

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

English translation  
Anthony Alcock

This section of the work contains the prophecy of things that the author of the text is probably experiencing or has experienced. At a certain point (p. 42,8) he abruptly addresses an unnamed person in the 2nd person masc. sing., who may of course be the 'priest' he has addressed earlier (see p. 11).

## 26

For this reason, at that time those bishops and presbyters [ 10 lines ]

## 27

in the towns and fields and vineyards will be submissive<sup>1</sup> and subject to the powers of that time like lay people, because their sins and acts of lawlessness have increased greatly. So God has raised barbarians against them that they might be continuously oppressed, exacting from them what they were unable to give. Many monasteries will become desolate at that time and empty, because their monks have transgressed against the commandments of God [4 lines] and oppressed them. Many monks will be materialist businessmen and receive interest like lay people. They have forgotten what Paul said: *The root of all evil is the love of money.*<sup>2</sup> The monks will transgress against the commandment of God and the canons given to them by their fathers, *they being polluted, deranged, contemptuous, arrogant, idle boasters, without mercy, lovers of vainglory, traitors, sleek lovers of their own comfort*<sup>3</sup>, men praising them and being blessed by them. God too

## 28

will be hostile to them because of their wicked deeds, bringing His anger upon earth because of them. In that time the whole of humanity will turn away *and their path before God will be destroyed.*<sup>4</sup> They will be arrogant and merciless. Rulers will rise against the poor and violate them and the poor will become very poor. The pagans who rule the earth in those days will dispossess the rulers and the rich of the land. They will take their silver and gold, their wheat and wine and oil. They will make them poor and suffering. The whole of humanity will groan in distress. The bishops of that time will become lovers of money, drinkers of wine, boasting arrogant drunkards, bitterly merciless to the poor and they will not perform a single commandment given to them by their holy apostolic fathers. They will be stiff-necked, whores *who do not determine the word of truth.*<sup>5</sup> There are many priests who will prostitute themselves at that time and their bishops [2 lines]

---

1 ὑποδέχεσθαι: cf. Liddell and Scott *Greek Lexicon* meaning II, 2

2 I Tim. 6-10

3 II Tim. 3, 1-4 has a somewhat more extensive catalogue of terms of abuse

4 Gen. 6,12

5 II Tim. 2,15

## 29

in their ranks again. Many presbyters, deacons and readers will cast aside their wives without reason and take another because of the desire in their eyes. The bishops of that time will not reprimand them or expel them from the church because *gifts have sealed their eyes*.<sup>6</sup> The lay people too will do the same because they see the sons of the church doing these things. Prostitution will increase greatly on earth at that time because the bishops [2 lines]. Accordingly, each one will err, for there will be no magistrate or judge among them. God will not be with them at that time. The written word will be fulfilled upon them:<sup>7</sup> *I will make children magistrates over them and the childlike will rule over them*. And again: *The priests have not known the Lord. My people too has chosen this way*.<sup>8</sup> The bishops of that time will be like private individuals, none of them able to utter a word of comfort to the people or a word of encouragement. They will not know how to instruct the people or the power of the

## 30

Scripture. The written word will be fulfilled upon them: *The priests do not know the way of the Lord and those who seize my law do not know me*.<sup>9</sup> They will be lovers of money and food and drink, arrogant and bitter. *They will eat the offerings and tithes brought to the Lord, shameless, thankless and ...less*.<sup>10</sup> They do not act according to the worth of the name conferred on them or according to the rank allotted to them. They will be those without fear of God, without justice in their hands and without true law in their mouths: *Gifts have sealed their eyes*. For people sin frequently using them as an excuse, as they say: 'Look at the bishops, how they have fallen into error and have not taught men true judgement.' The bishops of that time and the presbyters, including the seven orders<sup>11</sup> of the church will do all manner of wickedness from the bishop to the doorkeepers [2 lines].

## 31

They lie in everything, there being no truth in their mouth or fear of God in their heart.

6 Ex. 23,8

7 Is. 3, 4.

8 Judges 2,10

9 Jer. 2,8

10 Deut. 12,13

11 Bishops, presbyters, deacons, sub-deacons, readers, singers, doorkeepers.

They will walk in dissolute fashion in the house of God. They will make churches an object of ridicule. They will despise the church and the universal laws of the church when they seal their hearts and become greedy, *their hearts being gods for them*,<sup>12</sup> eating and drinking what is given to them [for the souls of the living and dead and they take the offerings and first fruits and ... 1 line missing ...] and the tithes and they give them to reprobates, whores and the defiled and they consume them without fear and pollute themselves. For this reason they will quickly see *the abomination of desolation which Daniel the propher spoke about in the holy place and the anger of God will come upon them quickly*<sup>13</sup> because *they made the house of God a place into a place of traders and eating and drinking*,<sup>14</sup> as they reel around the church, like those on the high sea. The laity will see them and laugh at them and say:

### 32

'Look at those priests drunk with the blood of the sacrifice of God. This is why many lay people sin, using them as an excuse. The bishops will become covetous, pleasure-loving braggarts, haters of the poor, money-loving and venal, *these for whose sake the anger of God comes*.<sup>15</sup> The presbyters will become deceitful usurers, arrogant, contemptuous, pitiless, heartless, hypocritical, subservient to the rich and hostile to the poor, sneering at their fellow-presbyters, backbiting those who perform the liturgy with them on the same altar. They will leave the house of God and serve the powers of this world, consuming the honours of the Son of God but not performing a single commandment as it should be, leering at women on the holy altar, speaking without fear of God in the holy places and lying to each other in the house of God [4 lines]

### 33

*they will be wiped out like the children of Eli in their time.*<sup>16</sup> The deacons of that time will be fractious, boasting, arrogant, each one vying to scandalize the other in the house of God, deceitful, unafraid to lie on oath, gossip being sweet in their mouths, purveyors of lies, traducers, two-faced liars, bibulous destroyers of hearts, pitiless drunks, slanderous [ 4

---

12 Phil. 3, 19

13 e.g. Dan. 9, 27

14 e.g. Eph, 5, 6

15 Eph. 5,6

16 I Sam. 4, 11

lines] readers and singers and doorkeepers will destroy the laws of the church, defiled, polluted, performing shameful acts not to be spoken at all or heard.<sup>17</sup> The laity too everywhere will fornicate and defile their bodies with abnormal pollution, being greedy brother-haters, church-hating trespassers, those who break fasts, jeer and blaspheme, who hate the Mass and do not listen to the bishops and submit to the presbyters. They do not listen to

## 34

the one who is greater than them. There will be many heretics at that time, as the Apostle said: <sup>18</sup>*It is necessary that heresies will arise among you everywhere so that the chosen will be visible.* And there will be many lawless kings who arise in those days and destroy the upright faith and all the bishops of the world will commune with them out of fear. They will destroy the prescriptions of the upright faith, even to the throne of my father Mark himself, for whose sake I have taken all this, I your father Athanasius .<sup>19</sup> The Holy Trinity, which is one, will be divided into two natures, and the entire Christian world will perform the divine service of this sort, except for Egypt alone, to please defiled bishops who will be responsible for their death. Woe to them for they have broken the commandments of the upright faith for the glory of man. After these things the Good God will become angry that the prescriptions of the upright faith of the Consubstantial Trinity have been destroyed. He will break up the Roman empire [5 lines]<sup>20</sup>

## 35

with many countries and He will lay waste their power for the sake of His faith which has been given two natures. And He will give the power to the Persian kings for a brief period. And they will humiliate the land in their days and shame the sons of men and commit acts of great lawlessness in their days. God will see how the Persians have been lawless, and the lawlessness of those who live on the land has increased beyond measure: *they will commit*

---

17 This may indicate that the author's enthusiasm for these dreary litanies of abuse is beginning to wane, even if it has not completely disappeared.

18 I Cor. 11, 19

19 A reference presumably to the troubles endured by Athanasius in the course of defending the 'upright faith'.

20 Ar. : God will break up the Roman Empire because it has been responsible for breaking His 'great power' into 'two natures'.

*great sins like Sodom and Gomorra*<sup>21</sup> in their time [5 lines na]tion upon the land, it being as numerous as locusts , that is: *the fourth wild beast that Daniel the faithful prophet saw, more fearful than all previous wild beasts, eating, crushing and stamping on the residue with its feet.* <sup>22</sup> And that nation<sup>23</sup> will come upon the land in its final days and crush and scatter all kingdoms *like wheat that is threshed and winnowed with the wind.*<sup>24</sup> That nation will rule over many lands and will receive tribute from them, a fierce nation with no mercy in its heart. It pities not the old

## 36

nor does it spare the child, because the sins of those who live there have increased greatly in the presence of God. That nation will shamelessly subdue all the saints on earth and destroy them and make them dust and sweep them away. *As iron subdues all thing and reduces them, so too will that nation destroy all countries.*<sup>25</sup> And they will continue to be forced to pay tribute to it.<sup>26</sup> The yoke of that nation will be harder than iron and it will make heavy the neck of all the inhabitants of the country to chastise the sons of men for their sins because their lawlessness has been extreme. Their lawlessness has raised their heads, so God has delivered them to the heathens to chastise them, for that nation is a hostile, arrogant, merciless, bitter nation. It will make war on many countries and rob them and subject them with its might and they will continue to pay tribute to it [ 5 lines]

## 37

---

21 Gen. 19, 1ff.

22 Dan. 7, 7

23 It is worth noting that **ἑθνοῦς** (pl.) 'heathens', (sg.) 'nation'

24 Is. 41,15

25 Dan. 2, 40

26 The taxes levied by the Arabs seem to have been largely those paid by the Copts during the Byzantine period. One tax in particular, called **ἀνδρισμός** or **διάγραφον** (poll tax) in Greco-Coptic sources, seems to be what is known in Arabic sources as **جزية**. It seems to have been a 'subject' tax: in the early days of Roman rule in Egypt the Hellenes did not pay it, the Hellenized paid a little and the Egyptians, who were barred from military service, paid a lot cf. H.I. Bell 'Hellenic culture in Egypt' *JEA* 8 (1922) p 148. (I cannot help wondering if that situation contributed in part to the later derogatory use of 'Hellene' (pagan) in Coptic texts. Essentially, the Arabs seem to have taken over the tax and the operation of it. According to E.W. Lane *Arabic-English Lexicon* (1863) p. 422, it was 'the tax that is taken from the free non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim government ... whereby they ratify the compact that ensures them protection.' The term *dhimmi* is used of such people and indicates a 'protected' status. It is mentioned in the Koran 9,29 as a tax imposed on those who do not accept Islam: '(fight) until they subserviently give the *jizya* from their own hands'. According to Coptic documents , it seems to have hit the monasteries fairly hard, according to Paul Kahle *Deir el Bala'izah* (1954) p.41.

with Bethany and all other countries at that time, for it will humiliate them and make them waste. The written word has been fulfilled upon them: *Woe to them, they have turned from God. They will be overtaken by poverty because they have wronged Him.*<sup>27</sup> It will take their gold, silver and bronze, their wheat, wine and oil, down to their clothes and all their goods, given to that nation as tribute. It will destroy the land and make it waste like a bird's nest [ 4 lines] and will make them waste and destroy them. All these things will be brought by God upon the sons of men for their sins and lawlessness. In particular, the sins of the priests and monks who will turn away at the end of these times. Woe to the land and those in it for *these are the final pains.*<sup>28</sup> That nation will increase greatly like the sand of the sea. And many Christians and barbarians and Basan<sup>29</sup> and Syrians and every nation will partake of their faith, wishing to liberate themselves from the burdens brought upon their country. They will settle in many

## 38

countries, become masters of them and form dynasties in them.<sup>30</sup> Their leader will live in the city called Damascus, which means 'rolling down to hell'.<sup>31</sup> They will gather all gold, silver, precious stones, copper, iron, lead and beautiful clothes. The name of that nation is Saracen, *one of the Ismaelites, that is, the son of Hagar the servant of Abraham.*<sup>32</sup> These are the ones who judge the entire land in trembling and will make it waste. They will take control and carry off much wealth and make them poor. At first, that nation will destroy the gold which bears the Cross of Our Lord God and cause all lands under its control to mint their own gold.<sup>33</sup> *A name of the beast is written on it, making 666 on its head.*<sup>34</sup> Afterwards they will count people<sup>35</sup> and write their names in their books and add

---

27 Hos. 7, 13

28 e.g. Is. 13,8

29 cf. Witte II, 224. There is no immediately obvious reason why this name is used here because it is probably the place named Nu. 21, 33, Joshua 12, 4 and so on as one of the territories that were overcome by the Israelites with the help of God. Witte rejects, rightly in my view, a suggestion that it might be a form of 'Byzantines'

30 An understanding rather than translation of: **ΝΣΕΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΕΙ ΜΜΟΟΥ.**

31 A clear reference to the first Muslim dynasty. I suppose δαμάζειν has to be the etymology involved but it does not seem, even remotely, to do justice to the rather vivid image given in the Coptic translation (**ΟΥΩΖΜ**) of the name.

32 Gen. 16, 1ff.

33 If Byzantine coins bearing the Cross were 'destroyed', I imagine this would mean melting them down.

34 Rev. 13, 18

35 Presumably a census, an obvious measure for the new owner-occupier of the country.

judgements<sup>36</sup> on them so that they are deprived of bread. And many will sell their children  
[ 3 lines ]

39

Later they will measure the land<sup>37</sup> with its fields and orchards, count the livestock, as an excuse for finding gold. They will do this when they are at their end. They will inflict great distress and trouble on the entire world. They will persecute foreigners in the cities and towns and everywhere they find them. They will confine them in their prisons because at that time many will leave their cities and towns and go abroad because of the hardships of that nation<sup>38</sup> [ 4 lines] misfortunes that will befall the land. And everyone will experience something like the agony of permanent death. After all these tribulations and dangers that God will bring upon the whole of mankind, men will not repent, but add to their acts of lawlessness, angering the God who created them. All will learn about evil, the old and the young. Young people will defile themselves with dumb animals and women from the age of ten, because lawlessness has increased among the sons of men. They will be blasphemers, who break fasts, lie, unrestrainedly

40

swear false oaths, hating each other, betraying each other, arrogantly fighting with each other. Fornication will increase greatly among men and desire and pleasure more than all the generations who have been on the earth. They will make them powerless of body and bring upon them hunger and great poverty on the land, because of their excessive sinning. At that time God will take away His blessing from them on earth. At home, in the field, in wheat, in wine, in oil. *And even to the rain and dew they will be prevented from allowing their face to come upon earth.* <sup>39</sup> The river of Egypt will become weak and so low that

---

36 Arabic 'taxes'

37 As the Normans did in 11th cent. England.

38 I do not know any word from Pharaonic Egypt used to describe flight from one's land due to inability to pay taxes due, but the subject of vagrancy can be found in the text (c. 1000 BC) published by R. Caminos in *A Tale of Woe* (1962), an imaginary letter from Wermai, a high-ranking priest, to a friend at the royal residence in Heracleopolis in the 20th Dynasty, complaining about the hardships he has suffered because he has been driven out of his home illegally. The phenomenon of leaving one's land because of inability to pay taxes or because of heavy debt came to be known in Greek as ἀναχώρησις, a term adopted by Christians as an expression of leaving the secular world to embrace the divine world.

39 Hag.1, 11



people will be able to walk across it. Then God will take control of the river not to let water come upon the land for many years because of the sins of those who live in it. So many people and animals will perish from that harsh drought. And even if God is pleased to bring it upon the land for years ... and it is very little. And then transgression will increase very greatly [ 5 lines]

## 41

and the dew and the rain not to allow them to come down on the land. For this reason too the earth will be unable to produce its fruits. *A great seed will be taken from the field and little will be reaped*<sup>40</sup>, because the lawlessness of the children has increased greatly upon the earth. *God has taken away His blessing on the earth from all that grows in the fields, the vineyards, the olive trees and the rest of the fruits of the earth.*<sup>41</sup> There will be much death from pestilence, as the Saviour said in the Holy Gospel: *Pestilence will be everywhere.*<sup>42</sup> [2 lines] whose name has already been mentioned. He will remain over them and teach them a great lesson for many years. *Men will cry out to God, and He will not hear them,*<sup>43</sup> for they have broken His commandments. And they have not kept His righteous ordinances and commands, but walked in crooked ways, without heeding the Scripture: *I called you, but you did not hear. I broadcast my words, but you ignored them. I will laugh at you when you are overtaken by destruction and tribulation. It will happen when you cry out to me, I will not hear.*<sup>44</sup> In those days *men will desire death but not find it and death will go forth*

## 42

*and leave them,*<sup>45</sup> as the beloved of God, John, said in the Apocalypse. But in those days all mankind will turn away. You<sup>46</sup> will find the doors of churches open but you will not find

---

40 Hag. 1, 6

41 Hag. 1, 11

42 Matt. 24, 7

43 Jer. 11, 11

44 Deut. 11, 43 and 28, 63.

45 Rev. 9, 6

46 The speaker now addresses the reader/listener directly, 'you' (2nd pers. sing.). As Prof. Witte says in his commentary II, 243 there are striking parallels in this part of the text with the Samuel Apocalypse.

anyone going into pray. You will find the body and blood of Christ scattered about, people running from them, rushing this way and that, absorbed in the cares of the world and not going to Mass. Even if a few go to Mass and, with difficulty, sing the Psalms at the offering, they will go inside to hear Mass and receive the Eucharist in a disturbed state and come out, their hearts and wicked thoughts as black as a sack. Their prayer will not get as far as the ceiling of the house of God. You will find them <sup>47</sup> sitting in the streets and their houses on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, the body and blood of Christ scattered in the churches, as they ask passers-by: 'Do you know what they are saying in church? Did they start with David? Have they sung the Ode? Have they recited the Apostle? Or will we get the Gospel?' They will go inside just when the Psalms are being sung and receive the sacrament in a disturbed state before they say 'Amen' and they will eat it and not look at their hands for they have not a tiny part [ 3 lines]

43

the entire world is not worthy of a ten thousandth part of a single tiny part of Him. They then come out disturbed before they receive the kiss of peace and each one goes home to his wicked way. Neglect and a closed heart have led them astray from the God who created them. But all these things will happen in the final days because of the sins of the priests and monks. *These are the signs of the completion of the aeons.*<sup>48</sup> The bishops of that time will ... and ordain [2 lines] the Christian and baptism which they have received they will make them clerics. They will ordain lay people unable to read or sing Psalms in the Mass. They will make many defiled and abominable people clerics. They will ordain children presbyters and deacons before they are old enough to be made readers. They will dissolutely eat and drink in the house of God and fight with each other and make the house of God an object of ridicule. At that time you will go to the houses of God and find them bare, with no-one gathered

44

for them, because troubles and distress have multiplied on the land. People have stopped being sober for the house of God<sup>49</sup> The whole of mankind has destroyed their way before God.<sup>50</sup> They sway like drunks. They will all groan and grieve from childhood, before

---

47 Presumably εἴσοογ for εἴσοο.

48 Matt. 24,3

49 I take this to mean that if they attend Church they will be drunk.

50 Gen. 6, 12. It is curious that in neither this version of this verse nor in the Bohairic one (as published by P. de Lagarde *Der Pentateuch* 1867) is there grammatical congruence between the subject and the

reasoning has begun, to old age, when strength has abated. For the joy of the land has disappeared. They groan because they have not achieved any worthwhile yield, for the joy of the land has gone. The fishermen will weep that their fish have disappeared in the waters of the river. The sailors will grieve that the water of the river has declined and that they are no longer able to sail on it with ease. The craftsmen of the land will grieve that their crafts have fallen into neglect<sup>51</sup>. Trade has been ruined in the whole country. The whole of mankind groans, have fallen into decline and are dying out in their towns and cities, which have become empty because of death and famine and the tribulations brought upon them by barbarians. And many churches will be left without Mass on Saturday and Sunday because the offerings have dwindled, there are fewer presbyters and deacons because of the hardships imposed by the pitiless barbarians. *This is the abomination of desolation ... Daniel*<sup>52</sup> [4 lines]

45

God, like these animal stables, locking people up in them and taking tribute from them, destroying Christian laws with the consent of God so that the elect might be made manifest.<sup>53</sup> Pay attention, my beloved, and I will tell you precisely what will happen in the last times by means of the things explained to me by the Holy Spirit. If you go into the churches, you will find the presbyters and deacons to be small beardless children lacking decorative grey hair [6 lines] before they come of age, defiled and abominable, their desires and pleasure burning within them like a fire. *These because of whom the anger God comes.*<sup>54</sup> Similarly, if you see the bishops and presbyters and deacons and priors of monasteries, the heads of towns and villages, supporting the heathens, about whom we have been speaking, then understand<sup>55</sup> and see that *the abomination of desolation, the Antichrist, has come near.*<sup>56</sup> If you see the sons of the church receiving interest, while monks conduct business, many having fallen into fornication ... They have fallen into the hands of those heathens. They have laughed at them and despised them with their

---

object.

51 CD 492b quotes M 23 with a similar sentiment: **ΑΤΕΙΤΕΧΝΗ ΟΥΩΣΩ ΑΣΕΡΑΤΩΛ**

52 An assortment of Biblical passages is cited by Prof. Witte, starting with Dan. 9, 27

53 I Cor. 11,9 (among others).

54 Eph. 5, 6

55 Coptic has two verbs **COOYN** and **ΕΙΜΕ** (also in Pharaonic Egyptian), which seem to indicate different stages of the knowledge process, the former referring to the registering of the information, the latter to the processing of it, not unlike **γνῶσις** and **ἐπιστήμη**. The word used here is **ΕΙΜΕ**.

56 A variety of Biblical passages, including Dan. 11, 31, for this and the passage above.

monastic habit.<sup>57</sup> Then they have taken money from them and left them. Understand and see that *the Antichrist, the son of destruction, has come near*. Woe to the world in those days, for there will be tribulation and pestilence in it. *Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom and there will be a great war, and the earth will not cease to experience revolution after revolution*<sup>58</sup> until the time when the one who shakes the whole earth appears, the Antichrist, the son of destruction. Woe to the world when that one appears, for there will be much tribulation and disturbance in it [

---

<sup>57</sup> The concept of the monastic or restricted communal life is largely unfamiliar in Islam, with the prominent exception of groups such as Dervishes and Sufis , where groups can live together in an institutional form such as the institution described by E.W. Lane in his Arabic-English Lexicon (1863) p. 818 as 'a convent inhabited by righteous and good men': خانقاه

<sup>58</sup> Matt. 24, 7