

59. Emergency in Pontus

1 Peter 1:1-2 and 4:12 – 5:14

The crisis had spread to the northern part of Asia. To the baptismal homily of a few years earlier, its author now added new material at both ends, turning it into an Epistle of Peter, and sending it out again, to encourage the Christians in that northern region who were suffering these sudden hardships.

Why Peter? He was long dead, but his name carried authority. The Gospel of Matthew at about this time added a few verses¹ in which Jesus makes Peter the future head of the church. The Gospel of John at about this time added a last chapter, John 21, in which Jesus recognizes Peter as the future leader of the flock. Other texts show an interest in coming to be identified with Paul. As time went on, the claim of any text to speak with authority increasingly rested in its adopting the persona of one or another recognized figure.

Theologically, 1 Peter is Paul territory, not only for its Atonement theology, but also for its mention of Paul's associate Silvanus, and its allusion to the legend that Mark had translated for Peter in Rome.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied . . .

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy. If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed [are ye]; because the [Spirit] of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you. For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters, but if [a man suffer] as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name. For the time [is come] for judgment to begin at the house of God: and if [it begin] first at us, what [shall be] the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?

And if the righteous is scarcely saved,
where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?

Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator.

¹Matthew 16:18-19, an obvious intrusion into what is on both sides of it.

The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to [the will of] God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you. Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom withstand steadfast in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world.

And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. To him [be] the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I account [him], I have written unto you briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand ye fast therein. She that is in Babylon, elect together with [you], saluteth you; and [so doth] Mark my son. Salute one another with a kiss of love.

Peace be unto you all that are in Christ.



Reflections

The idea that suffering is grace, and thus leads to salvation, was to continue, leading to a cult of martyrdom. The author also recommends disdain for wealth and other worldly advantage, and greater conformity with society. There is no inconsistency. The sufferings were caused by a refusal of outside authority and custom, and it was wise to minimize that friction. But if that did not work, to accept the inevitable: not as failure, but as success; indeed, as consummation. The death of Jesus had already been rationalized in a similar way by Mark. Here, that kind of thinking is extended to the community of the faithful.

The churches named make a loop, along which apostles from a center (probably Sinope) might efficiently tour their area of concern. The claim of the letter to derive from Peter may have been meant to imply an origin in Rome. The geography of the letter makes an implicit case for Sinope.

Still to come is a letter that undoubtedly *was* sent from Rome.