

The Preaching of Peter

The following selection is excerpted from Montague Rhode James in *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1924), pp. 16-19.

Again our principal source of knowledge is Clement of Alexandria, who makes a series of quotations from it.

Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* i. 29. 182. And in the Preaching of Peter you may find the Lord called 'Law and Word'.

Twice again he quotes this phrase.

vi. 5. 39. But that the most approved of the Greeks do not know God by *direct* knowledge, but indirectly, Peter says in his Preaching: Know ye then that there is one God who made the beginning of all things and hath power over their end; and: The invisible who seeth all things, uncontainable, who containeth all, having need of nought, of whom all things stand in need and for whose sake they exist, incomprehensible, perpetual, incorruptible, uncreated, who made all things by the word of his power. . . .that is, the Son.[1]

Then he goes on: This God worship ye, not after the manner of the Greeks. . . showing that we and the good (approved) Greeks worship the same God, though not according to *perfect* knowledge for they had not learned the tradition of the Son. 'Do not', he says, 'worship' - he does not say 'the god whom the Greeks worship', but 'not after the manner of the Greeks': he would change the method of worship of God, not proclaim another God. What, then, is meant by 'not after the manner of the Greeks'? Peter himself will explain, for he continues: Carried away by ignorance and not knowing God as we do, according to the perfect knowledge, *but* shaping those things over which he gave them power, for their use, *even* wood and stones, brass and iron, gold and silver (forgetting) their material and *proper* use, they set up things subservient to their existence and worship them; and what things God hath given them for food, the fowls of the air and the creatures that swim in the sea and creep upon the earth, wild beasts and fourfooted cattle of the field, weasels too and mice, cats and dogs and apes; yea, their own eatables do they sacrifice as offerings to eatable *gods*, and offering dead things to the dead as to gods, they show ingratitude to God, by these practices denying that he exists. . . He will continue again in this fashion: Neither worship ye him as do the Jews, for they, who suppose that they alone know God, do not know him, serving angels and archangels, the month and the moon: and if no moon be seen, they do not celebrate what is called the first sabbath, nor keep the new moon, nor the days of unleavened bread, nor the feast (of tabernacles?), nor the great day (of atonement).

Then he adds the finale (colophon) of what is required: So then do ye, learning in a holy and righteous sort that which we deliver unto you, observe it, worshipping God through Christ in a new way. For we have found in the Scriptures, how the Lord saith: Behold, I make with you a new covenant, not as the covenant with your fathers in mount Horeb. He hath made a new one with us: for the *ways* of the Greeks and Jews are old, but we are they that worship him in a new way in a third generation (*or race*), *even* Christians.[2]

Shortly after his he cites Paul 'in addition to the Preaching of Peter' as referring to the Sibyl and Hystaspes. The passage is given below as a possible fragment of the Acts of Paul.

After his quotation from Paul, Clement continues:

Therefore Peter says that the Lord said to the apostles: If then any of Israel will repent, to believe in God through my name, his sins shall be forgiven him: (and) after twelve years go ye out into the world, lest any say: We did not hear.

In the next chapter (vi. 6) he has:

For example, in the Preaching of Peter the Lord says: I chose out you twelve, judging you to be disciples worthy of me, whom the Lord willed, and thinking you faithful apostles; sending you unto the world to preach the Gospel to men throughout the world, that they should know that there is one God; to declare by faith in me [the Christ] what shall be, that they that have heard and believed may be saved, and that they which have not believed may hear and bear witness, not having any defence *so as* to say 'We did not hear'.

After a few lines:

And to all reasonable souls it hath been said above: Whatsoever things any of you did in ignorance, not knowing God clearly, all his sins shall be forgiven him.

vi. 15. 128. Peter in the Preaching, speaking of the apostles, says: But we having opened the books of the prophets which we had, found, sometimes expressed by parables, sometimes by riddles, and sometimes directly (authentically) and in so many words naming Jesus Christ, both his coming and his death and the cross and all the other torments which the Jews inflicted on him, and his resurrection and assumption into the heavens before Jerusalem was founded (*MS. judged*), even all this things as they had been written, what he must suffer and what shall be after him. When, therefore, we took knowledge of these things, we believed in God through that which had been written of him.

And a little after he adds that the prophecies came by Divine providence, in these terms: For we know that God commanded them in very deed, and without the Scripture we say nothing.

The character of the heathen worship, with its mention of weasels, cats, &c., and the fact that our authorities are all Alexandrine, point to the Egyptian origin and currency of the Preaching. We see also that it was an orthodox book. Origen even faces the possibility of its being genuine in whole or in part. The earliest of the Greek apologists for Christianity whose work we have, Aristides, takes a very similar line to the Preaching, and is thought to have used it.

A Syriac Preaching of Simon Cephas in the city of Rome (to be found in Cureton's *Syriac Documents*) has nothing in common with our book. Its gist is, briefly, this: A great assembly gathers to hear Peter. He speaks to them of the life and death of Jesus, and the call of the apostles, exhorts them to shun idolatry: reverts to the signs at the crucifixion, and the report of Pilate to Caesar and the senate, and warns them against Simon Magus. We then have the incident of the dead man raised by Peter after Simon had failed. Peter's episcopate of twenty-five years, his martyrdom and that of Paul, Nero's death, and a famine which ensued after many years, are shortly told.

In the Clementine Recognitions, &c., a great deal is said about books of Preachings of Peter: but these are to a great extent imaginary, and, if ever they existed, must have belonged to the same peculiar school of thought as the rest of that literature.

There are certain other fragments of a 'Teaching of Peter' which may be another name for the Preaching. Opinion is divided. Probably the first, from Origen, is from the Preaching. The others are of a different complexion.

Origen *on First Principles* i, prologue 8. But if any would produce to us from that book which is called The Doctrine of Peter, *the passage* where the Saviour is represented as saying (*lit. seems to say*) to the disciples: I am not a bodiless spirit (demon): he must be answered in the first place that that book is not reckoned among the books of the church: (and then) it must be shown that the writing is neither by

Peter nor by any one else who was inspired by the spirit of God.

The quotation agrees with one from the gospel according to the Hebrews. See p. 4.

Gregory of Nazianzus, *ep.* 16. 'A soul in trouble is near unto God', saith Peter somewhere - a marvellous utterance.

(John of Damascus), *Sacred Parallels*, A. 12:

Of Peter: Wretched that I am, I remembered not that God seeth the mind and observeth the voice of the soul. Allying myself with sin, I said unto myself: God is merciful, and will bear with thee: and because I was not immediately smitten, I ceased not, but rather despised pardon, and exhausted the long-suffering of God.

ibid. From the Teaching of Peter: Rich is he that hath mercy on many, and he that, imitating God, giveth of that he hath. For God hath given all things unto all, of his own creatures. Understand then, ye rich, that ye ought to minister, for ye have received more than ye yourselves need. Learn that others lack the things ye have in superfluity. Be ashamed to keep things that belong to others. Imitate the fairness (equality) of God, and no man will be poor.

Oecumenius *on James*, v. 16. And that happens to us which blessed Peter says: One building and one pulling down! they gain nought but their labour.

[1] In vi. 7. 58 he repeats a clause of this:

For there is in very deed one God, who made the beginning of all things: meaning his first begotten Son; thus Peter writes, understanding rightly the words: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

The words *In the beginning* were interpreted as meaning 'By the son'.

[2] Origen *on John*, xiii. 17, has part of the above passages:

It is too much to set forth now the quotations of Heracleon taken from the book entitled The Preaching of Peter and dwell on them, inquiring about the book whether genuine or spurious or compounded of both elements: so we willingly postpone that, and only note that according to him (Heracleon) Peter taught that we must not worship as do the Greeks, receiving the things of matter, and serving stocks and stones: nor worship God as do the Jews, since they, who suppose that they alone know God, are ignorant of him, and serve angels and the month and the moon.