

THE SACRED
WRITINGS OF ...



ST. PETER OF
ALEXANDRIA

The Sacred Writings of Peter, Bishop of Alexandria

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Fragments from the Writings of Peter.

I.-Letter to the Church at Alexandria.

II.-On the Godhead.

III.-On the Advent of Our Saviour.

IV.-On the Sojourning of Christ with Us.

V.-That Up to the Time of the Destruction of Jerusalem,
the Jews Rightly Appointed the Fourteenth Day of the
First Lunar Month.

Elucidations.

Footnotes

*The Sacred Writings of Peter
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Germany*

ISBN: 9783849621469

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

Cover Design: © Sue Colvil - Fotolia.com

St. Peter of Alexandria - A Biography

By Francis Joseph Bacchus

Became Bishop of Alexandria in 300; martyred Nov., 311. According to Philip of Sidetes he was at one time head of the famous catechetical school at Alexandria. His theological importance lies in the fact that he marked, very probably initiated, the reaction at Alexandria against extreme Origenism.

When during the Diocletian persecution Peter left Alexandria for concealment, the Meletian schism broke out. There are three different accounts of this schism: (1) According to three Latin documents (translation from lost Greek originals) published by Maffei, Meletius (or Melitius), Bishop of Lycopolis, took advantage of St. Peter's absence to usurp his patriarchal functions, and contravened the canons by consecrating bishops to sees not vacant, their occupants being in prison for the Faith. Four of them remonstrated, but Meletius took no heed of them and actually went to Alexandria, where, at the instigation of one Isidore, and Arius the future heresiarch, he set aside those left in charge by Peter and appointed others. Upon this Peter excommunicated him. (2) St. Athanasius accuses Meletius not only of turbulent and schismatical conduct, but of sacrificing, and denouncing Peter to the emperor. There is no incompatibility between the Latin documents and St. Athanasius, but the statement that Meletius sacrificed must be received with caution; it was probably based upon rumour arising out of the immunity which he appeared to enjoy. At all events nothing was heard about the charge at the Council of Nicæa. (3) According to St. Epiphanius (Haer., 68), Meletius and St. Peter quarrelled over the reconciliation of the , the former inclining to sterner views. Epiphanius probably derived his information from a Meletian source, and his story is full of historical blunders. Thus, to take one example, Peter is

made a fellow-prisoner of Meletius and is martyred in prison. According to Eusebius his martyrdom was unexpected, and therefore not preceded by a term of imprisonment.

There are extant a collection of fourteen canons issued by Peter in the third year of the persecution dealing chiefly with the *lapsi*, excerpted probably from an Easter Festal Epistle. The fact that they were ratified by the Council of Trullo, and thus became part of the canon law of the Eastern Church, probably accounts for their preservation. Many MSS. contain a fifteenth canon taken from writing on the Passover. The cases of different kinds of *lapsi* were decided upon in these canons.

The Acts of the martyrdom of St. Peter are too late to have any historical value. In them is the story of Christ appearing to St. Peter with His garment rent, foretelling the Arian schism. Three passages from "On the Godhead", apparently written against Origen's subordinationist views, were quoted by St. Cyril at the Council of Ephesus. Two further passages (in Syriac) claiming to be from the same book, were printed by Pitra in "Analecta Sacra", IV, 188; their genuineness is doubtful. Leontius of Byzantium quotes a passage affirming the two Natures of Christ from a work on "The Coming of Christ", and two passages from the first book of a treatise against the view that the soul had existed and sinned before it was united to the body. This treatise must have been written against Origen. Very important are seven fragments preserved in Syriac (Pitra, op. cit., IV, 189-93) from another work on the Resurrection, in which the identity of the risen with the earthly body is maintained against Origen.

Five Armenian fragments were also published by Pitra (op. cit., IV, 430 sq.). Two of these correspond with one of the

doubtful Syriac fragments. The remaining three are probably Monophysite forgeries (Harnack, "Altchrist. Lit.", 447). A fragment quoted by the Emperor Justinian in his Letter to the Patriarch Mennas, purporting to be taken from a Mystagogia of St. Peter's, is probably spurious (see Routh, "Reliq. Sac.", III, 372; Harnack, op. cit., 448). The "Chronicon Paschale" gives a long extract from a supposed writing of Peter on the Passover. This is condemned as spurious by a reference to St. Athanasius (which editors often suppress) unless, indeed, the reference is an interpolation. A fragment first printed by Routh from a Treatise "On Blasphemy" is generally regarded as spurious. A Coptic fragment on the keeping of Sunday, published by Schmidt (Texte und Untersuchung., IV) has been ruled spurious by Delehaye, in whose verdict critics seem to acquiesce. Other Coptic fragments have been edited with a translation by Crum in the "Journal of Theological Studies" (IV, 287 sqq.). Most of these come from the same manuscript as the fragment edited by Schmidt. Their editor says: "It would be difficult to maintain the genuineness of these texts after Delehaye's criticisms (Anal. Bolland., XX, 101), though certain of the passages, which I have published may indicate interpolated, rather than wholly apocryphal compositions."

The Sacred Writings of Peter, Bishop of Alexandria

Introductory Notice to Peter, Bishop of Alexandria

[a.d. 260¹ -300-311.] Entering upon the fourth century, we may well pause to reflect upon what Alexandria has been to the Church of Christ,-the mother of churches, the mother of saints, maintaining always the intellectual and even the ecclesiastical primacy of Christendom. "Ye are the light of the world," said the great Enlightener to the Galileans of an obscure and despised Roman province. But who could have prophesied that Egypt should again be the pharos of the world, as it was in Moses? Who could have foreseen the "men of Galilee" taking possession of the Alexandrian Library, and demonstrating the ways of Providence in creating the Bible of the Seventy, and in the formation of the Hellenistic Greek, for their ultimate use? Who could have imagined the Evangelist Mark and the eloquent Apollos to be the destined instruments for founding the schools of Christendom, and shaping scientific theology? Who would not have looked for all this in some other way, and preferably in Athens or in Rome? But who would have expected the visit of God Incarnate to Nazareth, and not to Alexandria?

In Peter's day Antioch was coming to be a school under the influence of Malchion's genius and that of the bishops who withstood Paulus of Samosata. Malchion had taught there in the "School of Sciences," and learning was once more to be made the handmaid of true religion. But Alexandria was still the seat of Christian illumination and the fountain of orthodoxy; its very ferment always clarifying its thought, and leaving "wine well refined," and pure from the lees.

To this subject I shall have occasion to refer again in an elucidation subjoined to the works of Alexander (successor to Peter), in which, for a final view of the great Alexandrian school, I shall gather up some fragments in brief outline. Here it may be enough to remark, that, until the definite

development of the school of Antioch (*circa* A.D. 350), I have regarded the whole Orient as dominated and formed by the brain of the grand metropolis of Egypt and the Pentapolis. I have considered the great Dionysius as really presiding in the Synod of Antioch, though absent in the body, and have regarded Malchion as his voice in that council, which we must not forget was presided over by Firmilian, a pupil of Origen, and a true Alexandrian disciple.

Peter's conflict with Meletius shall be noted in an elucidation. We shall see that the heresy of Paulus as well as the Meletian schism are but chapters in one prolonged history, of which the outcrop was Arianism. Now, as to Alexandria we owe the intrepid defenders of truth in all these conflicts, we must not forget that they are to be judged by the *product* of their united testimony, and not by their occasional individualisms and infirmities of mind and speech while they were creating the theological dialect of Christendom and the formulas of orthodoxy.

Peter was able to maintain his canonical authority against the mischievous rebellion of Meletius; and the history of this schism is forcibly illustrative of those $\alpha\theta\rho\chi\alpha\iota=\alpha\epsilon\lambda\eta\eta$ which the Nicene Synod recognized, confirming the primacy of Alexandria, and striving to suppress Meletianism by firm but moderate measures based upon the primitive maxims. Peter left a pure and holy memory to the Church, and sealed his testimony in martyrdom.

Translator's Introductory Notice.[2](#)

Eusebius alone, of the more ancient writers, speaks in terms of the highest praise of Peter, Bishop of Alexandria. He was, says he, a divine bishop, both for the sanctity of his

life, and also for his diligent study and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures;³ and in another place he styles him "that excellent doctor of the Christian religion," who, indeed, during the whole period of his episcopate, which he held for twelve years, obtained for himself the highest renown. He obtained the bishopric of Alexandria next in succession to Theonas. He governed that church about three years before the persecution broke out:⁴ the rest of his time he spent in the exercise of a closer discipline over himself, yet did he not in the meanwhile neglect to provide for the common interests of the Church. In the ninth year of the persecution he was beheaded, and gained the crown of martyrdom. So far we have the account of Eusebius, whom Dodwell⁵ proves to have accurately distributed the years of Peter's episcopate. After Peter had spent twelve years as bishop, and in the ninth year of the persecution which broke out under Maximin, he was beheaded; so that his martyrdom falls in the year of our Lord 311-as the Egyptians reckon on the 29th day of the month Athyr, which answers to our 25th of November, as Lequien,⁶ after Renaudot,⁷ has observed.

St. Peter wrote in the fourth year of the persecution, A.D. 306, some Canons Penitential with reference to those who had lapsed. They are to be met with in every collection of Canons. In the *Pandecta Canonum* of Bishop Beveridge,⁸ they are accompanied by the notes of Joannes Zonaras and Theodorus Balsamon. Upon these Penitential Canons, however, Tillemont⁹ should be consulted. Moreover, according to Renaudot,¹⁰ Echmimensis, Ebnapalus, Abulfaragius, and other Oriental Christians of every sect, make use of the testimony of these Canons; and in the anonymous collections of them called *Responsa*, some