The Festal Epistles: Fragments and Additional Letters (Burgess translation)

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. AD 296–373)

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Letter 27. Fragment of the Twenty-seventh Letter

For who is our joy and boast, but our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who suffered for us, and by Himself made known to us the Father? For He is no other than He Who of old time spake by the Prophets; but now He saith to every man, I Who speak am near. Right well is this word spoken; for He does not at one time speak, at another being silent; but continually and at all times, from the beginning without cessation, He stirs up every man, and speaks to every man in his heart.

Letter 29. Fragment of the Twenty-ninth Letter

37-41. And the Lord proved the disciples, when He was asleep on the pillow, at which time a miracle was wrought, which is especially calculated to put even the wicked to shame. For when He arose, and rebuked the sea, and silenced the storm, He plainly shewed two things; that the storm of the sea was not from the winds, but from fear of its Lord, Who walked upon it; and that the Lord, Who rebuked it, was not a creature, but rather its Creator, since a creature is not obedient to a creature. For although the Red Sea 21. was divided before Moses, yet it was not Moses who did it; for it took place, not because he spake, but because God commanded. And also if the sun stood still in Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, yet this was the work, not of the son of Nun, but of the Lord, Who heard his

Joshua 10, 12. prayer. He it was, Who both rebuked the sea, and on the cross caused the sun to be darkened.

Letter 39. Of the Books Received by the Church (the Canon)

Of the particular books and their number, which are received by the Church. From the thirty-ninth Letter of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, which treats of the Paschal festival; wherein he defines canonically which are the divine books which are received by the Church. But since we have made mention of heretics as dead, but of ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures for salvation; and since I fear lest, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some few of the simple should be beguiled from their simplicity and purity, by the subtilty of certain men, and should afterwards read other books—those called apocryphal—led astray by the similarity of their names with the true books: I beseech you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, of matters with which you are acquainted, influenced by the need and advantage of the Church. In proceeding to make mention of these things, I shall adopt, to commend my undertaking, the pattern of Luke the Evangelist, saying, Forasmuch as some have taken in hand, to reduce into order for themselves the books termed

The above fragment of the thirty-ninth Letter has long been before the world, having been preserved in the original Greek, by Theodorus Balsamon. It may be found in the first volume of the Benedictine edition of the works of S. Athan. tom. i. p. 767, ed. 1777. A Syriac translation of it has been discovered by Mr. Cureton in an anonymous Commentary on the Scriptures in the collection of the British Museum, (Col. 12, 168.) and appended to his volume. This translation does not contain quite so much as the fragment of the original, commencing only at the quotation from S. Luke. The heading above given is translated from the Syriac. A careful consideration of the style, compared with that of the other Letters, has led me to consider it as the work of a different translator. It adheres less closely to the Greek, than is the case in the other Letters with the few fragments that are extant; more than once introducing explanations of the word Apocryphal. The quotation from

St. Luke differs widely in the choice of words from the same quotation, as found in Letter ii. p. 20. Lastly, the word 'heretics' is written very differently in this fragment from the mode uniformly adopted in the other Letters.

In this we find it written, Ἰωσοῖοι, elsewhere, οὐλογοῖοι. The Greek has the words καὶ τῆς ἀγνότης, found in some Mss. of the Scriptures. apocryphal, and to mix them up with the divinely inspired Scripture, concerning which we have been fully persuaded, as they who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, delivered to the fathers; it hath seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by the brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to bring before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may correct those who have led him astray; and that he who continues stedfast in purity, may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance. There are, then, of the Old Testament, in all twenty-two books in number: for, as I have heard, they are handed down the same in number as the letters among the Hebrews, their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following them, we have Joshua, the son of Nun, and Judges, then Ruth. And again next, four books of Kings, and of them the first and second are reckoned one book, and so likewise the third and fourth, one. And again, after these, the first and second of the Chronicles are similarly reckoned as one book. Esdra again, the first and second as one. After these there is the book of Psalms, then Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book. Then Isaias, Jeremias, and with him Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament.

But we must not look upon it as a task to speak of the books of the New Testament. These then are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Catholic Epistles, called of the Apostles, seven in number, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; and then, one of Jude. Besides these, there are fourteen Epistles of the The Syriac has the conjunction, editors, which is rejected by the Benedictine Syri. And the seven Epistles. Apostle Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians and to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. To these, the Revelation of John.

These are the fountains of salvation, that he who thirsteth may be satisfied with the words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to them, neither let him take ought from them. For on this point the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, saying, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures. And

He reproved the Jews, saying, Search the Scriptures, for they testify of Me. But for greater exactness, I add this also, considering it necessary so to write: that there are other books besides these, not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who are come of late, wishing for admonition and instruction in godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Doctrine of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read: nor is there any mention of apocryphal writings. But this is an invention of heretics, writing them to favour their own views, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, and producing them as ancient writings, that thereby they might find occasion to lead astray the simple.

Syr. 'Of Paul.' Syr. 'living words.' The Syriac translator appears to have had before him the Benedictine reading, sui Bonhagorans. Syr. 'The Son of Sirach.'

Letter 44. Fragment of the Forty-fourth Letter

WHEN, therefore, the servants of the Chief Priests and the Scribes saw these things, and heard from Jesus, Whosoever is athirst, let him come to Me and drink; they perceived that this was not a mere man like themselves, but that this was He Who also gave water to the saints, and that it was He Who was acknowledged by the prophet Isaiah. For He was truly, as it were, the splendour of the light, and the Word of God; thus too He was the river from the fountain which gives drink. And then to Paradise, and now to all men, He gives the same gift of the Spirit, and says, If any 38. man thirst, let him come to Me and drink. Whosoever believeth on Me, as saith the Scripture, rivers of living water shall flow out of his belly. This was not for man to say, but for the living God, Who truly vouchsafes life, and gives the Holy Spirit.

a The hitherto unpublished Syriac text corresponding to p. 71—73. of the translation. Vide note y, p. 71. 1 □□□□□□□ (virtue) is doubtless an error for □□□□□□□ (produce).

Letter 40. Addendum to the Fortieth Letter

Ye are they that have continued with Me in My temptations; and I appoint to you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me, that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom. Being called, then, to the great and heavenly Supper, in that upper room which has been swept, let us cleanse ourselves, as the Apostle exhorted, from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; that so, being spotless within and without,—without, clothing ourselves with temperance and justice; within, by the Spirit, rightly dividing the word of truth—we may hear, Enter into the joy of thy Lord.

Letter 42. Addendum to the Forty-second Letter

For we have been called, brethren, and are now called together, by Wisdom, and according to the Evangelical parable, to that great and heavenly Supper, and sufficient for every creature; I mean, to the Passover,—to Christ, Who is sacrificed. Again, a little afterwards: They, therefore, that are thus prepared shall hear, Enter into the joy of thy Lord.

Letter 43. Addendum to the Forty-third Letter

Of us, then, whose also is the Passover, the calling is from above, and our conversation is in heaven, as Paul says; For we have here no abiding city, but we seek that which is to come, whereto, also, looking forward, we properly keep the feast. And again, a little afterwards: heaven truly is high, and its distance from us infinite; for the heaven of heavens, says he, is the Lord's. But not, on that account, are we to be negligent or fearful, as though the way thereto were impossible; but rather should we be zealous. Yet not, as in the case of those who formerly, removing from the east and finding a plain in Senaar, began [to build a tower], is there need for us to bake bricks with fire, and to seek slime for mortar; for their tongues were confounded, and their work was brought to nought. But for us the Lord has consecrated a way through His blood, and hath made it easy. And again. For not only has He afforded us consolation respecting the distance, but also in that He hath come and opened the door for us which was once shut. For, indeed, it was shut from the time He cast out Adam from the delight of Paradise, and set the Cherubim and the flaming sword, that turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life—now, however, opened wide.

And He that sitteth upon the Cherubim having appeared with greater grace and loving-kindness, led into Paradise with himself the confessing thief, and having entered heaven as our forerunner, opened the gates to all. And again. Paul also, Phila. 3, 14. pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling, by it was taken up to the third heaven, and having seen those things which are above, and then descended, he teaches us, announcing what is written to the Hebrews, and saying, For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and clouds, and darkness, and a tempest, and to the voice of words. But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven. Who would not wish to enjoy the high companionship with these! Who not desire to be enrolled with these,

that he may hear with them, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you 31. from the foundation of the world.

Letter 45. Addendum to the Forty-fifth Letter

Let us all take up our sacrifices, observing distribution to the poor, and we enter into the holy place, as it is written; whither also our forerunner Jesus is entered for us, having obtained eternal redemption. . . . . From the same. . . . . And this is a great proof that, whereas we were strangers, we are called friends; from being formerly aliens, we are become fellow-citizens with the saints, and made children of the Jerusalem which is above, whereof that which Solomon built was a type. For if Moses made all things according to the pattern shewed him in the mount, it is clear that the service performed in the tabernacle was a type of the heavenly mysteries, whereto the Lord, desirous that we should enter, prepared for us the new and abiding way. And as all the old things were a type of the new, so the festival that now is, is a type of the joy which is above, to which coming with psalms and spiritual songs, let us begin the fasts.

Source. English translation by Henry Burgess, from *The Festal Epistles of S. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, translated by Henry Burgess (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1854; *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* 38), the appendix and addenda; public domain. The text was read by machine (Mistral OCR) from a scan of the 1854 edition at the Internet Archive and has not been proofread against the printed book. SermonIndex has removed running heads and page numbers, joined words split across lines, and divided the text into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Footnotes and the editor's introduction are left out. The indexes and Burgess's notes are also left out. No original-language text is shown beside it, and no modern English version has been made.

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