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The Festal Letter of the Pope Matthew the Poor

Introduction

Dionysius of Alexandria was the first Coptic patriarch to introduce the festal letters, announcing to his congregation in Egypt the date of the Pass-over and the beginning of the lent in addition to several moral exhortations. This became a tradition which survives up to the ninth century¹. Many festal letters are known in a Coptic version, among them the letters of Saint Dionysius², Athanasius³, Theophilus⁴ and Cyril⁵. Some of these letters were translated into Arabic.⁶

The patriarch Matthew the Poor, or Matthew the Great

The life of this Patriarch, Matthew I, the Poor (Matta al-Maskin)⁷ eighty-seventh patriarch of the See of Saint Mark (feast day: 7 Kiyakh) (1378-1408), contains ample material on his actions and movements in the *History of the Patriarchs*.

- 1 J. Quasten, *Initiation aux Pères de l'Eglise*, traduction J. Laporte, Tome 2, Paris 1958, p. 131-132.
- 2 W. Till, *Osterbrief und Predigt in achmim. Dialekt*, Leipzig 1931.
- 3 T. Lefort, *Lettres festales et pastorales en copte*, CSCO 150-151, Louvain 1955, A. Camplani, *Le lettere festali di Atanasi di Alessandria, Studio storico critico – Corpus Manoscritti Copti Letterari*, Roma 1989. P. Devos „Les cinq premières lettres festales de Saint Athanase d'Alexandrie”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 110, (1992) 5-20. R. G. Coquin et E. Lucchesi, „Un complément au corpus copte des lettres festales d'Athanase (Paris B. N. Copte 176)”, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 13, (1982) 137-142. R.-G. Coquin, „Les lettres festales d'Athanase (CPG 2102), un nouveau complément le Ms IFAO Copte 25”, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 15, (1984) 133-158. Enzo Lucchesi, „Un nouveau complément aux lettres festales d'Athanase”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 119 (2001) 255-260.
- 4 S. Emmel, „Theophilus' Festal Letter of 401 as quoted by Shenute”, ed. C. Flück, *Divitiae Aegypti: Koptologische und verwandte Studien zu Ehren von Martin Krause*, Wiesbaden 1995, p. 93-98.
- 5 A. Camplani, „La prima lettera festale di Cirillo di Alessandria e la testimonianza di P. Vindob. K. 10157”, *Augustinianum* 39 (1999) 129-138.
- 6 G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen-arabischen Literatur, Studi e Testi* 117, Vatican City, Vol. 1, p. 309, 314, 316, 321f., 469.
- 7 Subhi Y. Labib, „Matthew I”, in *TheCoptic Encyclopedia* 5, p. 1569a-1570b.

A contemporary with this patriarch wrote his biography as he uses sometimes the first person. It may be the bishop of Khandaq⁸.

He was a native of a small village called Bani Ruh in the district of al-Ashmunayn in Upper Egypt. At the age of fourteen Matthew left his home and went to one of the neighbouring monasteries in Upper Egypt, apparently the monastery of Dayr Abu Fanah⁹. After his ordination as a priest Matthew decided to go to the Monastery of Saint Anthony where he met another saint Mark of Saint Anthony¹⁰. There he acted as a deacon, concealing his priesthood. After some time in that wilderness, he moved to Jerusalem, where he spent his time in ardent prayer and fasting as well as in rendering service to others. He returned to Egypt and headed for Qusqam and the Monastery of Our Lady al-Muharraq.¹¹ After the death of Gabriel IV, Matthew was elected. Having asked the counsel of the elders of the monastery of Saint Anthony he accepted and was ordained on 16 Misra, which happened to be the commemoration day of the Virgin.

As patriarch he served the community in every way imaginable, and he retained his humility by participation with others in the most menial tasks, although this never diminished his respectability in the eyes of others. Matthew I advised the prelate of Ethiopia that he consecrated him, to ask the negus to send two missions to Europe in search of religious relics supposed to attest divine favor toward Dawit and consolidate his throne thereby. The first mission reached Venice in 1402, and the other arrived at Rome in 1404. It was the first mission, whose spokesman was a certain Florentine, Antonio Bartoli who brought the relics desired by the negus from Venice.¹² All his income was spent by helping the needy, the poor, the monks, and the nuns. He helped all who were in need, Copts, Muslims, or Jews alike. Individual stories of his generosity are enumerated in detail in the *History of the Patriarch*. Matthew also consecrated the holy Myron in the year 1401 AD in the monastery of Saint Macarius.¹³ He translated the relics of Saint George to the monastery of Qalamon.¹⁴ This patriarch had also the gift of prophecy and miracle, he prophesied the name of his successor.¹⁵ He died at the age of seventy-two on 22 Tubah. Of these years, he spent forty as a bachelor and a monk,

8 J. Den Heijer, *Mawhub Ibn Mansur Ibn Mufarrig et l'Historiographie Copto-Arabe*, CSCO 513, Subs. 83, Louvain 1989, p. 12-13.

9 R. G. Coquin, M. Martin, „Dayr Abu Fanah”, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 3, p. 698-700.

10 R. G. Coquin, „Murqus al-Antuni”, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 6, p. 1699.

11 Apparently this practice was common at that time. An Ethiopian text of a miracle of Saint Mary shows that there were fairly close relations at this period between the monks of Saint Anthony and those of al-Muharraq. This miracle took place in the monastery of al-Muharraq in the year 1396 AD, cf. E. Cerulli, *Il Libro etiopico dei Miracoli di Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del medio evo latino*, Rome, 1943, p. 209.

12 S. Tedeschi, „Ethiopian Prelates”, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 4, p. 1005-1044.

13 Graf, *GCAL* II, p. 458. R. G. Coquin, „Dayr Apa Anub”, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 3, p. 770.

14 R. Stewart, „Birma”, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 2, p. 392.

15 A. Khater and O. H.E. Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church known as the History of the Holy Church*, Vol. 3, part 3, Cairo 1970, p. 271-272 (translation).

and thirty-two as patriarch. Apparently his funeral was a turbulent occasion in which innumerable people congregated from all walks of life. He was buried in the tomb he had prepared for himself at Dayr al-Khandaq in Cairo.¹⁶

He also appears in the Islamic sources of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

1.1.1 Literary activity of Matthew

The monumental work of Graf¹⁷ mentions briefly the literary activities of this patriarch including a collection on purity including witnesses from the scriptures and the fathers, and another collection of sixteen moral and ascetic homilies. Coquin did not add anything except a reference to the *History of the Patriarchs* and a homily for the funeral of this patriarch.¹⁸

However in the *History of the Patriarchs*, we read

واما مكاتبتة فكان يكتب فيها بعد ذكر الثالوث المقدس الخلاص للرب يشير بذلك ان المسيح
الهنا هو الذي يحكم على فمه بما فيه الخلاص لعبيده

„And as for his correspondence, he used to write in it, after the mention of the Holy Trinity, ‘Salvation belongs to the Lord’ meaning by it that it is Christ our God Who gives judgment through his (the patriarch’s) mouth, in which is salvation for His slaves”¹⁹

This text makes allusion to the literary activity of Matthew. In our text there is an allusion to a previous festal letter, which did not survive. This means that at least for the first two years of the patriarchate of Matthew, he wrote festal letters.

1. Subjects treated in our text

- 1 – The adultery and the concubinage, their consequences, examples from the Holy Scriptures.
- 2 – Exhortations for the priests to examine their congregation.
 - 1 – Repentance is possible.
 - 2 – Repentance should not only be during the lent but also during the whole year.
 - 3 – Let everyone choose his share.
 - 4 – Exhortations for the whole congregation (men and women) to respect the discipline of the Church.
 - 5 – Final blessing.

16 R.G. Coquin, M. Martin, „Dayr al-Khandaq”, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 3, p. 814-815.

17 G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen-arabischen Literatur, Studi e Testi* 133, Vatican City 1947, Vol. 2, p. 455-456.

18 M. Albert, R. Beylot, R.G. Coquin, B. Outier, C. Renoux, A. Guillaumont, *Christianismes orientaux, Collection Initiations au Christianisme ancien*, Paris Cerf 1993, p. 87. (Coquin wrote the chapters concerning the Christian Arabic texts and the Coptic texts). This homily is published by Kamel Saleh Nakhlah, *Silsilat Tarikh al-Batarikah, (The collection of the History of the Patriarchs)* Vol. 3, 2nd edition, edited by Anba Matteos, Cairo 2001, p. 47-53.

19 A. Khater and O. H. E. Burmester, *The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church known as the History of the Holy Church*, Vol. III, Part III, Cairo 1970, p. 136-158 (text), p. 235-271 (translation) especially p. 144 (text); p. 248 (translation).

The patriarch always refers to himself using the word „maskanat“ (= poverty, humility), and one can conclude that this title became his nickname. As his style, Matthew quoted from the Old and New Testaments, as well as from the Didascalia.

As we can see the problem of concubinage and polygamy is present in our text. This problem is very recurrent in the Coptic history.

– For example *Saint Poemen* never reproached his neighbour who lived with a concubine, and when the woman gave birth to a child, he had sent a jug of wine to her. At once the neighbour repented and became a disciple of the old man.²⁰

– During the Patriarchate of *Simon I*, the forty-second patriarch (689-701 AD), some men wanted to obtain the right to leave their legal wives in favour of taking concubines and still adhering to the church as Christians. They appealed to the governor to legalize this behavior and consequently ‘Abd al-‘Aziz convened a special council, which was attended by sixty-four bishops in Alexandria, to look into this strange matter.²¹

– *Abraham*, the sixty-second patriarch (975-978), known as Ibn Zar‘ah, became one of the most significant patriarchs of the tenth century. Immediately after his consecration, Abraham suppressed the practice of simony, which had been rampant during former patriarchs. Then he concentrated on reforming the morals of the Coptic archons who kept many concubines in addition to their legal wives. He spared no effort to enforce the sanctity of marriage, even threatening to excommunicate all culprits.²²

– This issue will be the reason of the deposition of the Patriarch *Mark V* (1601-1617 AD), when the inhabitants of Rydaniyah and the metropolitan of Damietta used polygamy and concubinage.²³

In Ethiopia Coptic bishops such as Sawiros (late eleventh century) fought against polygamy. *Ya‘qob* (fl. mid-fourteenth century) supported the monks in their revolt against the king Sayfa Ar‘ad against his concubinage. The later promised to have no more than one wife, but some time later, following the example of his predecessors, he married three. The negus dispatched Ya‘qob to Egypt. Near the end of 1635, *Marqos III* (d. c. 1648) entered Gonder, which had just been founded by the negus, and upon his arrival he issued certain moralizing edicts to the Ethiopian society. In particular, he objected to the custom of keeping several concubines, which was common, especially among the nobility.

20 L. Regnault, „Poemen, Saint“, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 6, p. 1983-1984.

21 Subhi Y. Labib, „Simon I“, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 7, p. 2138-2139.

22 Subhi Y. Labib, „Abraham, Saint“, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* . 1, p. 10-11.

23 Kamel Saleh Nakhlah, *Silsilat Tarikh al-Batarikah*, (*The collection of the History of the Patriarchs*) Vol. 4, 2nd edition, edited by Anba Matteos, Cairo 2001, p. 62-63. Bishop Samuel and Nabih Kamel Dawod, *Tarikh al-Aba al-Batarikah li-l anba Yusab Usqf Fuwah*, [the history of the fathers patriarchs by Josep bishop of Fuwah] Cairo 1992, p.205.

However some Coptic bishops in Ethiopia were accused to have concubines, such as Krestodolu I (fl. late sixteenth century) and Sem'on (d. 1617)²⁴

1.1. The manuscript

The manuscript is a collection of moral and pastoral theology for priests in addition to some practical-liturgical issues

Fol. 149 recto contains the following colophon

نجاز هذا الكتاب الذي هو القانون الطاهر يوم الخميس المبارك الثاني عشر من برمهات سابع شهر سنة 1570 قبطية للشهدا الاطهار السعدا الابرار رزقنا الله بقبول طلباتهم الى النفس الاخير امين

وكان المهتم به الاب الفاضل الطاهر القديس الحبر الموقن الكامل النفيس ابونا القمص هرمينا خادماً ببيعة القديس العظيم ابو هرمينا الكاينة بقاؤ الشوق وذلك صرف عليه من ماله وصلب حاله فنسال الرب الاله العالى في سماءه ان يساعده عوض اهتمامه على العمل بما فيه مع غفرات خطايه بشفاعه الست السينة العدرى والملايكة والرسل والشهدا وكافة من ارضاه امين

وقفاً موبدا وحبساً مخلداً على بيعة القديس ابو هرمينا المعروفة بقاؤ شوق لايباع ولا يرهن ولا يستعار ولا يخرج من وقفه لوجه من الوجوه التلاف وكل من تعدا واخرجه عن وقفه لوجه ما ذكر يكون نصيبه مع سيمون الساحر ومن يشبهه ومن حفظه وصانه الله يحفظه امين

(Here) finishes this book, which is the pure canon on blessed Thursday 12th of Baramhat, which is the seventh month, in the Coptic year 1570 of the pure,²⁵ happy righteous martyr, May God grant us, the acceptance of their prayers to the last breath. Amen!

The person in charge was the honoured pure, saint, perfect entrusted precious priest, our father the Hegumen Hermina the minister of the church of the great saint Abba Hermina²⁶ at Qaw²⁷ of the East, by spending his own money and his private belongings, we beseech the Lord elevated God in His Highest to help him and reward him zeal for this work, by the forgiveness of his sins, through the intercessions of Lady Madonna, the Virgin, the angels, the pure Apostles, the martyrs and all who pleased Him.

An inalienable endowment and eternal bequest for the church of Saint Abba Hermina at Qaw of the East. It should be sold or given as a pledge, or borrowed, or taken out of his endowment for any damaging reason whoever transgress and took it out of his endowment for the above mentioned reason, will have his share with Simon the Magician and who resembled to him; and whoever preserved and conserved it, God may guard him; Amen!

24 Cf. „Ethiopian Prelates“ (continued), *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 4, p. 1005-1044.

25 = 20 March 1854 AD.

26 J. Muyser, „Ermite pèlerinant et pèlerin infatigable; fragment arabe de la vie d'Anba Harmin, racontée par son compagnon de voyage Apa Hor de Preht“ *BSAC* 9, (1943), p. 159-23. R.-G. Coquin, „Harmina, Saint“, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 4, p. 1209a-1209b.

27 R.-G. Coquin and M. Martin, S. J., „Dayr Harmina“ *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 3, p. 808. Fr. Samuel al-Suriany and Badii Habib, *Guide to Ancient Coptic Churches and Monasteries in Upper Egypt*, Cairo 1991, N 101. (South of al-Badari, Izbet al-Aqbat).

1.1.1 The text (Fol. 135r-138r)

بسم الاب والابن والروح القدس الاله الواحد

نسخة كتاب تهنية بالصوم المقدس كتب في سنة الف وستة وتسعين للشهدا الاطهار للشعب الارثوذكسي بمصر والقاهرة وضع ابينا السيد البطريك انبا متى الله يرحمنا بصلاته امين قال ايها الاولاد بارك الله عليكم انه قد تقدم من مسكنتنا وصية العام الماضي ولم نشدد على الاولاد فيها لكن اظهرنا ما يعلموه الاولاد من الكتب المقدسة اولا فاول واعلمناهم ايضا انه ليس خطية تبعد من الله وتمتع سرايره وتجعل الانسان اسيرا في يدي العدو مثل نجاسة الجسد بالزنا من غير توبة ورجوع الى الطهارة الذي بغيرها لا يعاين الله فان كان الاولاد يسألون* مسكنة ابيهم قايلين اوصي وصية فقط من غير تشدد رباط ولا حرم [طبيا ماو] الاولاد الكتب جيدا ان ابينا الرسل و من سبقهم اوصوا وصايا كثير بغير رباط ولا حرم ووصايا اخر شددوا فيها قايلين ان من خالفها يكون محروما فان اردنا نحن ان نوصي في هذا المعنى بغير رباط لكن وصية فقط بشفعة من اجل ضعفنا فلننظر ايضا بخوف ورعدة ما حل بالجيل الثاني اذا اهلك الله منهم لاجله بالطوفان وحوش الارض وطيور السما وان اردنا ان نتكلم في هذا المعنى بالترخيص من غير رباط فلننظر ما حل بشعب الرب ابنه بكره مع قيامهم بعبادته في البرية القفرا اذا اهلك الله منهم لاجل زنا* رجل واحد الذي اعده واتفهم ايضا ما صار اليه بلعام معما انه كان ناظر الالهيات وان اردنا ان نتكلم في هذا المعنى باللين والشفقة فلننظر ايضا ما حل بعالي خادم الله وكاهنه لاجل شفقتة على بنيه معما انه كان طاهر زكيا ولننظر ايضا بفهم ما قال كمال الناموس ومتمم قول الانبيا تعالى قوله انه من نظر العين فقط يكون سراج الجسد فان كانت عينك شريرة فجسدك كله يكون مظلما وان كانت عينك بسيطة فجسدك كله يكون نيرا كما ينير لك السراج بلمع ضياه وقد نجد الرسول الطاهر يحرس²⁸ في هذا المعنى ليس في موضع* واحد لكن في مواضع كثيرة اذ يعلم هكذا قايلان ان الطعام موضوع للبطن والبطن للطعام والله مبطل كلاهما فاما الجسد فانه هيكल الله ومن يفسد هيكل الله يفسده الله وقد قال ايضا ان الزواج طاهر ومضجع اهله نقي من العيوب واما الزناة فالله يعاقبهم ويكرر في هذا المعنى قايلان لا تضلوا يا هولا انه لا الزناة ولا السحرة ولا عباد الاوثان يرثون ملكوت الله فان كانت مسكنتي تسمع هولا الشهادات كلهم واريده ان اصنع وصايا بشفقة من غير رباط ولا تشدد وحروم فلا تسمع انا المسكين ابينا الرسل قايلين ان التسري حرام وفاعله يكون محروما فان سألوا* الاولاد بارك الله عليهم قايلين لماذا تبكت الناس قاطبة ولم تبكت الذي شهرته هذا الامر بين الشعب ظاهرا لماذا تناشدني في العام الماضي قايلان الويل لكل كاهن يعلم او يتحقق ان احد الاولاد متسري او متخذ مضجع نجس او زيجة محرمة ويدنيه من السرائر المقدسة الذي هو جسد المسيح له المجد ودمه الكريم ولم يتحقق توبته فليكون مدان لماذا تناشدنا في العام الماضي قايلان الويل لمسكنتنا ان اطلعنا احد الاولاد انه متسري او متخذ زيجة محرمة وسكننا عنه لاجل خوف او هدية وقد ظهر لنا الامر بخلاف ذلك اذ نرى منك انك رعيت* رعاية المسيح بالحباة ولم تقطع بكلمة الحق ولم تدوي الخروف الاجرب ولم تقطع العضو الفاسد ان كنت تخاف من سطوته فلماذا تقول مع الرسول ان نفسي ليست محسوبة عندي شيا في كمال سعي معما ان الروح يناشدني في كل حين ان الوثاقيات عتيلة لك في كل بلد ان كنت انت يا راعي المسيح تسلك بالمرائة والحباة فلماذا تحملنا نحن الغنم احمالا ثقلا هكني لاننا سمعناك في العام الماضي تناشدنا قايلان انه لاجل شفقة عالي الكاهن على بنيه وتركهم في خدمة الكهنوت وهم متنجسين في خطاياهم ولم تقطع درجاتهم اسلم الله شعبه في يدي الكنعانيين وقتلوا* منهم ثلثون الفا ونزل

تابوت عهده في بيوت الاصنام سبعة اشهر لماذا تناشدنا في العام الماضي قايلًا بمثل هذه الاقوال جميعها والان ظهر منك المراية في رعاية قطع المسيح فانا ايضا اسالكم ايها الابنا قايلًا كفوا عن تبكيت مسكنة ابيكم ولا تحزنوا قلبه حتى تسمعون احتجاجه لاني انا المسكين لم اترك ذلك خوفا من سطوته ولا انتظار الفخر هديته ولكني لما وضعت العام الماضي الفلاس على اصل الشجرة وجردت المنشار الكبير الاسنان فعند ذلك اخذتني الرعدة وتذكرت النص الموضوع في الانجيل المقدس انه كان لانسان شجرة تين مغروسة في كرمه فجاء يطلب منها ثمرة فلما لم يجد قال* لكرامه اقطعها لئلا تبطل الارض ونظرت انا المسكين كيف ذلك الفلاح اظهر الشفقة والتدلل بين رب الكرم قايلًا ان كنت انت يا سيدي صاحب البستان والكرم لك وانت الحاكم على وعلى ولكن بكثرة رحمتك تمهل على وامهل هذه الشجرة لعلي افلحها واصلحها فان اثمرت في العام المستقبل والا فاقطعها انظرتم لحنو ذلك الفلاح وشفقته انه لم يصنع بتلك الاشجار كلها الثابتة في بيت الرب الذين هم انتم لكنه اجتهد فيها اكثر من تغليح تلك الاشجار كلها فهكذي مسكنة ابيكم وذلته لما بلغني ان بعض الاولاد تركوا الزيجة الطاهرة والمضجع* النقي ولم يستطعوا حفظ الطهارة الذي بغيرها لا يعين الله فلم يضع الفلاس اولا على اصل الشجرة لكن كما استطاعت مسكنتنا حمل التعب في تغليحهم فقوموا منهم امرناهم بالزواج الطاهر وقوموا منهم امرناهم ان لا يدنوا من السراير المقدسة وقوموا انزلناهم عن درجات خدمتهم وقوموا قبلناهم كالبنا عندما تحته قناعتهم حسن التوبة النقية وقوموا اذ هم ثابتين على غوايتهم غير مستعدين من طريقهم فليسمعوا اوليك ليس من فمنا نحن الخطاة فقط ولكن من فم ابائنا الرسل ومن يتبعهم ان كل نصراني ان يتخذ من الان سرية او سيلة او امرأة من غير تكليل ولا تحليل فليكن الفاعل لهذا* الفعل محروما الى ان يتوب عنه ويتعد منه وان كان احد الاولاد يجاوبنا قايلًا لماذا ارشقنا بهذا السهم المر ولماذا ضربتنا بهذه الضربة الموجعة لانا لم نظن فيك انك تجرد هذا المنشار الذي لا يبرأ جراحاتها فانا ايضا اناشدكم قايلًا ان كانوا الاولاد يريدوا ان يكونوا سالمين من هذه الجراح برين من ما تقدم من الرباط والحرم فليتنا من كان منهم في مضجع نجس وهو يكون من الان مباركا محالًا بعد توبته لان الذي قال التسري حرام هو الذي قال ايضا ان كل كاهن لا يقبل توبة التائب من بعد توبته ورجعته عن معصيته فليفرز ذلك الكاهن* وليذكرون الاولاد ما كان عليه اهل نينوى المدينة المعظمة وما صارت اليه بعد ذلك بالتوبة وليذكرون ايضا ما حل بمريم النبية اخت هارون من البرص في مقاومتها لموسى النبي وما صارت اليه بعد ذلك من التطهير بالتوبة وليذكرون ايضا ما كان عليه منسى الملك الذي قيل عنه ان العالم باسره لو صاموا عنه ورفعوا القرايين بسببه لم يكن ذلك كفوا للصفح عن خطايه وحين اظهر دموعا مرة وتوبة نقية لا غش فيها فصار الى ما صار اليه وشاع ذكره الى جيل الاجيال لحسن توبته وقد يعلمون الاولاد ايضا ان الله ليس يطلب منا التوبة في ايام هذا الصوم المقدس فقط ولكن على ممر الايام يطلب منا عفة* نقية من غير دنس او مضجع نقي بالزواج الطاهر واما الذين يقولون اننا نبعد عنا في هذه الايام المقدسة كل مضجع نجس ونصون نفوسنا بكلما تصل القدرة اليه وعندما تاتي الايام الفصح وما بعدها يرخصون لنفوسهم ويعودون كمثلك الكلب الراجع الى قيه وكمثلك الخنزيرة الذي استحم ثم رجعت الى الحمة ليكمل عليهم قول القايل اوليك الذين يعدون يوم الطعام نعيما او قيل ايضا ان الامور الطبيعية انما يفعلونها كالبهايم وفيها يببدون الويل لهم فانهم في سبيل قاين سلكوا وبظلاله بلعام وبجراته احترقوا اذ يسعون بالغش والدنس في شهواتهم ويسوسون نفوسهم بغير تقوى فاما الذين يتوبون عن خطاياهم* بايمان مستقيم واعتراف صحيح ورجا ثابت هولا تحل البركة بركة الرب ويكمل عليهم قول الرسول القايل فاما انتم يا احباي فاقيموا على ايمانكم الطاهر اذ تصلون بالروح القدس واحفظوا نفوسكم بالمودة الالهية فانما نترجا رحمة ربنا يسوع المسيح في الحياة الدائمة فبعضا بكنوهم على خطاياهم وبعضا ارحمهم اذ كانوا مخصومين

وبعضا اتخلصوا من النار واستنقذوهم وكانوا مبغضين للباس الجسد الدنس فالا خلاصنا قادر ان يحفظكم بغير عيب وغير ذنوب ويقيمكم امام مجده بغير دنس امين وقد وضعنا محبتكم يا اخوتي هذه الاقاويل كلها فلينظر كل انسان منكم ما هو النصيب الذي يختاره لنفسه وحده كما قيل اني جعلت قدامك النار والمافمد يدك وخذ ما شئت وكما قيل ايضا من الشاهد الامين في الابو غلمسيس المصالح الذي ليوحنا ابن زبدي اذ يقول عند تمام نبوته لا تختم نبوة هذا الكتاب لان الزمان قريب من يظلم فليظلم ايضا ومن يتنجس فليتنجس ايضا والبار فليتزكى والطاهر فليطهر وهوذا اتي سريعا واجرتي معي اعطي كل واحدا واحدا كاعماله انا هو الالف والاول الاول الاخر طوباهم كل الذين يحفظون وصاياه ليكون سلطانهم على شجرة الحياة ويدخلون المدينة من الابواب والكلاب خارجا والسحرة والزناة وعباد الشياطين وكل من يصنع الكذب* فلاولاد بارك الله عليهم يعلمون انا وضعنا قدامهم ما استطاعت مسكنتنا وضعه فمن كان سامعا مطيعا لما فهو يكون سامعا ومطيعا للابا الذين اقامونا لرعاية شعب الرب ومن كان مطيعا لاوليك الابا فهو يكون مطيعا للمسيح يسوع الذي اقامهم ومن المسيح يسوع يقبل البركة قيل من سمع منكم سمع مني ومن سمع مني سمع من الاب الذي ارسلني ومن خالفكم فقد خالفني ومن خالفني فقد خالف الاب الذي ارسلني فمن ذا الذي يسمع هذه الاقاويل كلها ويصير بغير توبة الا ذلك الذي ليس له رجا في المسيح يسوع لان اهل نينوى المدينة العظما لم يهتموا لتبكيث يونان وحملوا* نفوسهم من المشقة ما تستطيع الطبيعة البشرية بالجهد حمله ولم يحنوا لبيكا اطفالهم وعند ذلك محب البشر نظر من علو سمايه على تلك التوبة الخاصة والقلوب الراجعة اليه بغير محابه فحينذا عطف عليه بكثرة رحمته وكمل عليه القول المكتوب ان البار انما يحيا بالايمان وان هو ضجر فلم تحبه نفسه فنسال الله ان يجعل الاولاد اهلا للصبر والاحتمال ولا ينطرحون خارجا بالضجر مع بني الشمال وفيما يوصي به الاولاد ايضا ان يلزموا الادب في كنيسة الله في اوقات الصلوات والقداسات ولست اخص بهذه الوصية الرجال دون النسوان بل هن اقول ايضا ان يكون صامتين في البيعة* لينالوا بذلك اوفر البركات فاما الذين يتمايلون بالاسترخا ويكثرون الحديث في البيعة وقت الصلوات والقداسات فقد يدلون عن نفوسهم ان خشية الله ليست نصب عيونهم كفاكم الله شر ذلك وعصمكم من الشكوك في هذه المسالك وان اردنا ان نوصي الاولاد عن واحدة واحدة من الوصايا فقد نجد ما يقرأ في مسامع الاولاد كل يوم من كتب الانبيا المويدين من الله بعمل الايات والنعمة المبشرين عن المزمعات بشتات البراهين وغوامض الحكمة واناجيله الطاهرة الناطقة بافعاله المعجزة الباهرة ووصايا رسله الذين ايدهم بالنعمة واعطاهم سلطان الحل والربط بالكلمة وكذلك ميامر قديسيه شهداياه وغير ذلك من تعليم* المعلمين في كل يوم بتكرار على اسماعهم ما يبني بعضه ونسال الله الاب الذي ينبغي له المجد مع ابنه وروح قدسه ان يبلغكم امثال هذا الصوم المقدس في امن وسلامة وحفظا واستقامة ويوصلكم سالين محروسين الى بهجة عيد القيامة وبارك عليكم وعلى بيوتكم وبنيتكم ونسايكم وعبيدكم وامايكم وبارك في كل تقلباتكم وجميع تصرفاتكم ويثبتكم على الايمان المستقيم بالطهارة والبر الى النفس الاخير والمجد للثالوث المقدس الاب والابن والروح القدس الان وكل اوان والى دهر الدهرين امين

Translation

(fol. 135r) In the Name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit One God.

A copy of a greeting for the holy lent (fast) written to the Orthodox people in Cairo and Egypt by our father Lord, Anba Matthew, in the year one thousand and sixty nine of the pure martyrs, may God have mercy upon us through his prayers Amen.

He said: 'O Children may God bless you. In the last year, our humility preceded to give a counsel, we did not press the children in it but we instructed the children in the Holy Scriptures step by step. We also showed them that there is no sin that removes from God and prevents his mysteries, makes the one slave in the hands of the enemy more that the impurity of the body by the adultery without repentance and return back to the purity which without it nobody will be able to see God.

So if the children ask (fol. 135v) the humility of their father saying: „Command a command but only without pressure of binding and loosening [2] the children, the books well, that our fathers the Apostles and who preceded them commanded many commandments without binding our loosening and some other commandments they insisted on them, saying that who will transgress them will be excommunicated. So if we wish to command in this context, without binding, but only a command with the intercession of our weakness, let us see what took of the second generation that God destroyed them as well as the beasts of the earth and the birds of the sky by the deluge. If we wish to talk in this context by allowing without binding let us see what happened to the people of the Lord, His first born, while worshipping Him in the desert, he destroyed them because of the adultery committed by one (fol. 136r) man²⁹ Let us understand what happened to Balaam although he was a divine seer³⁰. If we want to talk about this context with compassion and pity, let us see what happened to Eli the minister of God and His priest, because of his pity towards his children, although he was pure and sinless.³¹ Let us see also with understanding what is said by the perfection of the Law and the fulfilment of the saying of the prophets, let Him be exalted: „The sigh of the eye is the lamp of the body.“³² If your eye is evil, your whole body is full of darkness and if your eye is single, your whole body is full of light, as the lamp bright with its light.

We find the pure apostle insisted on this meaning not only in this place* (fol. 136v) but also in many other places for he taught thus saying: „Food is for the belly and the belly is for the food but God shall destroy both of them.“³³ As for the

29 Cf. Jos 7:24?.

30 Nu 22: 27.

31 1 Sam 4:12.

32 Matt 6: 22, Lk 11:34.

33 1 Cor 6:13.

body is the temple of God if any man defile the temple of God, God shall destroy him³⁴. He said also: „Marriage is pure and the bed is undefiled but the whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.“³⁵ He repeats the same meaning saying: „Do not be deceived neither, those, fornicators, nor magicians nor idolaters will inherit the kingdom of God.“³⁶ So if my humility listens to all those testimonies and I wish to make pitiful commandments without binding or pressing and excommunications, let me hear, me the poor our fathers the Apostles saying that the concubinage is out of law and that who committed is excommunicated. If the children, (fol. 137r) may God bless them, asked: Why should you rebuke everybody and not those that the matter was clearly spread about them among the people? Why, last year, do you seek me saying Woe to every priest knowing or is sure that one of the children has a concubine or having an defiled bed or unlawful marriage and he let him partake to the holy mysteries which are the body of Christ, to whom is the Glory, and the precious blood, if he is not sure that he repents, let him be anathema. Why last year, you seek of us saying: Woe to our humility if one of the children informed us that he has concubine or has an unlawful marriage, and we kept silent because of fear or present. For us, the matter appears differently, for we see that you took care (fol. 137v) of Christ's flock unfairly and you did not settle without the true word and you did not cure the scabby sheep, you did not severe the impious member. If you fear from his authority how could you say with the Apostle that my soul is not counted as dear thing to me³⁷. The Holy Spirit testifies in every city bonds and afflictions abide me³⁸. So you, o shepherd of Christ, your conduct is hypocrite and unfair so why you load us, we, the sheep, such heavy loads; for we heard you last year asking as the pity of Eli the priest for his children and how they left the ministry of priesthood while they are impure by their sins and he (Eli) did not excommunicate them from their rank s God delivered his people to the Canaanite and they killed (fol. 138r) thirty thousands and the Ark of convent was take to houses of idols for seven months³⁹. So why do you ask in the last year saying such these whole words and now you are showing hypocrite attitude in the caring of the Christ folk? Me too, I ask you, o children saying: „Enough rebuking the humility of your father and do not upset his heart before you hear his argument, for me the poor, I did not abandon that by fearing from his authority or expecting a honourable present but when I put the axe on the root of the tree⁴⁰ and prepared the hack saw,⁴¹ I was terrified when I remember the text of

34 Cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17.

35 Heb 13:4.

36 1 Cor 6:9.

37 Ac 20:24.

38 Act 20:23.

39 1 Sam 4:10-6:1.

40 Matt 3:10.

the Holy Gospel that certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came and sought fruit. When he did not find, he said to his vineyard dresser: cut it down in order not to cumber the ground."⁴² I saw, me the poor, how this vineyard dresser shows pity and humility in front of the Lord of the vineyard saying: „If Lord, you are the owner of this garden and to whom is the vineyard, you have the authority upon me and by your great mercy, be patient upon me and upon this tree, I will dig about it and I will straighten it, if it will bring fruit next year if not then after you shall cut it down.“ Did you see the pity and the mercy of that peasant, that he did not (cut) all those trees planted in the house of the Lord, who are you, but he did his best in cultivating all those trees; this is also the humility and abasement of your father. When I got informed that some of the children left the pure marriage and the pure bed (fol. 138v) and were unable to preserve the purity that purity by which no one will be able to see God.⁴³ So he did not put the axe first on the root of the tree⁴⁴ but as far as our humility was able to toil in their cultivation; some of them we order them the pure marriage, some of them we order them not to partake to the holy sacraments, and some were degraded from the rank of their ministry, some were accepted as children that we urge to convince them to good and pure repentance, some of them persisting in their conduct and are not prepared to change their behaviour let them hear, not only from our mouth, the sinners, but from the mouth of our fathers the Apostles and who follow them that every Christian who will take from now on a concubine or lady, or a woman without crowning or absolution let the committer of such act (fol. 139r) be anathema till he repents and go away from this (way).

If one of our children answer us saying: „Why do you throw this bitter arrow? And why do you strike us with this painful strike because we did not think that you would use the hacksaw⁴⁵, that its wound would never be cured. I also beg you saying: „If the children desire to be safe from this wound and innocent from the binding and the excommunication let those who have an impure bed give it up and from now he will be blessed and unbound after his repentance. Who said that concubinage is outlaw, said also that every priest who shall not receive the repentance of the repentant after his repentance and his turning back, let that priest be anathema. (fol. 139v). Let the children remember the situation of the inhabitants of the great city Nineveh and what happened after that by the repentance⁴⁶. Let

41 This expression is loaned from the Didascalia Ch. 8 Concerning the Bishop, cf. M. Daoud, al-Dasqalia, Mahabat Bookshop. Cairo 1975, p. 97. R. H. Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, Oxford, 1929; repr. 1969, p. XXXX. C. Wilfred Griggs, „Didascalia“, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 3, p. 899-900.

42 Lk 13:6-7.

43 Matt 5:8.

44 Matt 3:10.

45 Cf. Supra.

46 Jonah 3:1-10.

them remember what happened to Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, becoming leprous for she rebuked Moses the Prophet and what befell on her afterwards by the repentance⁴⁷. Let them remember what took place to Manasseh the king, it was said about him that if the whole universe fast and offer sacrifices for him, it is not enough to forgive his sins, but when he showed bitter tears and pure repentance without guile, he became as he became and his reputation was spread from generation to generation for his good repentance.⁴⁸ The children also know that God asks for repentance not only during the days of this holy fasting but also during all days (of the year). He beseeches pure chastity undefiled or a pure bed by the pure marriage. As for those who say: „Let us be away from any impure bed during these holy days and let us preserve ourselves as far as we can.“ And when the days of the pass-over and what follow will come, they will allow themselves to return back as a dog returns to his vomit and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire⁴⁹. So the word said, those who considered the daily meal as a delight or they do the natural matters to be shown like animals, will be accomplished on them. Woe to them for they are conducting like Cain and with the deviation of Balaam and by his reward. They are burned by the guile and the impurity of their desires. They behave in impiety. As for those who repent from their sins (fol. 140r) with a straight faith and true confession and established hope, let the blessing, the blessing of the Lord, be upon them, the saying of the Apostle will be accomplished on them saying: „But you, beloved, remain on your holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. There are some needs to rebuke for their sins and some need compassion if they are defeated and some are save from fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. God of our Salvation is able to preserve you sinless and spotless, and you stand in front of His Glory without impurity. Amen.⁵⁰ Now we put in front of your beloved persons all these words, let everyone of you chose his share as it is said: „I put in front of you fire and water, stretch your hand and take what you want⁵¹ And it was also said, in the entrusted witness in the true Revelation of John son of Zabadee in the conclusion of his prophecy: „Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is near. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward [is] with me, to give every man according to his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last Blessed [are] they that do his commandments,

47 Num. 12:10.

48 2 Kings 21: 1-18 and the Prayer of Manasseh This prayer is read in the dawn of the joyful Saturday.

49 Proverbs 26:11, 2Pet 2:22.

50 Jude 1:20-25.

51 Ps 66:12?.

that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city For without [are] dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loves and makes a lie."⁵² (fol. 140v) O Children, may God bless them, you know I put in front of you all what our humility can do, whoever listen and obey, he will listen and obey the fathers who established us to care about the folk of the Lord. Who will obey to those fathers, will obey to Christ Jesus who established them, and from Christ Jesus and will receive the blessing. It was said: „He who hears from you, hears from me, and hears from the Father who sent me. Who will disobey you disobey the Father who sent Me."⁵³ So who will hear all these saying without repent save that who does not hope in Christ Jesus for the inhabitants of Nineveh did not tolerate the rebuke of Jonah and tried hard (fol. 141r) that even the human nature can carry it on. They did not have pity upon their children and thence the Lover of mankind looked from the highest of his Heaven to the special repentance and the returning hearts without hesitation, then He had pity upon them with His great mercy and the saying that the righteous will live with faith is accomplished on them and if he is harassed so his soul will not live.

Let us beseech God that He makes the children able to apt the patience and support so that they would not be thrown outside with boring with those on the left.

He also recommends to the children to observe the discipline in the Church of God during the time of prayers and liturgies. I do not make any difference; this recommendation is for men and women. But I said also that they should keep silent in the church, (fol. 141v) in order to receive the multitude of blessings; as for those who swing for rest and increase the discussion in the church during prayers and liturgies, they indicate themselves that the fear of God is not in front of their eyes. May God prevent you from all of these and make you exempt from doubts in these ways. If we want to recommend the children one by one of the recommendation so we will find in every day readings from the book of the prophets, supported by God, by the power to perform miracles and the grace that they announce about the future with proofs and the fundamental demonstrations of the deep wisdom, and His pure Gospels uttering the miracles deeds and outstanding; the recommendations of His Apostles supported by the grace that He gave them the authority to bind and loosen by the word; the *mimars* of his saints and martyrs and the other teachings of the teachers (fol. 142r) which every day, is repeated the edifying thing to their ears.

We beseech God the Father to Whom is the Glory, with His Son and His Holy Spirit that you may reach such this holy lent in security, peace, preservation, and straightness and that He let you arrive to the joy of the feast of resurrection and

52 Rev 22:10-15.

53 Luke 10:16.

bless you, your houses, your children, your women, your slaves, your maid-slaves and He bless all your offering and all your deeds. He might establish you on the straight faith with purity and righteousness to the last breathing. Glory be to the Holy Trinity the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit from now and ever Amen.