

Sins of Priest and Monks  
by Pseudo-Athanasius: Part One

English translation  
Anthony Alcock

The Coptic text of the following English version was published with German translation and exhaustive commentary in two volumes by Bernd Witte *Ps.-Athanasius. Die Sünden der Priester und Mönche* 2002, a work with almost 700 pages, in which every topic of importance has been thoroughly discussed by Prof. Witte. The most important Coptic manuscript is **M 602** (in the Pierpont Morgan library) and the most important Arabic manuscripts **M**, **R** and **B**. Details of how these interact with the Coptic can be found in the synopsis on pp. 59ff. What follows here is no more than a simple English version of the Coptic text to appear in two parts: Part One ends with p. 26 col. b l. 24 of the Coptic text. Following Prof. Witte's example I have italicized Biblical quotations. I have used Arabic numerals for the pages and ignored brackets. Prof. Witte has subdivided the text into sections bearing Roman and Arabic numerals, but I have not included them.

The principal interest of the text lies in the fact that it deals in part with the interaction between Christians and Muslims in the first few centuries after the Arab Conquest. Another reasonably well-known text, but preserved only in Arabic, deals with pretty much the same topic: the Apocalypse of Samuel, published by J. Ziadeh in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 20 (1915) pp. 375ff.

This type of work is known as pseudepigraphic, which is in effect a sort of reverse plagiarism where a work by an otherwise unknown writer is attributed to a better known one, in this case Athanasius. As someone who had to deal with schismatic elements that were a threat to the unity of the incipient Great Church, Athanasius was probably an ideal choice as the mouthpiece to fulminate against those who wandered from the narrow path of orthodox Christianity. The prologue contains a key quotation from Leviticus about the fate of the fornicating daughter of the priest: ultimately those who prostitute themselves deserve to be burned, in the case of Christians after death. The early part of the text deals with the Arian opponents of Athanasius, then moves on to lament the increasing

unreliability and moral turpitude of the officers of the Church (priests and deacons) and monks before reaching (p.38) the current problem facing the Church: Islam. Robert Holyand *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (1997) describes this text as an 'apocalypse'.

## Translation

### 1

A discourse delivered by the Christ-bearing man and the son of the apostles who became a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, Saint Athanasius, the Archbishop of Alexandria. He delivered it because of what is written in the Law of Moses: *If the daughter of the priest fornicates, she will be burned alive, because she has shamed her father in his priesthood.*<sup>1</sup>

And because it is written: *The priests who are near to God, let them be purified lest some of them be destroyed by the Lord.*<sup>2</sup> He also spoke about the great tribulation that will affect the world at that time because of the sins of priests and monks. And also about the great wretchedness of man when he opens his mouth and [ 4 lines ]<sup>3</sup> .. Arsenius, the arrogant deacon, went and consorted with<sup>4</sup> Lucius the wrongdoer and depraved criminal. He delivered this discourse on Hathor 12<sup>th</sup> in the monastery of the commander of the Lord's army, Michael, because this was his feast day. He also said things in praise of Michael, that there was no-one like him in the entire angelic host. In the peace of God. Amen.

I am persuaded by time and urged by opportunity to call out myself with<sup>5</sup> the hymnodist and sweet song-collector David,

---

<sup>1</sup> Lev. 21,9

<sup>2</sup> Ex. 19,22

<sup>3</sup> Ar. 'when he returned from banishment on the island of Uratos and heard that Arsanus ' Urbatos seems to be reasonably well attested in Coptic sources cf. Witte II p. 63. On p. 3 of the text Athanasius says that his exile lasted for seven years, which would point to the exile in Rome. Is it perhaps too great a leap of the imagination to suggest that the strange form Urbatos is a play on words: *urbs* and *urbatus/orbatus* 'Romed/bereaved' ?

<sup>4</sup> Like the English verb, the Coptic verb can have negative connotations , e.g. I Cor. 5,9

<sup>5</sup> Preposition has to be emended cf. Ps. 125, 1-3

2

the bodily father of Christ, and myself say with my poor tongue: *When the Lord turned the captivity of His people, we became like those who had been comforted and our mouth was filled with joy and our tongue with happiness. It will be said among the Gentiles: The Lord had done a lot with these The Lord had done a lot with us. We are now rejoicing.* Truly, my beloved, this has happened to us: *Behold, the cruel waves of the sea*<sup>6</sup> have abated, that is, the heretic enemies. We also have docked in the harbour of the Church, the holy bride. The godless Arians and their doctrines full of blasphemy have been destroyed. We also have spoken out freely in the true bridal chamber, the Church<sup>7</sup> and pure and holy bride. The poison-spitting serpents have concealed themselves in the holes, that is, Lucius and George the depraved heretics. The orthodox bishops and presbyters and deacons have appeared rejoicing with their orthodox people in the middle of the unblemished Church. For this reason I, your father, will call out today blessing God in the middle of the Church, that His love has cleaved to my people and He has brought me back from exile [ 2 lines ]

3

be among you. Therefore, the God of all these blessings is blessed for He has saved all of you from the jaws of these wild beasts, that is, the godless heretics. I was away from you for seven years fighting for the upright faith of the holy catholic Church. When God recalled me from exile and I returned to you, I found you complete<sup>8</sup> in all faith as on the first day when I left you [ 6 lines ]. The truth being sweet in their mouth and righteousness in their ways: *Let heaven and earth*<sup>9</sup> rejoice with me today, for I have seen the Church *resplendent* in joy, the people obedient in the middle of it,<sup>10</sup> praising the true bridegroom, Christ, crying out in the blessed voice: *Remember us, Lord, in Your kingdom.*<sup>11</sup> My soul and my spirit were renewed when I saw the palace of Christ opened once again, that is, the

---

<sup>6</sup> Jud. 1,13

<sup>7</sup> The Coptic regularly adds **ⲧⲠⲠⲱ** ". I cannot think of a combination in English of " and 'Church' that would work, except perhaps 'the Church, our ', so I have omitted "

<sup>8</sup> I understand this as **Ⲅⲧⲉⲧⲛ[ⲭⲏ]ⲕ ⲄⲖⲠⲗ**, the stative form.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 95,11

<sup>10</sup> I understand the text as **ⲒⲛⲧⲉⲒⲙⲏⲧⲉ**.

<sup>11</sup> Lk 23,42

Church, the house of God and the assembly place of the angels in which<sup>12</sup> the faithful are gathered, saying: 'Allelouia, which means

4

we and the angels bless You in Your holy house.' You, my blessed sons and daughters, preserve the faith which you received from me and do not violate it to your dying breath. For you know that in every danger to which I have been exposed it is the upright faith that kept me whole in all of them and helped me in all of them. Keep the orthodox faith strong. Remove yourselves from these words of shame: *These people because of whom the anger of the Lord comes*, I mean Arius and the other bishops who commune with him. And do not eat with them or greet them. I know that you are filled with every fragrance of the Holy Spirit. *Keep to yourself*. Do not consort with them because they are godless. *But you will run from like one who runs from a serpent. When in the final times many will remove themselves from the upright faith* and perform wicked deeds, God will hate them. As it is written [ 2 lines ].

5

Now there are many bishops and presbyters and deacons who *will congregate outside the upright faith* of the Holy Trinity and consort with heretics for the sake of human glory, political power, food and drink, like this unholy bully Arsenius, who is unworthy of the name of deacon, this one who agrees with George the Arian and Lucius the one whose name should be deleted from human memory. [ 6 lines ] They are alien to the name of the of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in this age *and the one to come*.<sup>13</sup> The one who congregates with them or eats with them is anathema and will be cleansed<sup>14</sup> and are alien *in this age and the one to come*. The Lord God anathematizes George and Lucius and Arsenius and all heretics forever, *whether in this age or the one to come*. The pit of the abyss<sup>15</sup> will be your inheritance forever. Now, therefore, bishops, presbyters and deacons who hear me, *teach your people well in*

---

<sup>12</sup> Fem. pronoun refers to 'Church'

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 12,32

<sup>14</sup> There is a shift from the sing. to the plural here and the Gk vb used is clearly intended to be passive. Coptic has no morphological passive of its own and is not able to deal with a passive form in Gk. apart from using the active form.

<sup>15</sup> Slight emendation required to produce this meaning

## 6

*the fear of the Lord.* <sup>16</sup>Do not forget to instruct them in the Holy Scriptures, for you will be responsible for their souls at the divine tribunal. Do not allow the ship to sail rudderless and founder.<sup>17</sup> Do not let your heart so simply arouse the people lest they perish in sin and their judgement come upon them, for you are the ones to whom it is called *shepherds of the people tend your flock.*<sup>18</sup> Listen to the ... of the apostles, Peter, when he said *I will call on the presbyters among you as companion presbyters and witnesses of the trials of Christ to tend God's flock not in a ... but you being pleasing to God.* <sup>19</sup>You, my beloved sons and daughters, do not neglect to instruct everyone in the fear of God for you will be responsible for their souls at the impartial tribunal of God the true judge. If you instruct them and they do not hear you, their sins will visit them, and it will be their own fault for not accepting what you teach them. As it is written, *each one will bear his own burden.*<sup>20</sup> No, [do not let anyone ascribe an apology for you to say before the tribunal]

## 7

of God, lest they say: 'We did not find a *good shepherd* in our generation to tell us a good word that we might be saved by it.' For you, fathers of the people of God, do not neglect to instruct them well lest you be cast into the flames of Gehenna and not be found entirely as children. *For you are the salt of the earth.* Do not neglect your souls lest they become idle. You are the beacons of the world [ 6 lines ] and you are not under the law. You are the bishops of the people, do not be neglectful *lest the sword fall on you and all of your people* and you are wiped out in an instant. Look at those before you who were negligent priests, look what happened to them and what sort of destruction came upon them. Look and consider *what happened to the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abioud, how they were struck down and died on the holy altar for the sin they had committed in His house.*<sup>21</sup> He

---

<sup>16</sup> Ps. 33,1

<sup>17</sup> CD 193a describes the form **MTO** as 'rare'.

<sup>18</sup> Jo. 21,15

<sup>19</sup> I Pet, 5, 1ff

<sup>20</sup> Gal. 6,5

<sup>21</sup> Lev. 10, 1ff.

had no mercy on them or

8

spare them for the sake of Aaron their father or Moses the lawgiver their uncle. The one with whom God spoke 570 times, <sup>22</sup>like two people having a conversation. If God did not spare them for the sake of their just fathers, these with whom he spoke when making a covenant with them, especially those pretending to make an offering of a calf or sheep, then how will God spare you. We are the priests who perform the perfect act, dividing His holy body and pouring His revered blood into the chalice, not in pretence, God forbid !, but in truth. If these died performing the act only, then what sort of death will we encounter when there is no good left in our lives ? Look too at the *destruction that happened to Heli the priest because he neglected to instruct his children well in the fear of the Lord, Ophnei and Phineas. If this one died because of his neglect,*<sup>23</sup> what sort of fate awaits us if we neglect to instruct our people well. Look too *at the destruction that was visited*

9

*on the children of Levi when they committed these great acts of lawlessness in His holy temple,*<sup>24</sup> although at that time knowledge of God had not filled the whole earth but people performed *the semblance and shadow of the things of heaven* as the wise Apostle said, for when *God became angry with them, He removed them from His face* and again *if they perform the outward show when they offer calves and sheep for their sins*, then what sort of abomination awaits us when we perform the perfect act if we violate His commandments [ 4 lines] *the priests who are near to God, let them be pure lest the Lord destroy some of them.* How will they be pure, lawgiver ? They will be pure in their body and heart from all pollution and wicked thoughts. They will remove all wickedness, slander, envy, hatred and strife, greed, defilement, anger, small-mindedness, deceit, impurity and uncleanness, dishonesty, gluttony, excessive drinking, arrogance, making fun of people, pride,

---

<sup>22</sup> Prof. Witte, as far as I can tell, does not mention this figure in his commentary (vol. II pp. 106-109). There may be some numerological significance here cf. [http://www.biblewheel.com/GR/GR\\_570.php](http://www.biblewheel.com/GR/GR_570.php)

<sup>23</sup> I Sam. 4

<sup>24</sup> Num. 16 for the various quotations

10

complaining, scoffing, pitilessness, scoffing, hatred of the poor, lack of perspective and concupiscence. All these things and things like them, it is incumbent upon the priest to *be purified* them and to be vigilant not to be overtaken by any of the above. The one who is found among the sons of the Church who gives instruction in these things or practises them is a stranger to the community and the ordination conferred on him and he is outside the worship of the Church. The one among the sons of the Church and Christians who is found to be polluted in all these things is a stranger to the entire flock of Christ. If you are a priest and are ordained and do not behave in accordance with the priesthood that has been conferred on you, then<sup>25</sup> exactly what does it mean to you to be a priest or monk? Do you care that the world is overtaken by these troubles for your sake? If it is not possible for you to behave according to the commandment of priesthood, then who forced you to assume this great weight on yourself. There are many occupations on earth. Why did you not learn [ 3 lines ] listen to

11

what is written in the Law: *The priests who are close to God, let them be pure lest the Lord destroy some of them.* Take thought, priests that *you are in the midst of the angels at all times*,<sup>26</sup> especially the Lord of the angels. I confess to you, God-loving people, that every time the priest ascends the altar and gives the mystery to the people, the Son of God, with His angels, descends upon the altar and gives His spirit to those of the people who are worthy [ 3 lines ] until the deacon says: *Go in peace.* You have seen this great fear, priest. Why are you negligent and do not remember of the angels of God who serve with you, especially the Lord of the angels of Jesus Christ. When a king of this world goes forth, he is followed by his entire retinue. Then how much more the King of kings, when He comes upon the altar, you find His entire retinue following Him, the angels and the archangels and all the incorporeal ranks? I say to you, I your father Athanasius, except for

12

*the many mercies of God*, you would find many presbyters and deacons lying dead around

---

<sup>25</sup> If this is a well constructed conditional sentence, then the particle **ἢ** may well introduce the apodosis, in much the same way that **εἰ** does in the many other examples of this construction in this text. If it is not, the apodosis must be in the form of an abrupt question in which the rules of hypotaxis have been ignored.

<sup>26</sup> Ex. 19,22

the altar. Woe to everyone who does the works of the Lord negligently, for they will be punished severely, and the priests more than anyone else. A bishop who receives money for the gift of Christ or one who looks at the hand of the one who comes to him, pleasing the rich and humiliating the poor and the widow and being uncharitable to the orphan and the poor and afflicting the widow, his bishopric is empty and his office is a vanity. If you are a priest of the Lord who gossip about your fellow, who hand him over to the power of the strong, who mock the poor beneath you, scoffing and gossiping, [then] you are not a priest of the Lord at all. You eat and enjoy all the things of the altar, while the poor outside the Church are under [ 9 lines ]

### 13 (end quire 8)

*He begged for the tip of a finger with water, which was not given to him, to cool his tongue in the burning fire.*<sup>27</sup> If you are a priest of the Lord and take the wages of those who work for you, hating the poor and the wretched bending the rights of the orphan, then you are the priest *whose hands will be bound and who will be thrown to the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. Perhaps you have heard what is written: *The priest will become like his people. I will punish him for his sins and acts of lawlessness* [ 5 lines ... the bis]hop who has not been apprehended in anything, that is, *there is no stain in him or blame attaching to him, but is mild, faithful, self-restrained, sweet of word and teaching, tending his flock well in the fear of the Lord,*<sup>28</sup> fighting for the truth to death. But when the priest performs these commandments enjoined upon him and does what is right and has been ordered, then he<sup>29</sup> keeps himself holy and pure in his body. If he leaves this world from this free from all these things, he too will serve in his place in the *Church of the first-born which is written in the heavens*

### 14 (start of quire 9)

as the wise Paul said: *Our state in heaven is the place we look to*. Let us be charitable to the poor, because the Lord is charitable to us. *As you measure on earth, so will it be*

---

<sup>27</sup> Slightly different wording from the passage in Luke 16, 24.

<sup>28</sup> An allusion to Tit. 1,7 and 1 Tim. 3,2 which contain lists of characteristics both desirable and undesirable in a bishop.

<sup>29</sup> The construction known as the Conjunctive, which usually connects two verbs, seems to be used to introduce the apodosis of the conditional.



*measured to you in the other place.*<sup>30</sup> Let us therefore remove from ourselves all hatred and slander towards each other and this gossiping, and in particular greed and arrogance. For it is a shame for a Christian to have inimical feelings in his heart towards his neighbour. You say with your mouth: *Our Father who art in heaven*, but you do not perform the deeds of the Sonship. You call God 'Father', but your wicked deeds cast you away from Him. You profess only with your mouth and do not do what you say. You say: *Forgive me as I forgive those in debt to me.*<sup>31</sup> You lie and do not do what you say, but you extort only interest from the poor and afflict the orphan for what you will give him. You humiliate the poor widow when you do the works of injustice [ 5 lines]

## 15

If you do as you say, why are you bound to your brother ? You are an enemy of your neighbour when you say: "I will not forgive the one who has sinned against me and I will not be at peace with him until I have settled my score with him, for he said: 'I will not let him have the last word.'" Wretch, if these thoughts are in your heart and this arrogance and hatred, how can you dare to raise your face before God and pray: I will forgive those who owe me [ 2 lines ] and take the pledge of the widow because of creditors to whom her husband was in debt a long time before he died and say in your heart: *I will forgive those in debt to me.* If you do as you have said, you have not been truthful. Perhaps indeed the sacred psalmist David was talking about you and people like when he sang: *The Lord will destroy everyone who tells lies.* <sup>32</sup>If you make a profession at the altar before Christ and do not do what comes out of your mouth, do you not make God a witness to your deceitfulness ? If you go up

## 16

to the altar of the Lord when you are an enemy of your brother or neighbour, what business have you in partaking of the body and blood of Christ ? Do you not hear the Lord calling out in the holy Gospel: *If you come to make an offering and there remember that you are in debt to your brother, leave your offering there and go and settle with him, and*

---

<sup>30</sup> Matt. 7,2

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 6,12

<sup>32</sup> Ps. 5,7

*then go and make your offering.*<sup>33</sup> You know that God does not receive the sacrifice of one who is in dispute with his brother, but wishes you rather to make peace with your brother and neighbour than to make offering to Him, because the one who goes up to the altar of God when he is in dispute with his brother and especially his neighbour is cursed. But you will tell me that he is your enemy because he has done you great wrongs. I will tell you that you cannot [ 6 lines]

17

his hands reproach him. Some *throw spikes on his head*, others *give Him vinegar to drink with gall when He is thirsty*. Some *hit Him in the face*. Others *prepare to lance him*. After all these things He patiently raised His eyes to His Father, while he was spreadeagled on the cross and said: My Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. What is your excuse, man of clay and ashes, if you are not able to tolerate the word of your neighbour [ 2 lines], tell me. Wretched one, have you not heard the Scripture: *Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you ?* Why therefore are you hostile to your neighbour for no reason ? For material things which you will go and leave here ? Have you not heard the Scripture: *Make peace with everyone* ?<sup>34</sup> But you have performed your wicked wishes and come to the altar though you are stained and at odds with your neighbour. And you say: Give me of this holy mystery. How will Christ dwell in you when His peace is not in you ?

18

If you cannot meet the king of this world wearing a dirty tunic, especially one with mud, how you be able to dare to stand at the altar when you are in conflict with your neighbour and are unclean with the stench of fornication ? And your heart is as black as a sack<sup>35</sup> through your wicked thoughts when you say to Christ: 'Give me of Your body and blood'. Truly it is easier for the body of Christ to fall down to earth than to put it into the mouth of a man to whom God is an enemy and who defiles God when he says: 'Give me of Your body and blood'. If you wish to partake of the body of Christ, prepare yourself and purify yourself and put the peace of God in your heart towards everyone. And give comfort to the poor from what is yours and the orphans and the widows. In this way you will become like

---

<sup>33</sup> Matt.5,23

<sup>34</sup> Rom. 12,18

<sup>35</sup> An allusion to Apoc. 6,12

God. For it is written: *As long as you have given it to one of these little ones, you have given it to me.*'<sup>36</sup> Why does God love Michael and Gabriel more than the rest of the angelic host [... 4 lines...]

19

Michael the commander-in-chief over all the troops in heaven because of his goodness to His creation and because of his great humility. He begs the One on High at all times to forgive all sinners. For this reason the arrogant have been cast down and the humble raised in their place. Since the devil hates people and is bitterly arrogant, troubling man at all times and being eternally hostile [... 5 lines ...] God cast him forth from his glory, and he became a stranger to His dwelling places. Michael the archangel, since he is a good people-lover who stands at the right hand of the Lord praying for the salvation of men day and night that the Lord may have mercy on humanity, saying: 'Have mercy on them and be charitable to them, for they are Your creation and handiwork and *Your likeness and image because Your are merciful.*' Take thought, Lord, that the devil is our conspiring opponent. If he grudges us

20

angels, how will he not test man, knowing that he is clay. *It is the devil's work to charge.* It is Your work to forgive. You now know, my beloved that we have the one who fights on our behalf. We too, let us bear *the arms of righteousness*, each one as he is able. Even if we do not fast continuously, let us not violate the two fasts. Even if we are unable to remain virgins, let us keep our bedchamber. Do not let us marriage dissolutely like pagans. Restrain yourself. Do not wish for a woman who is not yours lest you inherit the things of hell forever. Fornication is a wickedness, hated by God and His angels. If not, listen to God ordering Moses: *If the daughter of the priest fornicates, she will be burned, for she has brought shame on her father in his priesthood.* Woe to us if He has ordered the daughter of the priest to be burned because she ate from the presence bread [... 3 lines ...]

21

and his soul how much because he has sinned. If he ordered her to be burned because she

---

<sup>36</sup> Matt. 25,40

ate from the presence bread,<sup>37</sup> then what sort of burning will seize the soul of the priest who fornicates or walks in the madness of heretics and divides the divinity of Only-Begotten into two natures or walks in defilement of the heretics with the dangerous words of Arius, for he has brought shame to his Father ... eating the offerings that are brought ... [3 lines] two. Think, priests, that we are in the midst of the angels at all times, especially the Lord of the angels, Christ. Let us not do evil things, believing that no-one sees us and that the book of our sins is not spread open in that great theatre<sup>38</sup> and our face is full of shame and we will curse the day when we were born. And it is only a brief time since we unwrapped from the sheet surrounding us and our shame became exposed in the midst of of everyone at that impartial tribunal. Truly, my beloved, there is a great

## 22

grieved with me with a great unquenchable sorrow in my heart, because of the things revealed to me that they will be at the end of time because of the sins of the priests and monks, *these which will destroy their path before God*.<sup>39</sup> For I have no other grief in my heart like the one that my people may stray. But at the end of time the whole of humanity will turn away and commit major sins that are wicked and serious. In particular, the priests and the monks are the first who will turn away and the bishops will become greedy haters of the poor and they will be unable *to divide the word of truth*<sup>40</sup> because their eyes have been closed by bribes. The people will walk in their way and become lovers of pleasure more than the house of God and those bishops will not blame them at all because he too persists in these same sins as theirs. The deacons will will become gluttons and drunkards and arrogant profiteers [4 lines]

## 23

that time they will be busy with the cares of the world. Their hearts are gods for them, disdaining all the commands of our holy apostolic fathers. They walk in dissoluteness, as

---

<sup>37</sup> Regulations concerning these loaves are to be found in the so-called Holiness Code , perhaps originally a distinct section of Leviticus (cc. 17-26), specified in 24, 5ff.

<sup>38</sup> Early Christianity seems to have had an ambivalent relationship with the theatre, as a brief glance at G.W.H. Lampe *Lexicon of Patristic Greek* (1962): 617a will reveal.

<sup>39</sup> Gen. 6,12

<sup>40</sup> 2 Tim. 2,15

the wise Apostle says: *These whose God is their belly and whose glory is their shame.* <sup>41</sup> Similarly, the monks who are in the monasteries and the priors of the monasteries, they will transgress the laws and commands given to them by their fathers [2 lines] and they walk into the house with women, scandalizing the people everywhere. And the sinning people will laugh and scoff at them, as they look for their wicked things and mock them, saying: See these monks, what are they doing in the house of women ? For this reason many simple people will lose their soul and sin, their excuse being that they see their wicked deeds and the things that are done in the house of God. The monks of that time will do business, they being merchants in the life

24

of the poor, profiteers, pleasure-lovers, the matter of this world drawing them down to hell and destruction. They will be wearing<sup>42</sup> the holy habit of monasticism, though they do not do the righteous things and perform the commandments which their fathers ordered them to do. For this reason they will be mixed with the things of life. Monk, do not forget the vow you took before you assumed the angelic habit, though you have renounced this world. Including the hair on your head and your property, you left them behind you and took up the Cross and followed Your Lord. And you vowed that you would not return to the enjoyment of worldly things. You said: 'If I turn to the illusory things of this world, the merciless angels over the punishments [7 lines]

25

the gates of the kingdom of heaven being open and I will not be worthy to enter through them and the angels over them will not allow me to enter.' Are not these the things you vowed, monk, before the monk's habit was placed upon you ? Before you assume the habit, the Lord forgives you all the sins you have committed. After the habit has been placed on you, you become like the day you were born into this world and abandon all the cares and worries of the world, like those of lay people [2 lines] made them with Christ. You say in your heart: 'I have girded myself with the habit of the angels', while you at the same time do the works of before, like lay people. You are wrapped in the holy garb of monasticism,

---

<sup>41</sup> Phil. 3,9

<sup>42</sup> This translation reflects a verbal form that superficially resembles the English progressive/continuous form. W.C. Till *Koptische Grammatik* (1966) p. 171 provides a description of how he believes these forms were used in Coptic.

but your thoughts are as black as a sack from your passions and abominable desires. You have abandoned what is yours. You have forsaken the world and its distractions and pollution and abominable desires and wicked works. But then you return to them and go astray in them, like lay people.

## 26

What will you say on the day when you meet the Judge of Truth ? What is the excuse you will offer on that day when it<sup>43</sup> is taken from you and you are excluded ? Monk, there is nothing left for you but punishment and judgement your hardness of heart because on the day when you wore<sup>44</sup> the holy garb you were pure and God forgave your sins, as if you had been born again into the world. Since the gift comes upon the water of the baptismal font at the time of baptism and makes man sinless, it also comes upon the holy habit at the time when it is given to you and makes you as sinless as the day you were born. And after all these gifts which you have obtained you have turned once again and have become distracted in the affairs of the world, like those who are in the world. And after God has given you freedom from the troubles of the world and its disasters, you have returned to being a slave to the material things of this life, *which will pass away like these spider's webs*.<sup>45</sup> You seize on an excuse: 'I am collecting for the monastery.'

---

<sup>43</sup> Not entirely clear what 'it' refers to. Immediately the 'excuse'. Less immediately the 'holy garb'.

<sup>44</sup> Coptic uses the Future Tense.

<sup>45</sup> Job 27,18