485 A.D dishonored, and was finally crucified in Rome. And the famous Paul, time after time ,was handed over to the authorities and was in danger of dying. He undertook many struggles and boasted about the many times he was persecuted and his many afflictions; in the same city he (St. Paul)also was beheaded with the sword and ended his life doing those things about which he boasted. In Damascus he was lowered at night in a basket over the wall and escaped the hands of the one who sought to arrest him, cf. Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor. 11:32-33*

*They(The Apostles) set before themselves first to preach the good news and teach the Word of God, in which “they strengthened the brethren to continue in the faith,” Acts 14:22. They also said that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God,” Acts 14:22. For they (The Apostles) did not seek what was beneficial to themselves but rather what would benefit the many, in order that the many might be saved. And he told*

*them many things about these matters, that they might act according to the Word. I say this in conclusion lest, in the words of the apostle, “the time fail us” as we explain these matters, Heb. 11:32 .*

**St. Clement, Origen, St. Cyprian and St. Dionysius** all defend flight from persecution. St. Athanasius gives the imprimatur to flight<sup>1</sup>. Canon 60 of Elvira says that those who destroy idols and are consequently killed are not to be considered martyrs.

10. The clergy who voluntarily exposed themselves instead of waiting to be arrested, and lapsed under unbearable tortures, then they returned to the conflict must nevertheless cease to officiate as clergy, though they may be accepted into communion.

*They abandoned the Lord’s flock and brought blame upon themselves-which none of the apostles ever did. For indeed the blessed apostle Paul, after he had undergone many persecutions, and was able to display the trophies from many contests, and though he knew that it was better “to depart and be with Christ,” still was able to say: “To remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” ,Phil. 1:23-24 . Since he did not consider what was beneficial for himself, but rather what was beneficial for the many in order that they might be saved, he believed that staying with the brethren and caring for them was more important than rest for himself. He also wished the teacher to be for the faithful “a model in his teaching,” Tit. 2:7 .*

*Therefore, let them in humility give thought to how they might “perform,” ceasing from vanity and self-delusion.*

*Christian fellowship is sufficient for them.*

**Origen** asserts that Christians “do not select those who have fallen after their conversion to Christianity for any office or administration in the Church of God, as it is called<sup>2</sup>.”

11. The Church will accept the prayers of any confessor on behalf of his lapsed relatives.

*[It is right that we give our approval to those who according to faith think it right that prayers and petitions ought to be made, either on behalf of those who have been punished in prison and have been betrayed by hunger and thirst, or on behalf of those who outside of prison have been tortured before the judges with skin-scrapers and whips and afterward have been defeated by the weakness of the flesh. For indeed it harms no one*

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<sup>1</sup>1. De fuga 22.

<sup>2</sup>1. Contra Celsum 3.51.

*to sympathize with and share in the sufferings of those who weep and mourn on behalf of parents, brethren, or children who have been defeated in the struggle by the great strength of the evil-scheming devil.*

*We know indeed that because of the faith of others some have had the benefit of God's goodness in the forgiveness of sin, in the health of their bodies, and in the resurrection of the dead. Therefore we are mindful of the many miseries and troubles they have undergone in the name of Christ; not only have they (the christians) repented, but they also mourn for what they did when they were betrayed by the weakness and mortality of the flesh. Furthermore they testify that they, as it were, have been disenfranchised from the faith. Let us pray with them and plead together for their reconciliation, and for other proper things, through him who is "our Advocate with the Father," who makes propitiation for our sins. And, "the scripture" says, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins," 1 John 2:1.]*

12. There is no condemnation on those who paid money to save their lives without offering sacrifices to idols.

*In order not to damage or destroy their souls they have borne a fine and loss of property which others, because of shameful greed, have not done. For the Lord says, "What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul, or loses it?, Matt. 16:26.*

13. Those who escaped from persecution, leaving their possessions are not accused.

14. Those who were forced to a sacrifice or eating a meal of idols during much violence, as burning their hands and putting chains in their mouths, are considered as confessors.

Peter's leniency finds precedent in Cyprian<sup>1</sup> and approval in Ancyra Canon 3 which pardons fully those who lapsed under duress. Canon 5 of Ancyra deals leniently with those who under protest ate of the sacrificial meats<sup>2</sup>.

#### **b. ANOTHER PASCHAL LETTER**

In some manuscripts containing St. Peter's work *On Penance*, the fourteenth canon, that was mentioned earlier, is followed by another entitled: "*From the Treatise on Pasch by the Same Author.*" It deals with

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<sup>1</sup>*Epistles 24 and 55.*

<sup>2</sup>*Vivian, p. 204.*

fasting on the fourth and sixth days of the week. Probably it is a quotation from one of his Paschal Letters. It is often considered as Canon 15 of the previous letter.

Quasten says: “We know from the fragment of an Alexandrian chronicle that Peter dedicated a treatise *On Easter* to a certain Tricenius. It is possible that this too, was an Easter treatise addressed to an Egyptian bishop of that name<sup>1</sup>.” Dr. Vivian<sup>2</sup> classified this work among “The Theological Fragments.” He also says that this letter is not dedicated to Tricenius, but addressed against someone.

### **c. A LETTER CONCERNING MELITIUS**

This letter, extant only in Latin, is of a considerable importance with regard to the Melitian schism. St. Peter addressed it to his clergy, attacking Melitius for invading his diocese and performing illegal ordinations.

### **d. A LETTER CONCERNING PERSECUTION AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST**

The Coptic fragment from an “*Epistle or Homily*” was published by Crum.

The first part of this letter encourages what is mentioned in Canons 12 and 13 of the *Paschal Epistle*, in which the Pope advised prudent actions during persecution and did not encourage zealotry:

*[Beloved sons, be not severe with these godless ones, lest... we be delivered into their hands... Be not reckless; because if we (the believes) appear in the streets of the cities, our enemies will talk against us, saying: “Whence are they thus so proud and come not to worship the king’s gods?” And thus a great disorder and disturbance shall befall the faithful<sup>3</sup>.]*

The second part of the letter directs that “the Eucharist is not to be celebrated twice on the same altar on the same day,” and relates a miraculous vision to explain why this should be so<sup>4</sup>.

### **e. A LETTER WRITTEN DURING PERSECUTION.**

Orlandi believes that this Sahidic Coptic fragment, announces the beginning of the persecution. Vivian believes that if this letter is authentic it must be dated to sometime after Diocletian’s third edict (September or

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<sup>1</sup>Quasten: *Patrology*, vol. III.

<sup>2</sup>Vivian, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>Crum, “*Texts*,” p. 390.

<sup>4</sup>Barns and Chadwick, p. 443.; Vivian, p. 54.

November 303) which called for Christians to sacrifice to the gods. The letter also assumes, interestingly, that St. Peter is not in Alexandria. If authentic, it would belong then to the time of his exile, sometimes after 305 A.D.

**f. A LETTER TO DIOCLETIAN.**

This Sahidic Coptic fragment, the third in Orlandi's collection, is purportedly a part of a letter from Peter to Diocletian.

Dr. Vivian translated it:

*[The third letter which Saint Peter, archbishop of Alexandria, wrote to Diocletian until he (Diocletian) (became) angry, sent (for him), and beheaded him. It is written in this way, in the peace of God. Amen.*

*I expect, O King, that you are a lover of the wise God in everything that is good. I have inquired, and I understand that you have given yourself over to the demons. Glorify God Almighty, this one who (holds) your life breath in his holy hands! Keep yourself from this evil lawlessness. Do not make these children of God worthless. Do not obey your thoughts, and do not scatter the sheep of Emmanuel (...) himself.*

*Yet now you have put enmity between yourself and the God who made you. O force, O violence! They are doing us evil, trampling divinity and worshipping things, having done evil to the nature of true worship. Know the murderers of the prophets and the patriarchs, O King. Know the ones who kill the holy Gospels which honor the noble estate of Christianity, not with sinful anger but with an open spirit. Did not Christ pity (and) bear with us, and did he not mediate for us with his father if we follow his words, O King of this world (according to your mind), it is not because you are not a lord (...)¹]*

As we have said before he wrote to the emperor not to flatter him, nor to have a chance to be released from the prison, rather to witness to the truth, offering his life as a cost of it.

**g. A LETTER TO BISHOP APOLLONIUS OF LYCOPOLIS.**

This Coptic fragment was listed by Crum and was first published by Barns and Chadwick; it is the fourth letter in Orlandi's collection. The Letter purports to be one from St. Peter in which he severely rebukes Apollonius, possibly for apostasy, and, if authentic, is of a considerable importance with regard to the Melitian schism.

**h. A LETTER DURING PERSECUTION CONCERNING HERETICS.**

This Coptic fragment was published by Crum and is the fifth letter

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<sup>1</sup>Vivian, p. 55.

in Orlandi's collection.

**i. A LETTER ABOUT A VISIT TO OXYRHYNCHUS.**

**SECOND: HOMILIES**

Three homiletic works have come down to us. One, in Greek, is merely a short fragment, while two in Coptic are substantially complete.

**a. "THE TEACHING "DIDASKALIA" OF OUR FATHER PETER ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA, WHO IS AMONG THE SAINTS"**

In 1902 J.M. Heer published a Greek fragment of a "*didaskalia* in homiletic form."

**b. A HOMILY ON RICHES.**

The Coptic homily, as it now stands, was intended to be read on one of the festival days of Saint Michael, specifically 12 Athor (22 November). Although the material on Michael is a later interpolation, the homily is frequently referred to as an "Encomium (Maimar) on Saint Michael."

It was discovered in 1910 at the ancient monastery of St. Michael at Hamouli in Fayoum, and is now at the Morgan Library in New York.

This homily was written during St. Peter's period of hiding. It reveals the thirteenth canon, in which St. Peter sets no punishment for those who fled the persecutions. St. Peter appears as one of the great moderates of the church, like St. Cyprian and St. Dionysius before him, who, although living in times of great turmoil and danger, nevertheless advocated forgiveness and leniency<sup>1</sup>.

It deals with the following topics:

1. Educational Equality between the Rich and the Poor.
- 2 Special Application to Church Leaders.
3. On Judgment and Resurrection.
3. Encomium (Maimar) on the Archangel Michael.

The author says that it is God who has created both the rich and the poor, and that it is God who will regard the righteous, rich and poor alike, and punish the wicked, whether rich or poor.

The homily contains some themes already set forth by Clement of Alexandria in the *Ques dives salvatur* .

[*You will say to (me), "God is the one who gave men this wealth." Yes, I (say) to you, (God) is the one who gives (wealth) and poverty. But (he did not give you wealth in order for) you (to speak it wickedly) but (rather) benevolently.*] 15

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<sup>1</sup>The Coptic Encyclopedia, vol. 6, p. 1946.

### c. *ON THE EPIPHANY.*

Professor Birger A. Pearson and Rev. Dr. Tim Vivian translated this homily which is attributed to St. Peter, from a Sahidic Coptic manuscript found in the Monastery of St. Michael in Hamouli, in Fayoum<sup>1</sup> Other copies of the same homily are attested in Coptic fragments from the White Monastery, now kept in Paris.

This homily has been variously referred to as a homily “*On Baptism,*” or “*On the Epiphany,*” or a “*Catechesis Pronounced on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Savior.*”

Rodolph Yanny, M.D. states, [The homily here is not a mere commentary on the gospel reading of the feast. Rather, it transmits to us Church life in the early Christian centuries. In the Coptic as well as in other eastern Churches, Baptism was given both on Easter and Epiphany. Although very few Coptic churches now have baptisms on Epiphany, yet the Church still has a baptismal liturgy, known as the *laqqan*, as an integral part of the Epiphany celebration. The homily alludes to this liturgy and it has much to say about the theology of the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and their role in salvation as understood and practiced in the early Church<sup>2</sup>.]

**First:** This homily reflects the major principals of the Alexandrian theology, such as the following:

1. It reflects the joy of the whole creation on the occasion of the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*[The entire world has been filled with joy today, O my beloved!*

*The inhabitants of heaven rejoice;*

*the angels celebrate; all of humanity rejoices;*

*paradise shouts aloud; the entire firmament is dancing;*

*the cattle in the meadow are skipping and the beasts of the field are shouting aloud;*

*all of the waters are clapping their hands (Ps. 97:8);*

*the foul smell has turned to a fragrance of perfume (cf Isa. 3:24),*

*and darkness has turned to light (Isa. 9:2),*

*and all the trees have spread their branches.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Isaiah the prophet remembered this day and cried out, saying, “Let the deserts of the Jordan rejoice and be glad and joyful, for he has been given the honor of Carmel!*

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<sup>1</sup>*Coptic Church Review*, vol. 13, no. 4, p.99-116.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, p. 98.

“ And when the army of the angels of the Most High saw the great honor which God had freely given to all of creation, he cried out by the mouth of this one prophet:

“Rejoice, O heavens, and earth rejoice!

Let the mountains loose joy and the hills righteousness, for God has redeemed the captivity of his people.] 15

[For truly in this night in which the Lord was baptized, his blessing has spread out over all the waters upon the whole world.

They all became like unmixed wine, dancing for joy, their waves bless God their Creator.” 17

“Thus the prophecy of the psalmist David was fulfilled which says:

“Let the heavens rejoice! Let the earth rejoice!

The sea will move together with its fullness, the rivers will clap their hands together.] 18

It is addressed to the believers who were participating in the celebration of the feast by receiving the Communion. According to the Coptic rite, believers call the heavenly creatures to give hymns to God, and to rejoice with them, as if these creatures participate with them in their liturgies. They chant Ps. 148 as a part of the hymn (Tasbeha) before celebrating the Eucharist<sup>1</sup>.

Although St. Peter suffered from the Melitian schism and from persecution, his homily was one of joy. It is in accordance with the Alexandrian attitude, as you never see any ancient Coptic icon that depicts suffering and pain. Even the icons of the martyrs are joyful, for usually you see angels appear to them presenting crowns. Satan usually appears very small and weak, thrown powerless, under their feet. Butler says, “The Copts seem to be the only Christians who do not delight to paint the tortures of Saints on earth or sinners in hell<sup>2</sup>.”

2. The homily is biblical. The author uses a numerous quotations from the Old and New Testaments.

3. It reveals the position of St. John the Baptist in the Coptic Orthodox Church, as the author calls him “*Evangelist among the prophets*” (4). This high position can be an acknowledged position by our rite concerning the icon of this saint, which is set close to the icon of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> The Author: Simple speeches concerning The Hymn , Vespers and Matins. (in Arabic).

<sup>2</sup> Ancient churches of Egypt, vol. 2, p. 92, 93.

When the priest offers incense before the door of the sanctuary, he says, "Hail to John the priest..." Also the Church celebrates his feast on the second day of the Coptic year after the feast of El-Nayrouz in which it celebrates the feast of all the martyrs.

**Second:** Concerning Christology, salvation is effected because the Creator has taken the form of a human being. He was baptized "like all sinners," granting us His own righteousness.

**Third:** The sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism are the basis of new life (21-26).

**Fourth:** Believers must prepare themselves to be worthy of the sacraments. They must live the Christian life of sobriety, watchfulness, and love.

**Fifth:** The homily as a whole has as its liturgical context the celebration of the Epiphany joyfully, which probably consisted of an all-night service, culminating in the Eucharist. "*I see all of you who, filled with great joy (and) gathered together in the house of God from evening until morning, wish to be satisfied by the word of God.*" 41

There are also indications in the text that baptisms were performed on this occasion "23, 35-36." The gospel text expounded in the homily, Matthew 3:13-17, is the same used for the "*laqqan*" service now in use in the Coptic church, is a part of the larger Epiphany celebration, which features prayers for the sanctification of the waters<sup>1</sup>.

### **THIRD: THEOLOGICAL WORKS**

There are some fragments from his theological works. Most of them were preserved by latter anti-Oreginists - among them the emperor Justinian - which has led most scholars to conclude that St. Peter was also anti-Oreginist. This is difficult to prove, but at last he appears to have been correcting certain Origenist teaching, such as that of the pre-existence of the soul<sup>2</sup>.

#### **a. ON THE GODHEAD (DEITY)**

Dr. Vivian believes that "*On the GODHEAD*" may not be the title of a work, but rather it indicates the contents of a work by Peter whose title is unknown<sup>3</sup>. There are six groups of fragments that clearly belong to it.

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<sup>1</sup>*Coptic Church Review*, p.101.

<sup>2</sup>*The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, p. 1945.

<sup>3</sup>*Vivian*, p. 89.

The Acts of the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431 A.D) contain three quotations from St. Peter's work "*On the Godhead.*" They indicate that it was written in defense of the true divinity of Christ. We list some of them below:

✠ *Since certainly "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ," John 1:17, hence by "grace we are saved," according to the apostle "and that not of yourselves, nor by works, lest any man should boast" Eph. 2:8, 9, "but by the will of God" , "the Word was made flesh" ,John 1:14, and was "found in fashion as a man" ,Phil 2:7. Yet He was not left without divinity.*

*Although that God, who is rich became poor, He was never separated from His power and glory. He endured death for us, sinners, and the Just for the unjust, so that He may bring us to God "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit..."*

*The Evangelist also asserts the truth when he says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Thus indeed from the time when the angel had saluted the virgin, saying, "Hail, you who are highly favored, the Lord is with you." Now when Gabriel said, " The Lord is with you," he meant that "God the Word is with you." He verifies that God was conceived in her womb, and was to become flesh, as it is written, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore the Child will be Holy and will be called the Son of God," Luke 1:35.*

*God, the Word, by His own will, and in the absence of a man, was made flesh in the womb of the virgin. He did not require the operation or the presence of a man, but the Power of God that overshadowed the virgin Mary together with the Holy Spirit who came upon her did more efficaciously than a man.*

#### **b. ON THE ADVENT OF OUR SAVIOR**

Leontius of Byzantium quoted a passage from St. Peter's work "*On the Advent of our Savior*<sup>1</sup>."

✠ *...He said to Judas, "are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?," Luke 22:48. These things and the likes, and all the signs which Jesus showed, and His miracles, prove that He is "The incarnated God." Thus, He was God by nature and He was man by nature.*

It is possible that this treatise is identical to that depicted in the work "*On the Godhead.*"

#### **c. ON THE SOUL**

The title given to the work "*The Soul*" is merely a conjecture given

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<sup>1</sup>Leontius of Byzantium: *Con. Nest. et Eutch.*

by common agreement.

Four groups of fragments, in Greek and Syriac, have come down with the above mentioned title. Two of the three Greek fragments of this work are quoted by Leontius of Byzantium. He cites them as being from writings of St. Peter directed against the Origenistic doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, and its imprisonment in the body for a sin committed. In the same work he refutes the Origenist interpretation of paradise and garments of skins in Genesis 2 and 3<sup>1</sup>.

#### FRAGMENT 1

✠... *According to the word of salvation, He who made what is without (the body), also made what is within (the soul)... Certainly by the one operation, and at the same time, made both on that day when He said, "Let us make man according to our image, and after our likeness" Gen. 1:26. It is manifest that man was not formed by a conjunction of the body with a certain type. For if earth, at the command of the Creator, brought forth other animals endowed with life, then how much more did the dust, which God took from the earth, receive vital energy from the will and operation of God?!*

#### FRAGMENT 2

✠ *How miserable I am!, for forgetting that God observes the mind and hears the voice of the soul. I turned consciously to sin, saying to myself, "God is merciful, and will bear you." As long as I am not tempted I keep on sinning, and despise His forbearance and exhaust the long-suffering of God.*

#### d. ON THE RESURRECTION

This work too was most probably a refutation of the alleged Origenist denial of the resurrected body as identical with the present body<sup>2</sup>. J.B. Pitra collected eight Syriac fragments extant of his work "*On the Resurrection*<sup>3</sup>."

Dr. Vivian says:

[Fragments III.1-2 discuss the resurrection body. In the first piece, Peter affirms that "all the dead will rise, changing the(ir) form and being conformed to his body of glory" (Phil. 3:21), and then quotes 1 Cor. 15:53: "For it is necessary that this perishable (nature) be clothed with immortality." Peter quotes Paul (including Hebrews and Colossians) six times

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<sup>1</sup>*Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity, Mercer University Press, 1988, p. 108.*

<sup>2</sup>*Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity, Mercer University Press, 1988, p. 108.*

<sup>3</sup>J.B. Pitra: *Analecta Sacra. Repr. Paris (1883) 1966, 4:426-29 (IIA-H).*

in a very brief passage- this seems typical of Peter's authentic writings- and does not go beyond Paul's statements on the nature of the resurrection body.

In frag. III.2 Peter again quotes 1 Cor. 15:43 to emphasize the point that there will be a change at the resurrection. Peter asserts that "when we arise from the dead we receive a different body not according to substance, but according to the quality made manifest" in Jesus.

In the final part of frag. III.2 Peter talks about the resurrection appearances of the risen Jesus (cf. Luke 24:39-41) and emphasizes again that because of this change the disciples did not recognize him. It seems that Peter understood the resurrection body of Jesus to be different enough that he was not recognized: he was now "clothed with imperishability."

The Syriac fragments attributed to Peter on the resurrection of the body. Fragment II.1 (which is entitled On the Soul and has no Greek counterpart), although not attributed to a work on the resurrection, it asserts that the body" also arises united again with the soul in order that both might receive retribution in judgment for those things which they did in this life." <sup>42</sup> fragment IV.1 echoes this understanding and alludes to 1 Cor. 15:53 to support it: "We are able to return from the dead since it is known that at the resurrection our mortal bodies put on immortality in order that the body united with the soul might receive the reward which it deserves." This cannot be a translation-unless it has been drastically altered-of the Greek fragments on the resurrection<sup>1</sup>.]

#### **FOURTH: MISCELLANEOUS FRAGMENTS**

Dr. Vivian mentions two miscellaneous fragments:

1. The *DIDASKALIA PETROS* or the Teaching of Saint Peter of Alexandria.
2. Untitled Fragment.

#### **NOTE:**

The acts of *The Martyrdom of St. Peter* is extant in Coptic, Greek, Latin and Syriac versions.

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<sup>1</sup>Vivian, p. 102-4.

# 4

## *HIS THEOLOGY*

Dr. Vivian in his theological study of St. Peter has the following conclusion<sup>1</sup>;

[In the eyes of those who later quoted him, Peter was supremely orthodox. Besides one might think from their opinion that his theological language was just waiting to be adopted against all heretics by the councils of the fifth and sixth centuries. Peter's crown of martyrdom, already lauded by Eusebius early in the fourth century, assuredly made him an attractive witness against Origen...

In discussing Peter's theology, therefore, only the following fragments, all in Greek, may be used. The rest are either secondary, have very tenuous attestation, or are too brief to be of any help.

1. On the Deity and Humanity "of Christ": Frags. I.1-3 and I.4-5
2. On the Soul: Frag. II.1
3. Paschal Letter (On the Resurrection): Frags. III.1-2
4. On Easter (paschal letter): Frags. V.1-5.

Fragments I;1-3 follow scripture very closely, emphasize the activity of the Logos in Christ's becoming human...

Fragment II.1 states that the things concerning the deity and humanity of Christ were explained"

Fragment II.1 on the soul is perhaps the most important piece of Peter's theological writings to be preserved because in it he clearly denies one of Origen's teachings, the preexistence of the soul. If the testimony of frag. II.T is added to this, then it is likely that Peter also denied the allegorical interpretation of Gen. 3:21: that the coats of skins that Adam and Eve received were bodies. Before Peter's anti-Origenism can be assumed, several things must be stressed: Peter does not use language such as *Hypostasis*, nor does he attack Greek philosophy. Where he appears to do either are secondary texts which do not belong to him. In addition, as far as we can tell, Peter did not attack Origen specifically, or Origenism or allegory in general. Peter affirms that humanity was made, body and soul, at one time by God.

Fragments III.1-2 preserve part of an Easter letter. In III.2 the bishop sets the date for Easter, an Alexandrian custom, and discusses,

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<sup>1</sup>Vavian, p.107 ff.

appropriately, that resurrection. In this fragment Peter does not go beyond Paul's (and Pauline) thought on the resurrection body.

The Syriac fragments (1V.1-7) on the resurrection are heavily interpolated, and the identification there of the heavenly and earthly body cannot be safely attributed to Peter.

Fragments V.1-5, probably from apostle homily or letter, discuss the dating of Easter. In these fragments Peter follows the Alexandrian custom of observing Easter after the vernal equinox.

Eusebius says nothing about Peter's writing because the latter was anti-Origenist...]

## MARIOLOGY

It is believed that St. Peter of Alexandria is the first known witness to St. Mary's title "*eiparthenos*," i.e., "ever-virgin," as he said: "Jesus Christ... was born according to the flesh from our holy and glorious lady, "Theotokos," and "ever-virgin Mary"<sup>1</sup>.

He is not the first Father who believes in St. Mary's perpetual virginity, i.e., before Christ's birth (*ante-partum*), in childbirth (*in partum*) and afterwards (*post-partum*)<sup>2</sup>.

Contrary to the Gnostics and Manichaeans the Arians deny that Jesus, the Son of God, is one with the Father in the divine essence. They deny Christ's divinity and subsequently St. Mary's motherhood to God. For this reason, the Alexandrian Fathers such as SS. Peter, Alexander and Athanasius gave to St. Mary the title "*Theotokos*," (mother of God) on confronting Arianism<sup>3</sup>.

## ESCHATOLOGY

Peter, the anti-Origenist bishop of Alexandria, seems, from the few extant fragments of his writings, to have emphasized the identity of every feature of the risen body with the present terrestrial one<sup>4</sup>.

## WAS ST. PETER ANTI-ORIGENIST<sup>5</sup>?

Jon F. Dechow said,

[This Peter has sometimes been represented as initiating an anti-

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<sup>1</sup>Fragment 7. PG. 18:517.

<sup>2</sup>Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty: *St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept*, 1978, p.21.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>4</sup>Brian E. Daley: *The Hope of Patristic Eschatology*, Cambridge University Press 1991, p. 61; J.B. Pitra (ed.) *Analecta Sacra 4 (Parts 1933) 193f. and 429; cf. L.B. Radford, Three Teachers of Alexandria: Theognostus, Pierius and Peter. A Study in the Early History of Origenism and anti-Origenism (Cambridge 1908) 76-86.*

<sup>5</sup>*Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity*, Mercer University Press, 1988, p. 108-112.

Origenist reaction in the Alexandrian church<sup>1</sup>. His legendary *Acts* has him, in a farewell address before martyrdom, ranting against Origen: “What trials they (Bishops Heraclas and Demetrius) endured from the madness of Origen, who gave rise to schisms in the church that stir up strife here to this day.” But that Peter’s anti-Origenism was so vehement seems exaggerated, and the quotation may not be authentic...

Unfortunately, only fragments of Peter’s writings are available for examination. The fragments do not demonstrate, however, that Peter was primarily opposing Origen himself, rather than some Origen’s interpreters, e.g., Abbot Hieracas of Leontopolis, who is said to have denied a fleshly resurrection. Nor do they show that Peter was doing more than exercising selectivity about Origen’s views, just as Athanasius did later. Harnack’s assessment seems accurate that Peter’s own expositions “only deprived Origen’s doctrines of their extreme conclusions<sup>2</sup>.”

According to Dechow, a literary relationship between St. Epiphanius and St. Peter remains an assumption, but a reasonable one. But to St. Peter, Origen may still be an orthodox churchman whose thought has not, on the whole, exceeded the bounds of ecclesiastical propriety, even if some aspects of it need revision and updating. To St. Epiphanius, Origen is a heretic and the father of heretics, especially Arius<sup>3</sup>.

It is worthy to note that Socrates does not mention St. Peter among Origen’s detractors, such as Methodius, Eustathius, Apollinarius and Theophilus<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>L.B. Radford: *Three Teachers of Alexandria*, Cambridge 1908, p. 58; L. W. Barnard: *The Antecedents of Arius, Vigiliae christianae*, 1970, 24. 3, p. 183-184.

<sup>2</sup>Harnack: *History of Dogma*, 1894 - 1899, vol. 3, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>St. Epiphanius: *Adv. Haer.* 64:4:2; *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity*, Mercer University Press, 1988, p. 111-112.

<sup>4</sup>Socrates: *H.E.* 6:13.