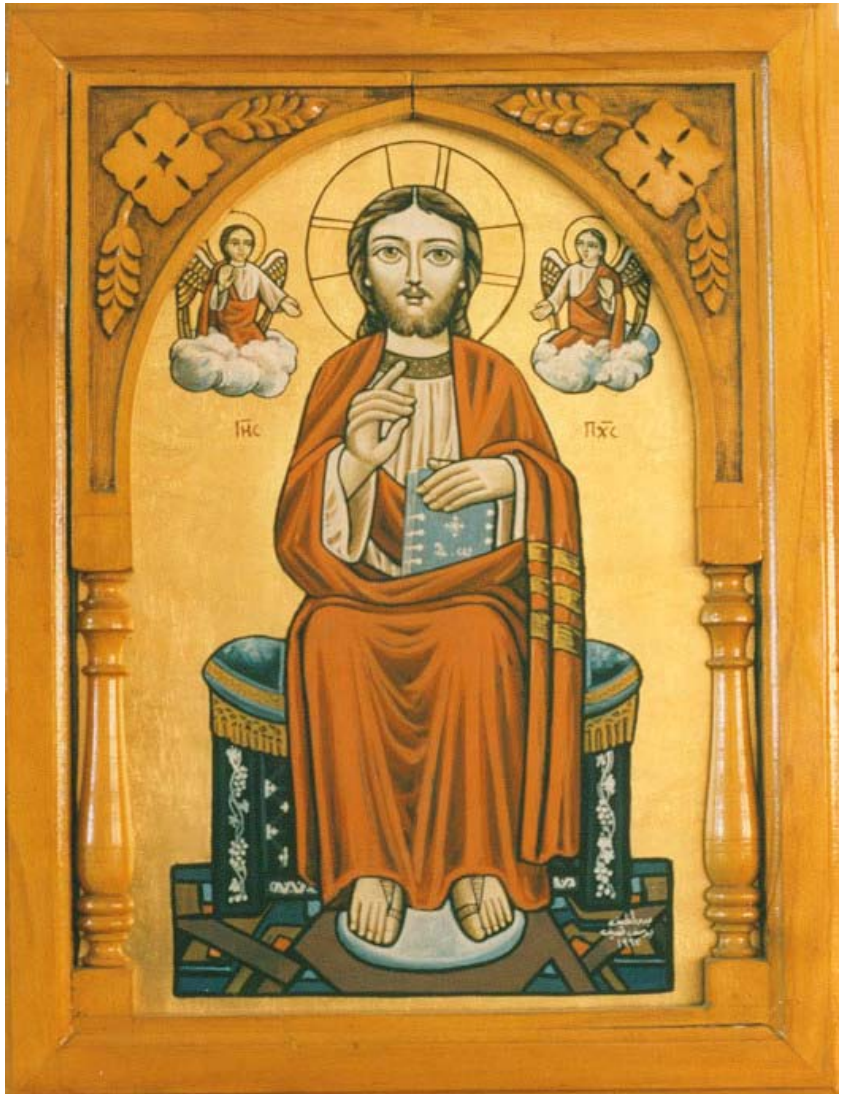


INTRODUCTION  
TO THE  
**COPTIC ORTHODOX  
CHURCH**



FR. TADROS Y. MALATY



**Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ King of Kings and  
Lord of lords**

Icon designed by Dr. Yousef Nassief and Dr. Bedour Latif



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of  
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

*INTRODUCTION  
TO THE  
COPTIC  
ORTHODOX  
CHURCH*

**1993**

**FR. TADROS Y. MALATY  
ST. GEORGE'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH  
SPORTING - ALEXANDRIA  
EGYPT**

## ***BLESSED IS EGYPT MY PEOPLE***

*Isa. 19:25*

God's promise to His people is always fulfilled; He foretold that He would ride on a light and upon a swift cloud and come to Egypt (Isa 19:1); and in that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border (Isa 19:19). This promise was fulfilled by the flight of the Holy Family from the face of the tyrant Herod to find refuge among the Gentiles. Thus Jesus Christ came during His childhood to Egypt to lay by Himself the foundation stone of His Church in Egypt which has become one of the four primary "Sees" in the world, among the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome, joined later by the "See" of Constantinople.

The star of the Egyptian Church shone through the School of Alexandria which taught Christendom the allegoric and spiritual methods in interpreting the Scripture, and was the leader in defending the Orthodox faith on an ecumenical level.

The Christian monastic movement in all its forms started in Egypt, attracting the heart of the Church towards the desert, to practice the angelic inner life. This happened at the time when the doors of the royal court had been opened to the clergy, and this consequently endangered the church, as

the quiet and spiritual church work was mixed with the temporal authority and politics of the royal court.

The Egyptian Church carried Jesus' cross throughout generations, bearing sufferings even from the side of Christians themselves. She continued to offer a countless number of martyrs and confessors throughout ages. Sometimes the people of towns were martyred and many struggled to win the crowns of martyrdom happily and with a heart full of joy.

Our Church is ancient and new at the same time; ancient in being apostolic, founded by St. Mark the Evangelist; traditional, sticking fast to the original apostolic faith without deviation. She is also ever new through her Living Messiah who never becomes old and through the Spirit of God who renews her youth (Ps. 103:5).

The Coptic Church is rich with her evangelistic and ascetic life, her genuine patriotic inheritance, her heavenly worship, her spiritual rituals, her effective and living hymns, her beautiful icons, etc.. She attracts the heart towards heaven without ignoring actual daily life. We can say that she is an apostolic, contemporary church that carries life and thought to the contemporary man without deviation. One finds in her life, sweetness and power of Spirit, with appreciation to and sanctification of arts, literature and human culture.

This church is well-known for her numerous saints: ascetics, clergymen and laymen. She offered many saints throughout ages and is still offering the same today.... For she believes that practising the sanctified life and communion with God, the Holy One, is prior to satisfying minds with solid mental studies.

She is the Church of all people, every member has his own positive role, being a clergyman, layman, a man, a woman, an adult or a child.... She is the church of the family as a whole and the church of each member at the same time.

Even a baby finds his pleasure in the church through the simplicity of her rituals and the sweetness of her hymns; you may find him gurgling joyfully as if he was in his own house or in his parent's home. At the same time the theologian finds pleasure through the deep concepts of these same rituals.

Lastly, I hope - in the Lord - to present the main lines of the Church's thoughts and concepts as an evangelic, apostolic and patristic church, which has a heavenly attitude. She believes in the sanctity of man, in his wholeness, and in awarding every gift, giving interest and care to every soul, so that the heavenly Christ might be revealed within her as the eternal Bridegroom who sanctifies His bride, beatifies her by His Holy Spirit, and embraces her to enjoy His eternal glory.

Indeed, I may have to speak about the Egyptian nationalistic side, but I hope - in the Spirit of God - that every reader will enjoy the Orthodox thought, regardless of his nationality, being a member of the one Body of Christ, through the one faith and with one spirit.

*FR. TADROS Y. MALATY*

## ***THE COPTIC CHURCH AS AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH***

---

### **TERM "COPTS"<sup>1</sup>**

The term "Copts" is equivalent to the word "Egyptians." It is derived from the Greek "Aigyptos," which in turns is derived from the ancient Egyptian "Ha-ka-Ptah," i.e. "the house of the spirit of Ptah," a most highly revered deity in Egyptian mythology. From the Arab conquest and until today, this term refers to the Christian Egyptians to distinguish them from the native Muslims.

### **SONS OF PHARAOHS<sup>2</sup>**

The Copts as the successors of the ancient Egyptians are defined as the modern sons of the Pharaohs. They played an essential role in the whole Christian world, especially during the first five centuries.

Their religious background helped them to accept Christianity with eagerness and to enjoy its depth through their ascetic life, meditation and studying of the holy scripture.

In this topic we wish to throw some light on the ancient Egyptian culture and how it reacted towards the new Christian faith.



**1. Their religious background:** It is well-known that ancient Egyptians have been religiously minded by nature and upbringing since the very early times<sup>3</sup>. Herodotus states that "The Egyptians are religious to excess, far beyond any other race of men." Their religious curiosity was satisfied by the Christian faith that puts no limits to spiritual progress, for it raises the believers towards the bosom of the Father that they might enjoy the likeness of God, fast communion with Him and acknowledgment of the eternal divine mysteries.

**2. Their high scientific background:** Modern science achieved unceasing progress, particularly in the last century. Many of the ancient Egyptians' scientific work which took place thousands of years before Christ are still considered to be obscure secrets; for example the pyramids with their scientific wonder and mysteries, the art of embalming, the art of carving, colored painting on walls etc.. All of these arts are still under research to the extent that some believe that the ancient Egyptians were working under the guidance of superhuman (coming from the outer space), or from other stars. Some consider that man would have conquered space much earlier if the library of Alexandria had not been burned, which led to losing scientific secrets of great importance.

In any case, the fact is that the ancient Egyptians put their scientific abilities at the disposal of the religious thinking (such as the building of pyramids, embalming etc.). It had influenced the Copts. They looked, to science not as an enemy of religion or contrary to it, but that science acts in favor of religion. Therefore, the School of Alexandria opened its doors to the scholars and philosophers, believing that science and philosophy could serve the true spiritual life.

### 3. Their religious dogmas:

a) Each major town in ancient Egypt used to recognize some kind of a triad. But these triads were too alien from the Christian Holy Trinity.

b) Their philosophers believed in One Supreme Being; the best example is king Ikhnaton (1383-1365 B.C.).

c) While the majority of the ancient civilizations were preoccupied with the earthly life, seeking temporary pleasures, the Egyptian mind was absorbed in the world to come, and in the resurrection. When they were converted to Christianity, they became involved in awaiting the advent of the Risen Christ, through their lengthy hymns, excessive fasting, enduring and suffering with joy. This eschatological attitude has its effect on our worship, liturgies and even in our daily life.

d) **The Cross:** Egyptians tended to identify the Cross with their own sign of eternal life, "the Ankh," which was held in the hands of the immortals such as gods and pharaohs. The "Ankh" sign took the shape of a cruciform with rounded tip, which was readily adopted and used by the Copts from the very early times.

e) In addition to this, the Egyptians seem to have had an idea of the unity of God, His eternity, His infinity, as well as His loving kindness<sup>4</sup>.

---

1. Murad Kamel: *Coptic Egypt*, ch. 1; A.S. Atiya: *The Copts and Christian Civilization*, 1985, P1, 2.

2. Fr. Malaty: *The Coptic Church*, "Church of Alexandria," Melbourne 1978,1.

3. A. Atiya: *History of Eastern Christianity*, 1968, P20.

4. W. Budge: *The dwellers of the Nile*, P130,132.

# ***THE HOLY FAMILY IN EGYPT<sup>1</sup>***

---

## **EGYPT IN THE HOLY BIBLE**

The Holy Bible concentrates on "Jerusalem" which means "land of peace," or "vision of peace" as the center of the promised land, where God declares His dwelling among people. And a holy temple was established in it in His Name, where people worshipped Him, offered Him sacrifices and offerings, and celebrated many feasts as a symbol of the heavenly joy. This is Jerusalem, the symbol of heaven, that is called "Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all" Gal. 4:26. On the other hand, we find Babel and Egypt; Babel represents disobedience to God, violence, vainglory (tower of Babel, Gen. 11), opposing God through His believers (the Babylonian captivity), adultery and abominations (Rev. 17:5). Egypt was well-known for its abundant crops, and its king (Pharaoh) to whom Israel and Jude used to refuge against Babylon. Therefore, Egypt was a symbol of loving the temporary things and the trust in human hands (1 Kings 18:21).

Egypt was a refuge to many people, especially in famines. Abraham visited Egypt (Gen. 12:10), so did Joseph who became the second man after Pharaoh, offering crops to all the neighboring countries. Jacob and his sons came to Egypt where they lived as a family and grew as a nation. It was the birth-place or the nursery of the people of God. Their first leader, Moses, the great prophet and his brother Aaron the first chief-priest appeared in Egypt to grant them freedom. St. Stephen says, "And Moses was taught in all the wisdom

of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" Acts 7:22.

Among the prophets who visited Egypt was Jeremiah who implored people not to flee to Egypt, but in vain, for they forced him to accompany them in their journey to Egypt (Jer. 41:1; 43:7). He uttered his last prophecies in Tahpanhes of Egypt (Jer. 43:8-44:30).

Thus, Egypt became a representative of the Gentiles to whom Christ came to establish His Church and to form His new people.

### **BLESSED BE EGYPT, MY PEOPLE**

Hosea, the Prophet, foresaw the Son of God going out of Bethlehem and fleeing to Egypt, where He found a welcome in the hearts of Gentiles. Through Hosea, God the Father uttered this prophecy, "I called my son out of Egypt" Hos. 11:1.

Isaiah the Prophet gave us more details, saying: "Behold, the burden of Egypt, the Lord rides upon a swift cloud, He shall come to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence. In that day there shall be an altar to the lord in the midst of the land of Egypt" Isa. 19:1. St. Cyril the Great interpreted this prophecy saying: [The glittering cloud which carried the child Jesus to Egypt was His mother, St. Mary, who surpassed the cloud in purity. The altar which was established in the midst of the land of Egypt is the Christian church which had replaced the temples of paganism as the idols collapsed and the temples were deserted in the presence of the Lord Jesus.]

## **THE HOLY JOURNEY**

The important stations where the holy family took shelter are:

### **1. BUBASTIS HILL**

The holy family left Bethlehem on its way to Egypt through Sinai. They followed the Southern Caravan way along the Mediterranean coast, passing through Gaza-Raphia (Rafah)-Rhinocolura<sup>2</sup>, (now El-Arish), and then to Ostrakini which became a diocese of Bishop Abram who joined the council of Ephesus 431 A.D<sup>3</sup>.

The last station for the Holy Family in Sinai was Pelusium (now Al-Farma<sup>4</sup>), which is located between El-Arish and Port-Said and which is considered the key entrance to Egypt from the Eastern side.

From Pelusium they crossed to Bubastis (Tel-Basta), where they rested under a tree, that is said to have survived till 1850 A.D. Here, at Bubastis Hill, a spring of water erupted, from which the holy family used to drink; and its water healed many from their sickness.

Soon after the Holy Family resided in the city, the pagan statues began to collapse and this consequently aroused the anger of the pagan priests against the Holy Family. Therefore, the Holy Family left to the outskirts of the city to a place now called "Mastard."

### **2. MATARYAH**

The Holy Family traveled to Bilbais, then to Miniati-Genah (now Miniati Samanoud), crossing the River Nile to Samanoud and from there to Borolos. They crossed the River Nile to the Western bank to Sakha, then they traveled

westward along Wadi-el-Natroun (Natroun Valley), south of the "Sheheet" wilderness. This wilderness became a paradise of monks, the earthly angels.

The Holy Family then traveled to Heliopolis, to a district called "Mataryah," where they took shelter under a tree, known as the "St. Virgin Mary Tree." The Coptic church is taking care of this tree which is still blossoming despite its old age. Near this tree a spring of water shot and balsam plants are still growing. These plants are added to the ointments used to make the Holy Chrism (Oil for confirmation).

Pilgrims in the middle ages used to visit "Mataryah" and "St. Mary's Tree" regarding them as sacred places. Until today tourists come to visit them.

### **3. OLD CAIRO**

Old Cairo is considered the third station for the Family. Here we have St. Virgin Mary's Church and a nunnery which are both located at Zwayla lane. But the most attractive landmark is the cave in Babylon in Old Cairo in which there is an altar and a niche. It is probable that the Holy family might have used this cave as a place for the Child Jesus to sleep. Above this cave, a church had been built in the fourth century and is known as the St. Sergius Church (Abu-Sarga).

Within a week, the idols of the pagan temples began to collapse, the pagan priests aroused with anger and, forced the foreign family out of the city. Thus, the holy family left for Memphis then to Maadi where St. Mary's Church has been built. Perhaps, this church was a Jewish Temple. The present structure with its attractive triple granary domes is known from the thirteenth century<sup>5</sup>.

#### **4. IN UPPER-EGYPT**

The Holy family crossed the River Nile to Upper Egypt and headed east to Bahnassa (near Beni-Mazar), they then crossed to the eastern bank, where they stopped at Gabal-el-Tair (Mount of Birds) near Samalout.

From Gabal-el-Tair, the Holy Family went to Ashmounin near Malawi, then to a village called Philes, about 20 km south of Ashmounin. They traveled to Qoussieh (Qousqam) where they were treated harshly and were driven away by the very people who saw that their stone idols had fell before Jesus. The Holy Family escaped to the village Mirah (now Mir), whence they took to the Qousqam Mountain on which the famous Monastery of the Holy Virgin, known as "Al-Muharraq" stands. There, at that mountain it had been revealed to them by Spirit to return back to Jerusalem. They followed a way that took them to the South up to Assyout Mountain where they took shelter for a while in a cave known now as St. Virgin Monastery at Assiout.

#### **ST. VIRGIN MARY'S CHURCH AT ZAYTOUN**

The Holy Family might have passed through Zaytoun, a suburb of Cairo. On the domes of St. Mary's church at Zaytoun, a good number of St. Mary's apparitions occurred (from the 2nd of April 1968 until 1971). Such wonderful apparitions occurred successively and were obviously seen by thousands of people.

#### **ST. VIRGIN MARY'S CLOSET AT EL-EZRAWIA**

It is said that the Holy Family passed by a watermelon farm where seeds had just been sown. St. Joseph asked the farmer to tell the soldiers, who were chasing them, that the Holy Family passed by his farm at the time when he was sowing his seeds. Two days later when the soldiers arrived at

the farm, the water melon had blossomed and some fruits were visible. This made the soldiers believe that the Holy Family had passed by this place several months before. Therefore the soldiers slowed down the chase after the Holy family.

### **PALM (EL-KAF) MOUNTAIN**

It is said that while the Holy Family was crossing the Nile to Gabal-el-Tair a huge rock from the Mountain was about to fall on their boat. St. Mary was afraid but her Son - who has power on nature - stretched His hand thus prevented the rock from falling, and left his palm print on it. Queen Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine, ordered that a church should be built at this place. In the twelfth century (1168 A.D), when Almeric, King of Jerusalem invaded Upper-Egypt, he cut away the piece of the rock and took it back to Syria.

- 
1. Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty: *The Coptic Church, "Church of Alexandria, Melbourne, Australia, 1978, p. 11-18.*
  2. *The identification with Coptic "Rhinocunoura" is accepted on sufferance by Amelineau Geographie, p. 404. In this city the Romans exiled criminals and cut off their noses.*
  3. Aziz Atia: *History of Eastern Christianity, p. 23.*
  4. *From the Coptic "Pheromi."*
  5. Aziz S. Atiya, p.24.



## ***SEE OF ST. MARK<sup>1</sup>***

---

The Coptic Church or the Church of Alexandria is called "**See of St. Mark**;" one of the earliest four sees: Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome.

### **HOW WAS CHRISTIANITY INTRODUCED INTO EGYPT?**

St. Mark is considered the founder of the Coptic Church. However, evidence indicates that Christianity was introduced into Egypt before St. Mark, though undoubtedly, it must have been on a very small scale. The following are some interesting points on this subject:

1) The Book of Acts refers to the Jews of Egypt who were present at the Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Upon their return home, they must have conveyed what they saw and heard about Christ to their relatives.

2) The same book mentions an "Alexandrian Jew named Apollos" who arrived at Ephesus... He was described as an eloquent man with sound knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. He preached with great spiritual earnestness and was able to demonstrate from the Scriptures that Jesus was the expected Christ (Acts 18:24-28). It is quite possible that Apollos was a member of a small Christian group of Jewish origin who lived in Alexandria.

3) St. Luke addresses his Gospel to "His excellency Theophilus," a Christian believer from Alexandria<sup>1</sup>.

4) The Coptic book of Sinxarum (the day of 15 Bashance) records the preaching of Simon the Zealous in areas of south Egypt and Nubia<sup>2</sup>.

## **ST. MARK THE FOUNDER**

The Copts are proud of the apostolicity of their church, whose founder is St. Mark; one of the seventy Apostles (Mark 10:10), and one of the four Evangelists. He is regarded by the Coptic hierarchy as the first of their unbroken 117 patriarchs, and also the first of a stream of Egyptian martyrs<sup>3</sup>.

This apostolicity was not only furnished on grounds of its foundation but rather by the persistence of the church in observing the same faith received by the Apostle and his successors, the Holy Fathers.

## **ST. MARK'S BIBLIOGRAPHY**

St. Mark was an African native of Jewish parents who belonged to the Levites' tribe<sup>4</sup>. His family lived in Cyrenaica until they were attacked by some barbarians, and lost their property. Consequently, they moved to Jerusalem with their child John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37). Apparently, he was given a good education and became conversant in both Greek and Latin in addition to Hebrew. His family was highly religious and in close relationship with the Lord Jesus. His cousin was St. Barnabas and his father's cousin was St. Peter. His mother, Mary, played an important part in the early days of the church in Jerusalem<sup>5</sup>. Her upper-room became the first Christian church in the world where the Lord himself instituted the Holy Eucharist (Mark 14:12-26). There also, the Lord appeared to the disciples after His resurrection and His Holy Spirit came upon them.

Young Mark was always associated with the Lord, who chose him as one of the seventy<sup>6</sup>. He is mentioned in the Scriptures in a number of events related with the Lord: He was present at the wedding of Cana of Galilee, and was the man who had been carrying the jar when the two disciples went to prepare a place for the celebration of the Pasch (Mark 14:13, 14; Luke 22:11). [He was also the same man who fled naked before the Crucifixion (Mark 14:51, 52)<sup>7</sup>]. Accordingly, the church insists on calling St. Mark "Theorimos," i.e. the beholder of the Lord, in order to prevent counterfeits of some historians.

### **ST. MARK AND THE LION**

The lion is the symbol of St. Mark for two reasons:

1) He begins his Gospel by describing John the Baptist as a lion roaring in the desert (Mark 1:3).

2) His famous story with the lion, as related to us by Severus Ebn-El-Mokafa: Once a lion and lioness appeared to John Mark and his father Arostalis while they were traveling in Jordan. The father was very frightened and begged his son to escape, while he awaited his fate. John Mark assured his father that Jesus Christ would save them, and began to pray. The two beasts fell dead and as a result of this miracle, the father believed in Christ, and died shortly thereafter.

### **PREACHING WITH THE APOSTLES**

At first, St. Mark accompanied St. Peter on his missionary journeys inside Jerusalem and Judea. Then he accompanied St. Paul and St. Barnabas on their first missionary journey to Antioch, Cyprus and Asia Minor, but for some reason or another he left them and returned home (Acts 13:13). On their second trip, St. Paul refused to take him along because he left them on the previous mission; for this reasons St.

Barnabas was separated from St. Paul and went to Cyprus with his cousin Mark (Acts 15:36-41). There, he departed in the Lord and St. Mark buried him. Afterwards, St. Paul needed St. Mark with him and they both preached in Colosy (4:11), Rome (Phil. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11) and perhaps at Venice.

## **IN AFRICA**

St. Mark's real labor lays in Africa. He left Rome to Pentapolis<sup>8</sup>, where he was born. After planting the seeds of faith and performing many miracles he traveled to Egypt, through the Oasis, the desert of Libya, Upper Egypt, and then entered Alexandria from its eastern gate on 61 A.D.

On his arrival, the strap of his sandal was out loose. He went to a cobbler to mend it. When the cobbler - Ananias - took an awl to work on it, he accidentally pierced his hand and cried aloud: "O One God." At this utterance, St. Mark rejoiced and after miraculously healing the man's wound, took courage and began to preach to the hungry ears of his first convert<sup>9</sup>. The spark was ignited and Ananias took the Apostle home, with him. He and his family were baptized, and many others followed.

The spread of Christianity must have been quite remarkable because pagans were furious and sought St. Mark everywhere. Smelling the danger, the Apostle ordained a bishop (Ananias), three priests and seven deacons to look after the congregation if anything befell him. He left Alexandria to Berce, then to Rome, where he met St. Peter and St. Paul and remained there until their martyrdom in 64 A.D.

Upon returning to Alexandria (65 A.D), St. Mark found his people firm in faith and thus decided to visit Pentapolis.

There, he spent two years preaching and performing miracles, ordaining bishops and priests, and winning more converts.

Finally he returned to Alexandria and was overjoyed to find that Christians had multiplied so much that they were able to build a considerable church in the suburban district of Baucalis.

### **HIS MARTYRDOM**

In the year 68 A.D, Easter fell on the same day as the Serapis feast. The furious heathen mob had gathered in the Serapis temple at Alexandria and then descended on the Christians who were celebrating Easter (Christian Pasch) at Baucalis. St. Mark was seized, dragged with a rope through the main streets of the city. Crowds were shouting "The ox must be led to Baucalis," a precipitous place full of rocks where they fed the oxen that were used in the sacrifices to idols. At nightfall the saint was thrown into prison, where he was cheered by the vision of an angel, strengthening him saying: "Now your hour has come O Mark, the good minister, to receive your recompense. Be encouraged, for your name has been written in the book of life.." When the angel disappeared, St. Mark thanked God for sending His angel to him... Suddenly, the Savior Himself appeared and said to him: "Peace be to you, Mark, my disciple and evangelist!" St. Mark started to shout "O My Lord Jesus" but the vision disappeared!

On the following morning probably during the triumphal procession of Serapis he was again dragged around the city till death. His bloody flesh was torn, and it was their intention to cremate his remains, but the wind blew and the rain fell in torrents and the populace dispersed. Christians

stole his body and secretly buried him in a grave which they had engraved in a rock under the altar of the church.

### **HIS RELICS**

During the schism which burst between the Copts and the Melkites<sup>10</sup>, the first kept the head while the body remained with the latter. On 644 A.D, a soldier sneaked into the church where the head was buried. He took it away to his ship under the impression that it was a treasure. Later, when Amro-Ebn-El-Aas (leader of the Arab troops) ordered the ships to sail off Alexandria, that particular ship could not move. Eventually the soldier had to confess and Amro handed it back to Pope Benjamin<sup>11</sup>.

The saint's body did not remain in Egypt, for it was stolen and taken to Venice by some Italian merchants. They built a huge cathedral in St. Mark's name, believing that St. Mark was their patron Saint. In 1968, part of his relics which is now kept in the new Cathedral in Cairo, was offered to the Egyptian Pope Cyril (Kyrillos VI) from pope Paul VI.

### **HIS APOSTOLIC ACTS**

St. Mark was a broad-minded Apostle. His ministry was quite productive and covered large fields of activities. These included:

- \* Preaching in Egypt, Pentapolis, Judea, Asia Minor, and Italy, during which time he ordained bishops, priests and deacons.

- \* Establishing the "School of Alexandria" which defended Christianity against the philosophical school of Alexandria and conceived a large number of great Fathers.

- \* Writing the Liturgy of the Holy Eucharist which was

modified later by St. Cyril to the liturgy known today as the Liturgy of St. Cyril.

\* Writing the Gospel according to St. Mark.

- 
1. Fr. T. Malaty: *The Coptic Church, Melbourne 1978, p. 19ff.*
  2. Kamel Saleh Nakhla: *St. Mark, Ch. 6 (Arabic)*
  3. Dr. Aziz S. Atiya: *Hist. of Eastern Christianity, p. 25.*
  4. Sawiris Ibn El-Mokaffa: *Hist. of Patriarchs, 13:13 (Arabic).*
  5. Douglas: *Dict. of the Christian Church, p. 632.*
  6. Origen: *De Reta in Deum Fide; Epiphanius: Adv. Hear 51:5; Cheneau: Les Saintes d'Egypte, vol. 1, p. 495.*
  7. Sawiris: *15R.*
  8. Pentapolis, or "The Five Western Countries," consist of: Cyrene; Beronice (*Hesperis*), now Beni-Ghazi; Appolonia (*Souzah*); Touchira or Arsinoe; and Ptolemias, or Tolomita, now Berce.
  9. Dr. Aziz S. Atiya: p. 27.
  10. *he Melkites were loyal to the Emperor of Constantinople; they were in authority, because Egypt was following the Eastern Empire.*
  11. Abu El Sebaa: *"Al-Gawhare Al-Nafisa Fi Oloom Al-Kanissa, p. 140-1 (Arabic).*

# ***THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE APOSTOLIC THOUGHT***

---

The Coptic Orthodox Church is an Apostolic Church, not only because her founder is St. Mark the Apostle who ministered in Egypt, ordained a bishop, priests and deacons to aid him in his ministry and was martyred in Alexandria, and not only because her first Patriarch is St. Mark's successor through an unbroken chain of popes since the apostolic age, but also because she preserves the apostolic thought in her life, spirituality, liturgies and dogmas. She is actually a living extension of the apostolic church without deviation.

The Coptic Church is sometimes accused of exaggerated conservatism and refusal of concessions. As a matter of fact she is not stagnant or stolid but faithful and conservative, preserving the apostolic life, and desiring to offer the gift of faith in all its aspects throughout the ages.

I would like to mention that in 1971 I baptized a child in Dallas, Texas in U.S.A. An American minister who attended the liturgy of baptism, said to me: "This child is lucky." When I asked him about the reason, he stated: "During this long baptismal rite I felt that I am living in the apostolic age."

Fr. Jungmann says in his book "The Early Liturgy": "In the general structure of the Mass, the oriental rites have kept many primitive characteristics which have disappeared from



the Roman rite... Whereas our Mass changes day after day, the Orient constantly repeats the same invariable formula." Since no significant change took place in the Church worship, i.e. in her liturgies, rites and hymns, and she continued to holdfast the dogmas in firmness, Christ transfigures her life, attracting many to Himself, working in her members by the power of Spirit.

I would like to mention here that in 1979, an American person visited our church in Alexandria (St. George's Church). He came to visit the church for half an hour as a tourist. When his guide tried to remind him of an important appointment he refused to leave until the end of the liturgy of the Eucharist. When he came outside he told his guide that he was moved by the Liturgy, although he did not understand its words, for he did not know the Arabic language, and that he felt as if he were in heavenly atmosphere.

This matter took place repeatedly in our churches in U.S.A.

I will let you encounter this apostolic thought when we speak about the Church in her worship, dogmas, tradition and conduct etc.

***THE COPTIC CHURCH  
BEFORE  
THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON***

---



***THE COPTS UNDER THE ROMAN  
PERSECUTION<sup>1</sup>***

**ROMAN STATE AND THE EGYPTIAN CHRISTIANS**

The Roman Emperors frequently in their persecution of the Christians concentrated on Egypt, especially Alexandria, for the following reasons:

- 1) The success of the Church of Alexandria and its School in attracting even philosophers to the new faith.
- 2) Alexandria represented a vital center that provided the Roman capital with products. For this reason the Emperors were afraid of any revolution in Egypt. The charge which Constantine made against St. Athanasius was that he forbade sending these products to Constantinople.
- 3) The courage of the Egyptians and their sincere desire to attain the crowns of martyrdom perplexed the persecutors,

so that Diocletian came to Alexandria to practice persecution by himself.

## **THE COPTS & MARTYRDOM**

The Copts insisted on starting their calendar by the beginning of the reign of Diocletian, in 248 AD, calling it "*Anno Martyri*," for in his reign the Church gained numerous numbers of martyrs, who are now glorified in Paradise. About the eleventh of September of every year we celebrate the commencement of a new Coptic year, calling it "*Feast of El-Nayrouz*," in which we celebrate the Feast of Martyrs, as a spiritual preparation for starting a new year.

By this unique understanding, the Church of Alexandria has shown the world her deep spiritual faith, her vision that leads to eternity and her concept of martyrdom. She did not consider martyrdom as death or something terrible, but rather a new birth which is an entry to paradise.

1) Martyrdom, in fact is a daily practice that which every believer should experience, even if there is no persecution, even if he lives in a monastery or lives alone as a hermit or pilgrim. For martyrdom is the continuous participation in Jesus' Crucifixion. St. Clement of Alexandria gives the name "martyr" to the Gnostic (the true Christian) who has achieved ordinary union with God<sup>2</sup>.

2) Martyrdom is an entry into eternity. Oregano<sup>3</sup> regarded the times of persecutions not as hard or sad times but as the true great ages of the church.

3) Martyrdom is a supreme conflict with Satan.

4) Martyrdom is looked upon as the way of transfiguration of the Crucified and Risen Christ in the life of each of us. For Christ Himself suffers in His martyrs<sup>4</sup>.

## **THE COPTS & THE ROMAN PERSECUTIONS**

The historians call our Church "The Church of Martyrs," not only because of the numerous numbers of martyrs in our Church, but also because of the ardent desire that her members had shown for martyrdom. When they were prevented from worship they never fled to catacombs or worshipped in the tombs, but openly in the fields. Many Copts traveled from one place to another seeking the crowns of martyrdom.

The waves of persecutions in Egypt began from the first century, when the Apostle St. Mark was martyred by the enraged pagan populace, while the ruler, though was not pleased, was at least silent.

The historical sources were almost silent regarding the persecutions that occurred in Egypt until the consecration of the twelfth Patriarch, Demetrius (68-118 A.D), but this does not mean that no persecution occurred during this period.

For example, after the death of Corrosions (106 A.D) no Patriarch could have been ordained for three years because of the persecution<sup>5</sup>.

Another example, in the reign of the seventh Patriarch, Eumenius (129-151 A.D), St. Sofia, a native of ancient Memphis in Middle Egypt, was martyred.

During the reign of Septimus Severus the Copts suffered severe persecutions that extended for about seven years. Severus visited Egypt and went to Upper-Egypt where he found Christianity had spread. At once he ordered the ruler to increase the persecution and to prevent preaching at all cost. The School of Alexandria was closed, and its dean St. Clement was compelled to flee, and his place was taken by Oregano who was about eighteen years old.

In 250 A.D Decius issued an edict to the rulers of all province to re-establish the state religion by any means; but in Egypt persecution appears to have been started before the issue of this edict. Thousands were martyred in cities and villages throughout all Egypt.

In the years 257 and 258 A.D, Emperor Valerian issued edicts to destroy the Church; and Church leaders in Egypt and Carthage as arrested. Pope Dionysius of Alexandria was arrested and exiled.

During the reign of Diocletian, in Alexandria a Roman legionary called Lucius Domitius Domitianus, nicknamed himself emperor. At once Diocletian personally descended on the Egyptian coast and took the city by force after a siege of eight months. In the year 302 A.D, he started his persecution against Christianity by the dismissal of every soldier in his legions who refused to conform to sacrificing to the Roman gods. In the following year, on the great Roman festival of the "Terminalia" (23rd of February, 303) Diocletian issued an imperial edict against Christians. It seems that persecution against Christians in Egypt was more severe than in most other countries, (and perhaps more than any). Diocletian believed that the head of the serpent was in Egypt and that if he could crush it, he could more easily annihilate Christianity

in the whole empire. In all, about 800,000 Christians were put to the sword in Egypt.

It is worthy to note that the persecution inaugurated by Diocletian was sustained by Maximinus Daza (305-313), Caesar of Egypt and Syria, whose reign was the most prolific in bloodshed of any period in the whole history of the church persecutions. The martyrs of his reign were usually attributed to the "Diocletian Persecution."



## ***EXAMPLES OF MARTYRS***

---

### **ACTS OF MARTYRS**

Through the waves of persecution, many spiritual leaders devoted themselves to strengthen the martyrs and confessors<sup>6</sup>. They visited the prisons and kept their company on their trial, or even to the place of their execution. Some virtuous men not only kept the martyrs' company but dared to take their holy bodies or relics, and wrote the biography of their trail and martyrdom as eye-witnesses, which are called "*Acts of Martyrs*."

#### **1. THEODORE THE VIRGIN**

She was summoned to the court, during the Diocletian persecution. She was accused of being a Christian, perhaps it was because of her refusal to marry a certain noble man. She was taken away to a den of sin and infamy, but a Christian soldier called Didymius saved her by giving her his own cloak. When Didymius was sent to be martyred, Theodora appeared to share with him the crown of martyrdom.

#### **2. ST. MENA THE MIRACLE-MAKER**

St. Mena is most well-known in both the East and West, due to the many miracles that are performed by his prayers for us. That is evident from the numerous little clay bottles that got his picture and name engraved on them, which were found by the archaeologists in various cities around the world, such as Heidleburg in Germany, Milan in Italy,

Dalmata in Yugoslavia, Marseilles in France, Dongula in Sudan, and Jerusalem.

St. Mena was born in the year 285, in the city of Niceous which follows the provision of Mymph. His parents were real ascetic Christians, the father Audexios, and the mother Aufimia. On the feast of St. Mary, the mother who did not have any children prayed in front of the icon of the Virgin with tears, that God may give her a blessed son. A sound came to her ears saying "Amen," and thus she called her son Mena.

His father, a ruler of one of the provisions of Egypt died when Mena was fourteen years old. At fifteen he joined the army, and was given a high rank, because of his father's reputation, and was appointed in Algeria. Three years later he left the army longing to devote his whole life to Christ, and headed towards the desert to lead a different kind of life.

After spending five years as a hermit, he saw the angels crowning the martyrs with glamorous crowns, and longed to join them. He hurried to the ruler, declaring his Christian faith. His endless endurance of the tortures that he underwent, had attracted many of the pagans not only to Christianity, but also to martyrdom. His body was buried in Marriute, near Alexandria. It was discovered by the daughter of King Zinon, who was healed from sickness when she slept at the site of his burial. The King built a church there, and a large city was established. Sick people from all over the world used to visit that city for recovery. Pope Cyril VI established a new monastery in this area.



### **3. ST. REFKA**

She and her five children, natives of a village in Upper-Egypt at the province of "Quous," submitted themselves to the ruler of Quous after giving all their belongings to the poor and the needy. St. Refka's family was well-known and loved by the natives of Quous, therefore, in order not to punish them in Quous, they were sent to Armanius, the ruler of Alexandria who was visiting Shoubra (a suburb of Damanhour) at that time. There they suffered cruel tortures and finally they were beheaded, giving great example of the love of martyrdom.

### **4. ST. DIMIANA**

She is one of the popular martyrs of Egypt, she lived together with forty virgins in her palace as a nunnery. During the reign of Diocletian, she rebuked her father Markos, the ruler of El-Borollos (Zaafaran), for his denial of Christ, and urged him to be martyred with her and the forty virgins.

### **5. ST. CATHERINE**

In the seventh century, Tillemont wrote that it would be hard to find a saint more famous than St. Catherine, the Alexandrian virgin<sup>7</sup>, who met her martyrdom at the early age of eighteen in A.D 307. Baronius states that in his own country, Belgium, no city or town is without some church or altar built to her glory<sup>8</sup>; even her feast was celebrated as a holiday in some European countries such as England, in the thirteenth century.

It is said that she endured horrible tortures and even dared to argue and reason in public with the philosophers of Alexandria and succeeded in converting them and many of the court's officers to Christianity... Her saintly corpse was transported to Mount Sinai by the angels<sup>9</sup>.

Generally she is regarded as the patron saint of schools, probably because of her controversial arguments with the philosophers of Alexandria. In Europe (in A.D 1063) a semi-monastery was instituted in her honor, where those who joined it made a vow to live in virginity.

## **6. ARIANUS, THE RULER OF ANTIONIE<sup>10</sup>**

The Roman Empire did not know a ruler more cruel than Arianus, who devoted all his strength to impose severe tortures upon Christians, to the extent that some rulers from outside Egypt used to send him those Christians who refused to abandon the Christian faith. He found great pleasure in visiting other cities, such as Esnah (Latopolis) in Upper-Egypt where he killed its Bishops and all his people.

He came to know about a Christian deacon in Antionie named Apollnius. As he summoned Apollnius, in fear, he asked his pagan friend, Philemon the piper, to appear before the ruler and bribed him with gold to offer sacrifice to the idols. Philemon, disguised in the deacon's clothes and went before the ruler. But there, the grace of God converted Philemon and he refused to offer the sacrifice!

After many failing attempts from Arianus, he sent for Philemon the piper, with the assumption that the man before him is Appolnius, hoping that through the piper's music, and influence, a change of faith could occur. But the messenger's search ended in vain, till the piper's brother was obliged to tell the truth. In great anger Arianus ordered both the piper and the deacon to come before him, submitting them to great punishments, throwing arrows at them; but non of the arrows hit the two Christians. One of the arrows reflected back, hurt the ruler's eye. Philemon told the ruler, as he was crying for

help, to wait until the next day and use dust from their tomb to heal his eye, as they were to be killed if they did not abandon the Christian faith.

The two Christians were beheaded, Arianus could not sleep all night, and in the morning he went to the martyrs' tomb and did as Philemon told him. At once his eye was cured. In sorrow and repentance the ruler accepted the Christian faith, and liberated all the Christians from prison.

Diocletian, who was visiting Alexandria, was agitated. Not believing what he had heard, he sent messengers to summon Arianus before him. He obeyed the order, but before traveling to Alexandria he visited the martyrs' tomb, and the messengers who were with him heard a voice encouraging him to be martyred.

God granted Arianus the gift of making miracles. In the end he was martyred along with the messengers who were converted to Christianity.

## **7. THE THEBAEAN LEGION**

In A.D 286 as some tribes of Gaul under two Roman officers, Aelianus and Amondus revolted against the Emperor Maximian who summoned to his aid from the East a legion called Thebaean, (because it was raised in the neighborhood of Thebais in Egypt). They were all Christians (6666 members). Before entering the war, the emperor held a review of the troops and called upon them to swear allegiance with all the usual pagan ceremonies. Encouraged by the exhortation of their commander Mauritius, they refused. One tenth were beheaded before all the soldiers, but instead of submitting they wrote a letter to the Emperor, in which they said:

"O Great Caesar, we are your soldiers, but at the same time we are God's servants.

We have to serve in the National (military) service, but we also submit heartedly to God...

We receive the temporary reward from you, but the eternal one from Him.

We never obey orders which oppose God's commandments..."

On reading the message he ordered that another one-tenth be beheaded. The rest still refused to sacrifice to the idols. Then they were all martyred.

---

1. Fr. T. Malaty: *The Coptic Church, Melbourne 1978, p 79-109.*

2. *Strom. 4:14:96.*

3. *In Jer. hom 14:17.*

4. *Origen: In Joan. hom 14:17.*

5. *Mourad Kamel: Coptic Egypt, p 33.*

6. *Smith & Wace: Dict. of Christian Bibliog., vol 1, p. 422.*

7. *Mem. Eccl. VII, p. 447.*

8. *Baronius: Ann. Eccl. (ed. Theiner) 111, p. 397.*

9. *Martin: Vies des Saints, t. 3, p. 1841 f.*

10. *Now Know as "Shekh-Abbada," a village in Mallawi.*



# ***THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA<sup>1</sup>***

---

Long before the establishment of Christianity in Alexandria, this city was famous for its various schools. By far, the largest school of all was the "Museum," which was founded by Ptolemy and became the most famous school in the East. Its huge library contained between two hundred thousands and half a million books and manuscripts in the days of Ptolemy I, in addition to the "Serapeum" and the numerous Jewish schools which were scattered everywhere.

In other words, Alexandria, the cosmopolitan city was chosen as a home of learning<sup>2</sup>, and a "unique center of a brilliant intellectual life<sup>3</sup>, where Egyptian, Greek and Jewish cultures were nourished and gave rise to a new civilization.

In such an environment, there was no other alternative but to establish a Christian Institution center<sup>4</sup> to enable the church to face the battle fought by those powerful schools.

## **THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL**

St. Jerome records that the Christian School of Alexandria was founded by St. Mark himself<sup>5</sup>. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to establish it for teaching Christianity as the only way to give the new religion a firm foundation in the city<sup>6</sup>.

This school became the oldest center for sacred sciences in the history of Christianity<sup>7</sup>. In it, the first system of

Christian theology was formed and the allegorical method of Biblical exegesis was devised. In this context, Dom. D. Rees states, "The most renowned intellectual institution in the early Christian world was undoubtedly the Catechetical School (*Didascaleion*) of Alexandria, and its primary concern was the study of the Bible, giving its name to an influential tradition of scriptural interpretation. The preoccupation of this school exegesis was to discover everywhere the spiritual sense underlying the written word of the Scripture<sup>8</sup>.

### **ITS DEVELOPMENT**

The Christian school started as a Catechetical School, where candidates were admitted to learn the Christian faith and some Biblical studies to qualify for baptism. Admittance was open for all people regardless of their culture, age or background.

By the second century it became quite influential in the life of the church as can be seen from the following:

1. It was able to quench the thirst of Alexandrian Christians for religious knowledge, to encourage higher studies and to create research work in a variety of fields.

2. It gave birth to numerous spiritual and well-known church leaders along the years. Many of them deserved to sit on the throne of St. Mark.

3. Through its missionary zeal, it was able to win more souls to Christianity from Egypt and abroad.

4. In a true ecumenical spirit, it attracted students from other nations, many of whom became leaders and bishops in their churches.

5. It established common awareness of the importance of education as a basic element in the religious structure. Consequently every church in Egypt benefited from it in one way or another.

6. It contributed to the world the first systematic theological studies.

7. It used philosophy as a weapon for maneuvering pagan philosophers, thus beating them at their own game<sup>9</sup>.

### **ITS PROGRAM**

1. It would be a grave error to limit the school's activity to theology<sup>10</sup>. Its teaching was encyclopedic; presenting at first the whole series of profane sciences, and then rising to moral and religious philosophy, and finally to Christian theology, set forth in the form of a commentary on the sacred books. This encyclopedic conception of teaching was an Alexandrian tradition, and it was also found in its pagan and Jewish schools.

2. From St. Clement's trilogy, (his three books), which broadly outline the school's program at that time we may conclude that three courses were available:

a. A special course to non-Christians, which introduced candidates to the principles of Christianity.

b. A course on Christian morals.

c. An advanced course on Divine wisdom and sufficient knowledge for the spiritual Christian.

3. In this school; worship went side by side with study<sup>11</sup>. Teachers and their students practised praying, fasting and diverse ways of asceticism. In purity and integrity their lives were exemplary. Celibacy was a recommended ideal, observed by many... In addition to continence in food and drink, they also continent in earthly possessions<sup>12</sup>.

## **ITS DEANS**

A quick glimpse at some of the names which headed the Christian school of Alexandria is a self-evidence of the history of the school and its rank among similar institutions. Among these names are Athenagoras, Pantaenus, Clement, Origen, Heraclas, Alexander, Dionysius, Pierius, Theognostes, Peter, Macarius, Didymius the blind... as well as Athanasius the Apostolic, Cyril of Alexandria, Dioscorus etc.

**1. ATHENAGHORAS:** He was anxious to write against Christianity. He read the Holy Scriptures in order to aim his shafts of criticism more accurately, but he was so powerfully seized by the Holy Spirit that he became a defender of the faith he was harassing. Not only was he converted to Christianity (c. 176 A.D), but he also became one of the most famous deans of the Christian Theological School<sup>13</sup>, while he continued to wear the philosopher's gallium. He wrote a plea (37 chs.) on behalf of Christianity about (A.D 177), addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son co-ruler commodes. He also wrote a treatise "on the Resurrection of the dead" in 25 chapters.

**2. PANTAENUS:** He was a well-known stoic who embraced Christianity at the hands of Athenagoras. In (A.D 181) he succeeded his teacher as the dean of the Theological (Catechetical) School. To him was attributed the



introduction of philosophy and sciences into the school to gain the educated pagans. He introduced the Coptic Alphabet, by using the letters and adding seven letters from the ancient Demotic letters. The Holy Bible was translated to the Coptic language under his guidance, assisted by his disciples, Clement and Origen. Most of our Christian literature was translated into this language as the last phase in the evolution of the ancient Egyptian language. In 190 A.D, Pope Demetrius elected him for the Christian mission to preach in India. In his journey he brought the Gospel of St. Matthew written by his own hand in Hebrew, brought by Bartholomew the Apostle<sup>14</sup>. He explained all the books of the Holy Bible.

**3. ST. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA:** He was the father of the Christian philosophy of Alexandria<sup>15</sup>, and was well versed in the Holy Scripture. He was born around the year A.D 150, and he was searching unceasingly for God. After converting to Christianity he made extensive travels to Southern Italy, Syria, and Palestine. His purpose was to seek instruction from the most famous Christian teachers. At the end of his journeys he reached Alexandria where Pantaenus' lecture had such attraction to him that he settled there and made this city his second home. He became the pupil, and assistant of Pantaenus. He was ordained a priest in Alexandria, discharged his catechetical duties with great distinction and succeeded Pantaenus as head of the School before (A.D 190). Among his pupils were Origen and Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem.

In the time of severe persecution by Septimius Severus about (A.D 202), he was forced to leave Alexandria and took refuge (probably in Palestine and Syria). In (A.D 215), he died without seeing Egypt again.

St. Clement is the first Christian writer who brought Christian doctrine face to face with the ideas and achievements of the time. He believed that the very constitution of the Church and Holy Scriptures was not incompatible with Greek philosophy. He believed that there is no enmity between Christianity and Philosophy. The difference was this; while the ancient philosophers had been unable to get more than glimpses of the truth, it was left to Christianity to make known in Christ the perfect truth.

The chief work of St. Clement is the trilogy, which consists of:

1. The Exhortation to the Greeks (*Protrepticus*).
2. The Tutor (*Paedagogus*).
3. The *Stromata*, Carpets or Miscellaneous studies.

In the first he urges the pagans to accept the Christian faith, in the second he calls for joining Christian life under the guidance of its Teacher (Christ), and in the third he reveals the need for knowledge (*gnosis*). He also wrote: "Who is the rich that can be saved?," the "*Hypotyposes*" (Outlines), a Paschal letter and other works which are lost.

**4. ORIGEN:** J. Quasten states, "The School of Alexandria reached its greatest importance under St. Clement's successor, Origen<sup>16</sup>, the outstanding teacher and scholar of the early church, ...a man of encyclopedic learning, and one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen<sup>17</sup>." The Coptic Church was compelled to excommunicate him because of some faulty ideas that he adopted, like the salvation of the devil, and the universal salvation of all human race, besides his acceptance of priesthood after making himself eunuch. After his death, other churches

excommunicated him and his followers in the Council of Constantinople in (A.D 553).

Origen, a true son of Egypt, was born probably in Alexandria, in or about (A.D 185). His father Leonides was very careful to bring him up in the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures. His father was arrested and thrown into prison. Origen ardently desired to attain the Martyr's crown, and when he was prevented by his mother, he strongly urged his father to accept martyrdom by writing to him "Do not dream of changing your mind for our sake."

Leonides was beheaded and his goods were confiscated. Origen's refuge was with a noble lady of Alexandria, who helped him for a while, but he could not feel comfortable there, because a heretic teacher, called "Paul of Antioch," had so captured this simple lady by his eloquence that she harbored him as her philosopher and adopted son, and allowed him to propagate his heresy by means of lectures, held in her house. Origen felt no comfort, left the house and supported himself and his family by teaching secular literature and grammar.

Through his teaching to pagans, Origen often had occasions to refer to the theological position of pagan writers. As a result, some pagans approached him for instruction in Christianity, and were later even martyred.

During the persecution St. Clement left Alexandria, and Origen was appointed as the dean of the School when he was eighteen years old. He devoted himself to studying the Holy Bible and its allegoric interpretation in an ascetic spirit. Because of the presence of women at his lectures he castrated himself.

He journeyed to many countries, to Rome in (A.D 212), to Arabia in 214 and 244, and to Palestine in 216 where he interpreted the Bible before the bishops of Jerusalem and Caesarea, which angered Pope Demetrius for according to the Alexandrian tradition layman should not deliver sermons in the presence of a bishop. He also went to Antioch to meet Mamaea, the Emperor's mother, and to Greece for church affairs, and on his return he went to Palestine where the bishop of Caesarea ordained him a priest so that he could teach in the presence of bishops. Pope Demetrius was angered again for Origen's acceptance of ordination from a bishop other than himself, and considered this ordination invalid, especially because Origen was eunuch. A council was held in Alexandria and Origen was exiled. A bishop of Caesarea embraced him and asked him to establish a new school in Caesarea.

During the persecution initiated by Maximian, Origen took refuge in Cappadocian Caesarea, then returned to Palestine. During the Reign of Decius (A.D 249-251) he was arrested, bore many sufferings and died shortly afterwards perhaps because of these sufferings.

His main writings are: The Hexapala (or six-fold Bible), arranged in six parallel columns from Hebrew and Greek texts; his exegetical works that range over nearly the entire field of Scripture; his dogmatic writings like "*De Principiis*," "Discussion with Heraclides" and "on the Resurrection;" his apologetic works like his "Contra Celsus" and his practical works as "On prayer," "Exhortation to Martyrdom," "On Easter" and his letters.

**5. HERACLAS:** He is one of the most remarkable of Origen's disciples. Even before that Origen had, studied the

New Platonic philosophy under Ammonius Saccas. At first he was a pupil to Origen, then his assistant and finally successor to him after his flight to Palestine.

On the other hand, St. Demetrius who discovered Heraclas' spiritual abilities to preach, catechize and guide the believers, ordained him a priest then protopriest, giving him permission to preach in the Cathedral. He converted many pagans to Christianity and showed great love towards the believers. In A.D 224 he was elected as successor to St. Demetrius. As his people suffered persecution he visited the cities and countries throughout Egypt, strengthening them. On his visits, he ordained about twenty bishops to take care of God's people. The people and the presbyters of Egypt who loved him, decided to distinguish him from the rest of the bishops by calling him, in Coptic, Papa or Pope, which means "Father." Thus, the first prelate in Christendom to bear this title was Heraclas before it was used in Rome.

It is said that Pope Heraclas urged the great master Origen to return to Alexandria<sup>18</sup>, but he refused, giving an excuse that the School of Alexandria was already established while that of Caesarea was in need of his care<sup>19</sup>. Through his virtuous life, St. Heraclas not only converted Egyptian pagans but some foreigners also, like Julius Africanus<sup>20</sup>.

**6. ST. DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA:** St. Athanasius called St. Dionysius "the Teacher of the Universal Church<sup>21</sup>." Dionysius who was born in Alexandria (c. A.D 190) of pagan parents, was a worshiper of stars and a successful physician. It was his wide reading that led him to embrace the Christian faith. Once he bought some papers of the Epistles of St. Paul from an old Christian woman. After reading them he hurried to her asking for more. She led him

to the church and introduced him to the priest. Dionysius embraced Christianity and attended the Christian School. At first he became one of Origen's pupils then he succeeded Heraclas as the Head of the School for about sixteen years (231-246). He became one of the brightest stars of this school<sup>22</sup>. He was ordained a deacon by Pope Demetrius, and a priest by Pope Heraclas.

In A.D 247 St. Dionysius was elected as the Pope of Alexandria, and had the difficult task of preserving his church in the midst of persecution. His reign, in fact, was full of troubles, such as:

1. In AD 250 the Decian persecution was raged; he waited for four days in his home while the secret-service agent dispatched by the prefect searched everywhere for him. At last he fled, but the soldiers arrested him. The people hurried to the prison while he was sleeping there. And insisted to carry him, to his home.

2. In AD 257 another persecution was conducted by the Emperor Valerian and he was exiled to Libya. In his exile he managed not only to hold meetings and convert many of the heathen but also to exert influence on his church in Alexandria so as to keep services going there as well.

In Alexandria, Aemilianus, prefect of Egypt, declared himself emperor, and civil war broke out which ended in his capture by the imperial general Theodotus, who sent the rebel in chains to Rome. The war, however, devastated the city and depleted the population. Plague was imminent and famine was at the door.

Because of his church position, education and wisdom he was much involved in combating heresies not only which arose in Egypt but also everywhere in the Universal Church of his days, such as the Schism of Novatius who was ordained illegally bishop of Rome, the heresies of Nepos, bishop of Arsinoe (in Fayoum), Sabelius bishop of Ptolmais (the Five Western countries), Paul of Samosate, and the dispute over baptism by heretics between Stephen of Rome and Cyprian of Carthage.

Concerning his writings Neale states that the absence of these writings is one of the greatest losses that befell in the church throughout history<sup>23</sup>.

**7. THEOGNOSTES:** He was an Alexandrian priest and theologian, about whom little is known, save through quotations in the writings of Photius, Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa.

**8. FR. PIERIUS:** He was an educated, eminent exegete and preacher. St. Jerome called him "Origen Junior." He published many treatises on all sorts of subjects, such as "On the Prophet Hosea," "On the Gospel according to St. Luke," "On the Mother of God," "On the life of St. Pamphilus " and twelve "Logio" (concerning the logos).

**9. ST. PETER THE LAST MARTYR<sup>24</sup>:** He was born in answer to his mother's prayers, who pleaded in tears that God might grant her a son to serve Him all his life. He was ordained a "reader" (*Agnostos*) at the age of seven, a deacon at the age of twelve, and a priest at the age of sixteen years. It is said that many times he saw the hands of the Son of God giving the communion to the believers through the hand of

Pope Theona. He was dedicated so much to Bible studies that he was qualified to be the head of the school of Alexandria, and deserved to be called: "The Excellent Doctor" in Christianity.

He interpreted the whole Bible; the Old and New Testaments word by word; and wrote many treatises on "The Trinity," "The Holy Spirit," "Against the Manichaeans," "Philosophy," "Incarnations" etc.

While he was a priest he conquered Sabellius, bishop of Ptolemais, who denied the Holy Trinity, considering them as three modes of God self-manifestation.

During the persecution of Diocletian and Maximianus, in AD 302, he was ordained a Pope of Alexandria. Meletius, bishop of Lycopolis (Assiut) made a schism in the church and ordained bishops and priests (outside his parish).

He ordained Arius a deacon then a priest in Alexandria, and when he noticed in his sermons that he denied the Godhead of Christ and his equality to the Father he excommunicated Arius. when the Pope was prisoned. he warned his disciples - Achillaus and Alexander - to take heed of Arius, for he had seen Christ in a vision with a torn garment; and when he asked Christ about the case He answered that Arius did tear His garment. A large crowd surrounded the prison to save their pope, in AD 311. In order to avoid any blood shedding, he sent secretly to the commander to plan for his martyrdom without killing his people.



He wrote many theological treatises and letters which contain his canons, especially that which deals with those who denied faith through persecution.

**10. ST. DIDYMUS THE BLIND:** He was born about the year A.D 313; He had lost his sight at the age of four. He had never learned to read in school, but through his eagerness for education he invented the engraved writing for reading with his fingers, fifteen centuries before Braille reinvented it. He also used to learn by heart the Holy Bible and the church doctrines. He excelled in grammar, philosophy, logic, mathematics and music. He became popular everywhere. After Macarius's death he became the head of the School of Alexandria. Among his disciples were SS. Gregory of Nazianzen, Jerome, Rufinus and Palladius. He was a close friend to St. Anthony. The latter visited him several times and Palladius paid him four visits. He defended Oregin and conquered the Arians in his dispute with them.

Now, I shall leave the writing about some Fathers of the Alexandrian School, such as SS. Athanasius, Cyril the Great and Dioscorus, to the next chapters which deal with the Ecumenical Councils and the controversy about the nature of Jesus Christ etc.

- 
1. FR. T. Malaty: *The Coptic Church Melbourne* 1978, p. 26f.
  2. H. Gwatkin: *Early Church History*, London 1909, vol. 2, p.155.
  3. Quasten: *Patrology*, vol. 2, p.1.
  4. Lebreton J.: *Hist. of the Primitive Church*, London 1949, vol. 3, p.731.
  5. *De Viris Illustribus* 36.
  6. *Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate: St. Mark and the Coptic Church*, 1968, p.61.
  7. Quasten: *Patrology*, vol. 2.
  8. Nelson: *A New Catholic Comm. on the Holy Scripture*, 1969, p.15.
  9. Douglas: *Dict. of the Christian Church* p. 26.
  10. Atiya: *Hist. of Eastern Church*, p.33; Mourad Kamel: *Coptic Church*, p. 36.
  11. J. Lebreton, p. 732.
  12. *Coptic Patr.: St. Mark*, p. 63.
  13. W. Schoedel: *Athenagoras*, Oxford 1972, p .IX.
  14. Tolinton: *Clem. of Ales.*, London 1914, vol. 1, p.14.

15. Schaff *Hist. of Christian Church*, Vol. 2, p.782.
16. "Oregano" means "son of or (Horus) the Egyptian sun-god.
17. *Quasten* vol. 2, p.37.
18. *Farrington: Early Christian Church*, vol. 2, p.463.
19. W. Budge: *Ethiopian Synxarium*, vol. 2, p.337-8.
20. *Paul d' Orleans: Les Saints d'Egypte*, 1923, t2, p.197.
21. *De Seyt. Dion.* 6.
22. F.W. Farrar: *Lives of the fathers*, London 1970, vol. 1, p.343.
23. *Holy Eastern Church*, vol. 1, p.84.
24. Fr. Malaty: *Pope Peter 1*, Melbourne, 1975.



# ***THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL<sup>1</sup>***

---

## **THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS**

Scholars who study the first Ecumenical Councils, get to know the Alexandrian theologians as leaders and pioneers of the Christian faith and thought on an ecumenical level. Their prominence was not based on any political power, because Alexandria was under the Roman Empire and subsequently was ruled by the Byzantines, until the Arab conquest of Egypt. Their strength was based on their deep spiritual, pious, theological and biblical thought and studies.

The Alexandrian Fathers were not looking for leadership for personal benefit, but it was the openness of their hearts with divine love and their extensive studies that attracted many people to the School of Alexandria and to the Egyptian desert, where they learned the Alexandrine theology and were introduced to the ascetic life of the Egyptian monks. The Copts, by their adherence to the orthodox (true) faith since early Christianity, played a positive role in solving many theological problems in both East and West. They did not interfere in other church's problems, but because of their spirit of love and unity they were called upon and consulted by other churches.

When the Emperors accepted the Christian faith and the waves of persecution calmed down, the heretics found a great opportunity to spread their adverse teachings, especially Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Apollinarius etc.. It became imperative for the Alexandrian Fathers to play their positive role in trying to win back these heretics to the true faith perseverance, but not at the expense of the evangelic thought of church faith.

Now, I will confine my writing to the role played by certain Alexandrian Fathers in the Ecumenical Councils, setting aside a separate chapter to St. Dioscorus and the attitude of the Council of Chalcedon towards him because of its importance, regarding how the Chalcedonian Churches perceive us, and for those who do not understand the truth of our belief in the nature of Jesus Christ.

## **POPE ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC AND THE COUNCIL OF NICEA**

In our book: "The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition and Theology," I dedicated a special chapter to Pope Athanasius and Arianism. I will limit myself here to what St. Gregory of Nazianzen said, "When I praise Athanasius, virtue itself is my theme; for I name every virtue as often as I mention him who possessed all virtues. He was the true pillar of the Church. His life and conduct were an example for bishops and his doctrine represents the Orthodox Creed<sup>1</sup>."

St. Athanasius was ordained Patriarch (Pope) of Alexandria in A.D 328, and he presided over the church for forty-six years, of which over seventeen were spent in exile on account of his vigorous opposition to the spread of

Arianism, which had the support of certain emperors. He was exiled five times.

Due to the spread of Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ and considered Him a creature found before all times, and an instrument for creation, who played the role of a mediator between God and the world, in A.D 325 the First Ecumenical Council was held in Nicea. Arianism also maintained that the Holy Spirit is not God but is still an inferior god to the Logos.

It was Emperor Constantine who invited the council, that was attended by 118 bishops, among them Pope Alexander of Alexandria, who was accompanied by St. Athanasius his secretary at that time. St. Athanasius was a young man, and as a deacon he was not allowed to participate in the discussions. It was said that the Pope ordained him a priest so that he can take part in the discussions. St. Athanasius entered into a dialogue with Arius and his followers, and completely defeated them with his zeal to defend faith, strong theological knowledge and reasoning. He wrote the Creed which all churches recite today. When the council was over, he left, after winning the admiration of all the bishops assembled there and the hatred of the party of heretics who opposed him vigorously .

John Henry Newman wrote of Athanasius as that extraordinary man... a principal instrument after the Apostles by which the sacred truths of Christianity have been conveyed and he believed in the Word<sup>2</sup>.

## **POPE TIMOTHY (TIMOTHIUS) AND THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

The second Ecumenical Council was held in A.D 381 at Constantinople, at the invitation of Emperor Theodosius the Great. The Council was attended by 150 bishops, to try Macedonius who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He was a follower of Arius and managed to become the Patriarch of Constantinople. Pope Timothy played a vital role in the council, and according to Sozomen<sup>3</sup> he chaired the council.

The council dealt at first very effectively with theological matters, then it discussed some administrative issues, and here the temporal pride entered into church. The Council put the Church of Alexandria after the churches of Rome and Constantinople, as Rome was the capital and Constantinople was the "new Rome." At this point the Pope and the bishops of Alexandria withdrew from the Council. This withdrawal from the Council did not in any way affect the Fathers of the Council in their works world-wide. It did not affect our appreciation for them. We remember them in every liturgy of Eucharist. It did not affect the position of Alexandria, for we find William Worrell writing about the ecumenical movement, "The see [of Alexandria] was the most important in the Church, as the city was the most important in the whole East. To the prestige of ancient Egypt and Hellenistic Alexandria, the reputation for Christian learning and the power of leadership were added<sup>4</sup>."

## **POPE CYRIL THE GREAT AND NESTORIANISM**

On the 22nd of June A.D. 431, the third Ecumenical Council was held in Ephesus, at the order of Emperor Theodosius the Lesser. It was attended by 200 bishops, and

St. Cyril the Great, Pope of Alexandria, chaired the council. The Council convened to try Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, for he divided Christ into two separate persons: the Son of God and the son of man. St. Cyril stressed on the unity of the Godhead and manhood without mixing or mingling. He also stressed on the title "Theotokos," i.e. "the mother of God" for St. Mary, in order to clarify that who was born from her is truly God the Incarnate Word and not an ordinary man on whom the Godhead descended subsequently. I have already discussed this subject in the book "Church of Erudition and theology."

---

1. *Orations* 21.

2. *The Penguin Dict. of Saints*, p.53.

3. *Sozomen H.E.* 7:7,9.

4. *A Short Account of the Copts, Michigan, 1945*, p.17.



# **THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE MONASTIC MOVEMENT**

---

## **AN EVANGELIC ASCETICISM**

The Coptic Church is known by her ascetic attitudes, not only because it was there the monastic movements started, but because these attitudes represent characteristics of her life of worship. These attitudes have an evangelic base;

*"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?!"* Matt. 16:26.

*"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor ... and come, follow Me"* Luke 18:22.

*"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified"* 1 Cor. 9:27.

The Copts enjoyed this evangelic thought, and their hearts were flamed by the love of eternity.

## **THE ASCETIC LIFE AND THE WORLD TO COME<sup>1</sup>**

The ancient Egyptians believed in the so-called "resurrection," that is, it was possible for the dead to live again forever if certain ceremonies were carried out<sup>2</sup>. For this reason the bodies must be well kept in sealed tombs, so that only the soul (*ka*) can visit the tomb and dwell in it.

No doubt, then, that tombs were provided with all articles used in daily life. Clothes, food and drinking vessels, cutlery,



chairs etc. Besides the actual furniture, the deceased was supplied with his weapons and carriages. The ornaments of women and the playthings of children, such as dolls and balls were also placed in the tomb.

When the Egyptians were converted to Christianity their longing for the world to come increased, based on the evangelic truth. Instead of their interest in the return of the spirits to their bodies that are preserved in the tomb, they desired that their spirits, minds and hearts be lifted up to enjoy heavenly life even while their bodies were on earth. In other words, their longing for the world to come paved the way to practice ascetic life on a biblical basis.

### **THE CONCEPT OF THE COPTIC ASCETICISM**

Asceticism, in the Coptic Church, is not a goal in itself that believers desire to attain, but it is a practical response to divine love. Our Lord gave Himself on our behalf, and we in turn long to give ourselves a loving-sacrifice for God's sake. We abstain from temporary pleasures as a sign of our internal desire to enjoy the divine delight through the new life in Jesus Christ. Believers, especially monks, have one purpose; to attain the inner heavenly Kingdom as a pledge of their hope for eternal life and meeting with God.

### **ASCETICISM AND CHURCH LIFE**

In many occasions I spoke about asceticism in the Coptic Church and its effect on her theological concepts, her life of worship, her conduct etc. Here I refer just to the following points:

1. The effect of the ascetic life on the Coptic Church is very clear, especially in her worship: the hymns are lengthy but very sweet and soul-comforting and long fasting too

many (more than half of the year), liturgies concentrate on the advent of Christ.

2. Her martyrs are innumerable, so that some historians look upon her existence as a divine miracle. It was not uncommon that an entire population of a city would hurry joyfully to their persecutors to gain crowns of martyrdom.

3. The spiritual ascetic thought had its own effect on the Alexandrian theology, because it has a soteriological attitude, and theology concentrated on the enjoyment of salvation. Theology is not philosophical thoughts to be discussed, but it is rather an experience of God's redeeming acts in the believer's life<sup>4</sup>.

4. The ascetic life does not mean an enmity to the body and its senses and energies, but rather it looks upon the body in sanctity as aiding the soul<sup>5</sup>.

5. The ascetic life prepared the way to the monastic movement in all its forms: monachism, coenobitic and communal systems, which aim at the unity with God in different forms. Therefore, the Egyptians understood "monachism" not as an isolation from men but as a unity with God... The monk does not isolate his heart from the human race but loves everybody wholeheartedly even if he lives in the desert. He prays for them, and shares them their sorrows, begging earnestly for their salvation.

6. Many of the Egyptian Fathers resisted the exaggeration in asceticism, especially if it is practiced without wisdom or discernment.

## **THE MONASTIC MOVEMENT<sup>6</sup>**

In Egypt, all monastic forms started, in the fourth century, to reattract the heart of the Church to the inner life, after the country had accepted Christianity and the Emperor had opened his door to bishops and priests .

Undoubtedly the various monastic forms or orders did not start on the basis of previous church plan, but they came to light through instinct love that flamed the hearts of many early Christians.

1. In the Apostolic age, many believers practiced asceticism, to enjoy the perfect life as it came in the Gospel.

2. The eschatological attitude of the church flamed the believers' longing for the Bridegroom's advent. On this base some believers preferred to live in virginity and devote all their time to worship, as a spiritual preparation for the heavenly wedding feast. In the second century Christian virgins used to walk in the liturgical processions after the priests and before widows. Many communities of virgins lived in Alexandria and many other countries all over the world, and many treatises on "Virginity" represented a vital part of the patristic writings in the first three centuries.

3. Some felt not only the need to live as virgins and have no family responsibilities, but also the need for a spiritual atmosphere. Women lived together in a house to assist one another spiritually. Men preferred to leave the cities and live in simple huts in villages. They were called "devotees." Some Christians felt thirsty towards the angelic life, and escaped to the deserts. We know only a small number of them such as

St. Paul the First Hermit who lived in the desert more than ninety years (c. A.D 250-341).

4. Although many preceded him in practicing monasticism, it was St. Anthony the Great who established the monastic movement and is considered the father of the monastic family for the following reasons: His close relationship with the leaders of the Church, especially Pope Athanasius who wrote about him to the Roman world; and because his cave was opened after twenty years of complete isolation and many leaders of monasticism became his disciples. Philosophers and rulers came to discuss reason with him. He also was an active member of the Church, who visited Alexandria in the period of persecution to serve and encourage the confessors, and to assist St. Athanasius in his struggle against Arianism.

5. St. Pachomius established the coenobitic system, because he was aware that the anchoric order was not fit for all those who desired the monastic life.

6. SS. Macari the Great and Amoun and others established the communal order in Wadi-el-Natroun, where many came from all over the world to live the monastic life in Egypt, and to write about the Egyptian monasticism.

It is worthy to note that the leaders of the three forms of monasticism were not prejudiced to their own orders, but praised the other orders.

7. Women monastic movement started side by side with that of men, and monks contributed in the building of the nunneries. Many female leaders appeared, who played effective roles, such as abbess Sarah and abbess Theodora.

Many Egyptian and foreign women were disguised in men garments to live an ascetic life in men monasteries, and they became pioneers in asceticism and spirituality.



### ***SOME EXAMPLES OF MONASTIC LEADERS***

---

**1. ST. PAUL OF THEBES** (*The First Pilgrim - Wanderer*): In the year 374 or 375 A.D., St. Jerome wrote his biography. St. Paul a native of the lower Thebaid in Egypt was highly skilled in both Greek and Egyptian learning. Being about sixteen year old, upon the death of his parents he came into a rich inheritance, during the persecution of Dicus (250 A.D) the young man fled to the desert, when his brother Peter threatened to betray him.

When the blessed Paul, already one hundred and thirteen years old, was leading a heavenly life on earth, St. Anthony visited him. St. Paul called St. Anthony by his name, and they were speaking about God's wonderful works, praising Him. At sunset, a raven alighted upon a branch of a tree and gently swooped down and laid a whole loaf of bread before them, although it used to bring only half of a loaf every day for St. Paul to feed.

On the third day St. Paul asked St. Anthony to go and fetch him a cloak that bishop Athanasius had gave him, to wrap his body with. When St. Anthony returned to the cave, he found St. Paul kneeling as if he was praying, but he discovered that he had already departed. Two lions came and dug the ground with their paws so that the corpse of the blessed man might be buried.

**2. ST. ANTHONY:** He was born about A.D 251 in Coma (Kemn-el-Arouse) in Middle Egypt. He was eighteen years old when he entered the church and heard the word of the Gospel: "*If you want to be perfect, sell all you have, give to the poor and come follow Me*" Matt. 19:21. He sold his land and left his sister in a community of virgins, and lived in a hut under the guidance of a recluse. Later he departed to the western desert to live in a tomb carved in a mountain, where he struggled in his spiritual war against demons. He was about thirty-five years old when he settled on the east bank of the Nile at Pispir to live as a hermit. Many came to him to copy his holy life. He again retired into solitude in the inner wilderness in the "El- Kalzam Mountain." He urged himself to visit Alexandria in A.D. 316 to assist the martyrs, and in A.D 352 to help St. Athanasius in his controversy against Arianism. Many came to him as disciples. He departed to the Lord in A.D 356. Among his disciples were SS. Hilarious of Gaza, Macari of Sheheet, Amoun of Nitria and Paul the Simple.

**3. ST. PACHOMIUS:** He was born in about A.D 290, in Upper Egypt, and he was converter to Christianity in Esnah (Latopolis) in Upper Egypt because of the generosity of its people and their love even towards their enemies. He left the army and was baptized in A.D 307 in Chenoboskion. He became a disciple of Palamon the Hermit, until an angel appeared to him and guided him to the Coenobitic system. As a successful leader he was concerned with the salvation of everybody; established many monasteries in Upper Egypt in an accurate order. In addition to two nunneries under the guidance of his sister.

His coenobitic laws were translated into Greek and Latin, and they were used by St. Basil the Great, and by the

Gaulians in the fifth Century. Benedict, the Father of the western monasticism and Caesarius of Arles adopted them too.

**4. ST. AMOUN:** He was a contemporary to St. Anthony. He was born about A.D 275, when he was a young man of about twenty-two (A.D 297) he was constrained by his uncle to marry, but he lived with his wife as two ascetics. After eighteen years (c. 315) she asked that they should live apart for the good of the progress of their spiritual life. Then he went to Mount Nitria, where many came to him as disciples, and where he established the communal system. It is a system half way between monarchism and the cenobitic system. The monks do not share in worship and food daily; they gather only on Saturdays and Sundays. They live in cells or caves around a church.

**5. ST. MACARIUS THE GREAT** (c. 300-390 A.D): He was the founder of the communal order in the desert of Scetis; he visited St. Anthony at least twice.

His parents obliged him to marry, but God permitted that his wife should die while she was a virgin. He lived in a hut, in a village, practicing asceticism about ten years, under the guidance of a hermit. As he longed for anchorism he went to Scetis, following a Cherub. He practiced worship and asceticism, with an open heart and therefore many came to him as disciples; from the East and West.

**6. ST. SHENOUDA THE ARCHIMANDRITE** (the Head of Anchorites): He was an abbot of the White Monastery of Atribe in the desert of Thebes for more than sixty five years (the forth/fifth century), heading 2200 monks

and 1800 nuns. He is called Archimandrite for he used to practice the hermitic life from time to time, and encouraged some of his monks to withdraw to the desert after a few years of coenobitic life. In A.D 431 he accompanied St. Cyril the Great to the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus.

He created Egyptian nationalism or Coptism, eliminating every Hellenistic culture from the Coptic literature, and did not permit any foreigner to be admitted to his monasteries. Besides his deep spirituality he was a political leader and a social reformer.

**7. ST. SARAH THE ABBESS:** The first monastic community in the world for women was founded in Alexandria by St. Syncletica, whose biography and teachings were preserved by Pope Athanasius. St. Pachomius established two women's convents, and many women hermits lived in the desert.

Many foreign abbesses came to Egypt such as St. Melania the Great (in A.D 374) and her granddaughter Melania the young (in A.D 418). We also cannot ignore St. Mary of Egypt who was converted in Jerusalem. For forty-eight years she dwelt in the desert beyond Jordan seeing nobody, except St. Osima twice in the last two years of her life.

Many abbesses were endowed with the grace of the true leadership and spiritual discernment. One of them was Sarah, who lived in Pelusium, and her sayings were treasured by the desert Fathers.

**8. ST. HILARY:** The daughter of Emperor Zeno in the fifth century, fled to the desert of Scetic to practice asceticism while she was disguised in a monk's clothes. When



her sister Theopesta was possessed by an evil spirit the elders of the wilderness sent her to Hillary without knowing that she was a woman. She prayed for her all night and kissed her. When she was healed the emperor was astonished at the monk who prayed for his daughter and was kissing her. He called (him) to his palace and when the (monk) got a promise that the emperor would leave (him) return to (his) cell, he uncovered (his) personality.

## **EGYPTIAN MONASTICISM AND THE CHRISTIAN WORLD<sup>7</sup>**

The Coptic monasticism is considered the most profound spiritual revival that ever happened in all the history of the Church. It attracted people from all over the world to practice angelic life in Egypt. Greeks, Roman, Cappadocians, Libyans, Syrians, Nubians, Ethiopians etc.

The following is a brief account of the effect of the Coptic monasticism on the whole Christian world:

1. Pope Athanasius was greatly responsible for the introduction of the monastic movement to the Roman religious life, during his exile in Treve (A.D 336-337), and his flight to Rome in A.D 339. He also wrote his book "*Vita Antonii*" about A.D 357 which was distributed all over the world.

2. The Pachomian rules were translated into Greek by Palladius, and into Latin by Jerome. St. Basil visited the Pachomian monasteries and he was profoundly impressed by what he saw.

3. The rules of Benedict of Nursia (c. A.D 480-550) were based on the Pachomian ones.

4. St. John Cassian (A.D 360-435) stayed seven years in Egypt, and he wrote his two famous books: the "Institutes" and the "Conferences."

5. Evagrius Ponticus (A.D. 346-399) who occupied a central place in the history of Christian spirituality, lived as a monk for two years in Nitria, then fourteen years in the "Cells."

6. SS. Jerome (A.D 342-420) and Rufinus (A.D 345-410) paid a visit to Egypt.

7. Palladius (c. 365-425 A.D), bishop of Helenopolis and historian of the early monasticism, spent several years with the monks of Egypt, where he was a disciple of Evagrius Ponticus, and composed his book "Lausaic History" about the year A.D. 419.

8. Mar Eugenius became a disciple of St. Pachomius; he established a monastery in Nisibus Persia and translated St. Pachomius' rules to the Persian and Syrian about the middle of the fourth century. According to the Chaldean tradition, seventy Egyptian monks helped him in building several monasteries at Nisibus.

9. St. Hilarius of Palestine (c.291-371 A.D) became a disciple of St. Anthony and returned to his own land to practice asceticism.

10. St. Epiphanius (A.D 315-403), bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, had been instructed in monastic Coptic thought.

11. The "Dialogues of Sulpicius Severus" (c. A.D 430) written by a traveler called Postumian, recorded what he had seen in Egypt. This was a very favorable view of the Egyptian monasticism.

12 Etheria (Egaria), a Spanish abbess or nun in the fourth century visited Egypt.

13. St. Melania the elder, a Roman lady, visited the desert of Egypt.

14. St. John Chrysostom stayed in one of the Pachomian monasteries in Upper Egypt from 373 to 381 A.D.

### **THE COPTIC MONASTIC MOVEMENT TODAY**

One of the remarkable aspects of the Coptic Orthodox Church today is the continual increase of those who are eager to join monastic life. At present, in Egypt, there are eleven monasteries scattered in the diverse desert regions, and six convents within the cities. All of them are expanding and are being renovated.

His Holiness Pope Cyril VI established St. Menas' Monastery in Mareotis, south west of Alexandria.

H. Holiness Pope Shenouda III takes care of St. Pishoy's Monastery in Wadi-el-Natroun. He established a papal residence in this area because of his eagerness to practice monastic life in addition of his tremendous pastoral responsibilities. Usually he spends three days per week in this monastery.

Some of the young men who had been immigrated to U.S.A., Canada and Australia and who succeeded in their careers, were admitted to the monasteries in Egypt.

---

1. Fr. Tadros Malaty: *The Coptic Church, "Church of Alexandria," Melbourne 1978, p. 6-7.*

2. *Hastings Encycl. of Religion and Ethics vol. 1, p. 113.*

3. *M.E. Harkness: Egyptian life and history, p. 17-19.*

4. Fr. T. Malaty: *The terms : "Physis & Hypostasis" in the Early Church, Sept. 1986, p. 19f.*

5. Fr. T. Malaty: *Dict. of the Fathers and the Saints of the Church, vol. 1, 1986, p.12 (in Arabic).*

6. Fr. Malaty: *The Coptic Orthodox Church, 1986, p. 9-11.*

7. *Ibid, p. 78-83.*



***THE COPTIC CHURCH  
AND THE  
COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON***

---



***THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON  
AND  
THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA***

**THE IMPORTANCE OF RESTUDYING THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON**

Nowadays it is very important to restudy and reexamine the Council of Chalcedon, not for the sake of reminding the world of wounds inflicted upon the Church of Alexandria by her sisters, the apostolic Churches, but in order to clarify the position of the Church of Alexandria. From the seventh century the Church of Alexandria had lost communication with other churches because of unwilling political circumstances. Through this long period she was accused of the following charges:

1. She is Eutychian!, and is called "Monophysite!" This title means that she believes in one nature of Jesus Christ, that the human nature was absorbed totally in the divine

nature. This idea differs from our own belief and from our Fathers' belief; and our church never accepted it.

2. Dr. J. Tager<sup>1</sup> states that Christianity was foreign to Egypt until the fifth century, and that Egyptians accepted Christianity for political reasons. When their Patriarchs felt sympathy of the Christian world and the world-wide respect to their education, they found a chance to get rid of the emperor's authority, and did their best to exercise their religious thoughts which differed from those of their direct principal, i.e. the Roman Pope!

This picture is too far from reality with regard to the Coptic Church. History witnesses that Christianity was not foreign in Egypt, hundreds of thousand of Copts had been martyred in the Roman age. In Egypt all forms of the evangelic monastic movements originated, and in Egypt the School of Alexandria was established and its Fathers were well known all over the world. I think that there is no need to argue this accusation that the Patriarchs of Alexandria used to oppose their leader, the Roman Pontiff, for history reveals the relations of mutual respect between Alexandria and Rome!

It is not true that the Coptic Church was separated from the Universal Church because of its desire to flee from Byzantium, but the truth is that the emperors wanted to solve the theological disputes by force, and the *Melkite* (royal) Patriarch, who was appointed by the emperor, used to persecute the Copts using the power given to him. These elements created a kind of revolution within the souls of the Copts against the rulers.

3. Some scholars accused St. Dioscorus of violence, looking upon his exile as a penalty for his violence. There is a new trend amongst scholars that attributes violence to all Alexandrian Fathers, such as SS. Athanasius and Cyril, looking to their spiritual struggle for keeping fast the true faith of the Church as a kind of violence.

Now, I do not ignore the efforts which the Church in the East and West offered for the cause of unity, especially when many of the theologians acknowledge our true belief concerning Christology. I have already written about this matter<sup>2</sup>. Here I present in brief the theological point of view to clarify the Coptic Church's opinion in the Council of Chalcedon.

### **THE ALEXANDRIAN AND ANTIOCHENE CHRISTOLOGICAL THOUGHTS<sup>3</sup>**

Many scholars attribute the problem of the Christological formula concerning the nature of Christ to the controversy between the Alexandrian and the Antiochene theology. While the Alexandrian School adopted the "*hypostatic union*" or "*natural union*" of the Godhead and manhood to assert the oneness of Jesus Christ, the Antiochene School accepted the "*indwelling theology*," that is the Godhead dwell in Manhood, as if Jesus Christ were two persons in one, to assert that no confusion had occurred between the Godhead and manhood and to avoid attributing human weakness to His divinity. The basis of the point of view to the Alexandrian School was John 1:14 "*And the Word became flesh,*" while that of the Antiochenes was Colossians 2:9 "*For in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*"

I would like to make clear the following points:

1. There was a controversy between the two schools, but they agreed on many points.

2. The problem has arisen because of those who misinterpreted these Schools' concepts. Apollinarius of Laodicea, who denied that the Lord Jesus had a human soul, and Eutyches of Constantinople denied the humanity of Christ, both did wrong to the School of Alexandria. It is noteworthy that they accepted the Alexandrian formula concerning the one nature of Christ (*mia-physis*), they were not Alexandrians, nor had they studied the Alexandrian system of theology. On the other side Nestorius, Theodoret of Cyrus, Theodore of Mospuestia and Ibas of Edessa who insisted to divide the Lord Jesus Christ in two persons, did wrong to the School of Antioch.

3. The imperial and church politics played their role in this controversy to create a huge gap between the leaders of these schools.

## **THE ALEXANDRIAN HYPOSTATIC UNION**

St. Cyril, in his struggle against Nestorius explained the "*hypostatic union*" as a "*personal union*," "*natural union*" and "*real unification*." He conserves at least two ideas:

1. The Logos, an eternal hypostasis, united Himself to manhood, which had no existence before the incarnation and could not be separated from the Godhead. He became individuated by receiving its hypostatic status through His union with the Logos. Manhood was not an independent hypostasis apart from the Logos, but became a hypostasis through union with the Logos.



2. The union of the natures was inward and real.

St. Cyril rejected the Antiochene theory of "*indwelling*," that is the Godhead of Christ dwelt in His manhood, or the theory of "*conjunction*" or "*close participation*" as insufficient to reveal the real unification but permits the division of the natures of Christ as Nestorius taught<sup>4</sup>.

### **MIA-PHYSIS OR ONE INCARNATE NATURE<sup>5</sup>**

Sellers states that the majority of bishops who attended the Council of Chalcedon believed that the traditional formula received by St. Athanasius was the "*one incarnate nature of the Word of God*." This formula differs from that of Eutyches concerning the "one nature."

I have already clarified the meaning of the one nature (of Alexandria) as "*mia-physis*," through the writings of St. Cyril and the non- Chalcedonian Fathers, such as SS. Dioscorus, Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus: We can summarize the meaning in the following points:

1. We mean by "*mia*" one, but not "*single one*" or "*simple one*," but unity, one "*out of two natures*" as St. Dioscorus states.

2. St. Cyril insisted on "the one nature" of Christ to assert Christ's oneness, as a tool to defend Church's faith against Nestorianism.

3. According to the Nestorians "one nature" of Christ means only one of two probabilities: the natures had been absorbed or a confusion between the divine and human nature happened to produce one confused nature. St. Cyril confirmed that no confusion or absorption had occurred but a real unity.

4. Jesus Christ is, at once, consubstantial with God the Father and consubstantial with us, men.

5. He is at once God and man (*Incarinate God*).

6. St. Severus states that in the incarnation "the divine nature of the Word was not changed into what it was not," but He remained what He was.

7. The Word became truly man.

8. Jesus' manhood was perfect, He had a body and also a soul.

9. Manhood of Christ was not formed before the incarnation, i.e. the manhood did not exist then the Godhead dwelt in it afterwards.

Some scholars tried to attribute the Alexandrian theological system to the Egyptian attitude of asceticism, saying that Copts concentrated on the "deification" or "divination" of believers, ignoring the body. I have discussed this wrong idea before<sup>6</sup>.

### **THE ANTIOCHENE "*DYO PHYSEIS*" (TWO NATURES)<sup>7</sup>**

To understand the Antiochene formula: "*two natures after the union*" we must know its position in the "one nature-two nature dispute":

1. The Arians could not accept the Godhead of Christ because it made of Him two persons: God and man.

2. St. Athanasius confirmed the unity of Godhead and manhood, repeating the church's belief in one person; and "Christ's body" was His own body and not a strange element (of Christ). Thus Jesus Christ is one Person and not two, had one nature without rejecting the dynamic presence of His Godhead and manhood.

3. Apollinarius of Laodicea used the Alexandrian formula "one nature" in his own theological system. In his eagerness to defend the church's faith against the Arianism he believed that the Logos was united with a mere human body and that the Logos replaced the soul that was united to the body received from the Virgin Mary. In other words to realize the hypostatic union he believed that the manhood of Christ is incomplete (body without soul).

4. The Antiochene leaders treated the "*hypostatic union*" of Cyril with suspicion as if it were Apollinarian. They adopted the theory of the "*indwelling*" of the Logos in the manhood, to assert Christ's manhood and to confirm Him as a real and perfect man. Nestorius declared this theory when he refused to call St. Mary "Theotokos" and rejected the Alexandrian statement: "the Son of God died." In fact the Antiochenes desired to assert three facts in the incarnation:

- a. The manhood of Christ was real and perfect.
- b. There was no confusion between the natures of Christ.
- c. The Godhead is impassable, God did not suffer, nor did He die.

But at the same time they speak of Christ as two persons, two sons [Son of God and Son of Man].

The "*Dualism*" of the Person of Christ is very clear in the statements of the Antiochene leaders, but as they used to

deny it to defend themselves, some modern scholars state that they did not intend to dualism, but rejected it, as well as Nestorius himself.

Today some scholars wonder whether Nestorius himself was truly a Nestorian, but the majority of scholars still believe that the Antiochene Christology divides the natures of Christ.

---

1. *Dr. Tager: Copts & Moslems (in Arabic, ch. 1).*

2. *For more details see:*

*\*Christology according to the Non-Chalcedonian Churches, 1986.*

*\*The Term Physis & Hypostasis in the Early Church, 1986.*

*\*The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition & Theology, 1986, ch. 14.*

3. *See: The Terms Physis & Hypostasis... p. 10f.*

4. *Ibid 11,12.*

5. *Ibid 12-19.*

6. *Ibid 19f.*

7. *Ibid 25f.*

## ***EVENTS PRECEDENT TO THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON<sup>1</sup>***

---

### **DISPUTE OVER THE PERSON OF CHRIST REOPENED**

In the third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in the year 341 A.D, Nestorius was deposed from his See and excommunicated, his doctrines were condemned, the creed of Nicea reaffirmed, and formal approval was given to the title "Theotokos." The Antiochene side attacked these decisions. On the arrival of John of Antioch, joined by Theodoret of Cyrus and other bishops, a rival meeting was held at which St. Cyril and Memnon of Ephesus were excommunicated and deposed as guilty of violence and heresy... Every Party had its supporters in the court, and the Emperor, more or less uncertain, did not know which side to support. St. Cyril was put into jail for two months and was then permitted to return to his see, but Nestorius was exiled into Egypt where he died in Upper Egypt. A reconciliation between John and Cyril was finally effected in A.D 433. John sent Paul of Emesa to Alexandria with credentials for Cyril and a profession of faith that was to serve as the basis of an agreement. St. Cyril accepted it and sent back to Antioch his famous letter "*Laetentur caeli*" i.e., the "Formulary of reunion." The problem was externally solved, but the "Reunion" itself was being taken in a different way by the Alexandrian and the Antiochene sides. St. Cyril accepted it just as to lead the Antiochenes to accept the Council of Ephesus (431) unconditionally. The Antiochenes also were not satisfied by

the reunion, and they were angry for the exile of Nestorius. Neither of the great parties was as a whole content with the term of the Union Symbol. Now, the circumstances had been changed and the controversy returned in a more severe form which created a bitter schism in the Church, through the Council of Chalcedon in A.D 451. We can summarize the events in the following:

At Edessa, in A. D 435 a newly elected bishop Ibas turned out to be a zealous disciple of Theodore of Mospuestia (an Antiochene leader), and the dogmatic controversy now began to concentrate on Theodore's writings. John of Antioch was replaced in A. D 443 by his nephew Domnus, who had a weak and unstable character, a man only capable of sensible decisions when he had Theodoret of Cyrus at hand to advise him. In the year 444 St. Cyril died and was succeeded by Dioscorus. At Constantinople Proclus was succeeded (A. D 446) by Flavian. He seemed to believe in "one incarnate nature of the Word of God out of the two," but Theodoret of Cyrus changed his mind.

According to church tradition St. Dioscorus sent letters to his brothers the bishops. Theodoret of Cyrus replied with a kind letter, wherein he praised his modesty and decency. Theodoret declared his enmity to St. Dioscorus, for the latter sent a letter to Domnus of Antioch, blaming him kindly and openly for his encouragement to Theodoret to preach the people with the Nestorian dualism of the Person of Christ, despising the Council of Ephesus and declaring that Nestorius was not a heretic. Domnus sent a kind reply

to St. Dioscorus, telling him that he enjoyed his letter because of his love and openness

### **ST. DIOSCORUS AND EUTYCHES**

Eutyches (c.378-454) was an Archmandrite of a monastery at Constantinople. He was an old ascetic, endowed with eloquence but he was not a true theologian. Eutyches had widespread fame throughout the see of Constantinople, within the monastic circles, the imperial court and among the people. As a friend of St. Cyril, he received from him a copy of the decisions of the Council of Ephesus in A.D 431. He accepted the Alexandrian Christological formula "one incarnate nature of the Word of God..." In his eager opposition to Nestorianism, he defended the formula "one nature" against that of the "two natures," but without sound theological basis, as he inferred that the Godhead absorbed the manhood of Christ.

Until today scholars cannot understand the character of Eutyches and his theology, for he sometimes used orthodox statements, against his main ideas. Perhaps because he was shaky in the theological knowledge, or because he was a deceiver, or even because he was cautious not to lose his fame or his position and priesthood.

A struggle occurred between Eutyches and Theodoret, the latter accused St. Cyril of Apollinarianism, and published a long attack against St. Cyril and Eutyches. Eusebius of Dorylaeum tried to agitate Flavian of Constantinople to condemn Eutyches. The Patriarch Flavian asked Eusebius to treat this matter with wisdom but the latter insisted on the condemnation of Eutyches before a council. The Council of Constantinople was held in A.D 448, but Eutyches refused to appear before the council till the seventh session. He denied

ever having said that Jesus' flesh came from heaven. He repeated that Christ took flesh of the Virgin Mary, and added that it was a complete incarnation, but he refused to conclude that His flesh was consubstantial with us.

Eusebius insisted on answering these two questions:

*Was Christ consubstantial with us?*

*Were there in Him two natures after the Incarnation?*

Concerning the first question he was hesitating, but he assured that the holy Fathers of the Church spoke of the "one nature."

Many scholars<sup>2</sup> state that according to this council discussions, Eutyches was not confirmed heretic, and that Eusebius did not aim at gaining Eutyches to the truth but to obliging him to accept the Nestorian dualism and that the condemnation of Eutyches by the Council was a hasty action.

## **THE SECOND COUNCIL OF EPHESUS IN A.D 449**

Eutyches condemnation caused many troubles in Constantinople. His supporters accused Flavian and his supporters of Nestorianism. Flavian had to excommunicate some monastery leaders somewhat violently. Eutyches appealed to Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Thessalonica, and through his friend Chrysophius, the chief Chamberlain, he lodged a complaint to the emperor saying that those who judged him desired to accept the Nestorian dualism, and that the minutes of the Council had been falsified.

Leo of Rome wrote to Eutyches, praising his zeal in opposing the Nestorian dualism, and at the same time wrote to Flavian to be kind to Eutyches<sup>3</sup>. But he changed his mind perhaps when he heard that the emperor wrote to St.



Dioscorus, Pope of Alexandria, summoning him to a council to be held to discuss this matter. Leo, who had no real knowledge of the nature of the conflict between the Alexandrian and Antiochine Christology sent his tome (letter) to Constantinople on 13 June 449, not to work for the reconciliation of the parties but to deform the Alexandrian theologians. Tixeront's comment on this tome was : [This letter has always been regarded as a dogmatic document of exceptional value. Yet, it is decidedly inferior, in theological inspiration, to the work of Cyril, and strictly so-called speculation hardly finds any place in it at all. St. Leo does not discuss or demonstrate; he judges and settles difficulties<sup>4</sup>].

Leo was occupied with "*papacy*" more than the dogma of the Church as we will see through the current events of the fifth century. J.W.C. Wand states: [Leo was one of the greatest of all ecclesiastical statesmen, and has been called the Father of Papacy<sup>5</sup>.]

This attitude was clear, as he wrote back to the emperor that there was no need for a council, but that he was nominating Julius of Puteoli, presbyter Renatus and deacon Hilary as his delegates simply to satisfy the emperor<sup>6</sup> declaring that his tome was enough to offer the needed guidance.

Emperor Theodosius II who was convinced with the necessity to hold a council, asked Dioscorus to exercise supreme authority over it as president, and asked Juvenal of Jerusalem and Thalassius of Caesarea in Capadocia to be co-presidents with him.

The decisions of the council were:

1. The Rehabilitation of Eutyches: It was not the error of St. Dioscorus that this council rehabilitated Eutyches, for these reasons:

a. Leo of Rome wrote to Pulcheria, saying that Eutyches inclined into heresy because of his ignorance, if he repents then let him be treated kindly. Leo declared the same idea in his letters to Julius of Cios (448-458) and to Flavian<sup>7</sup>.

b. Eutyches declared orthodox statements, like: [For He who is the Word of God came down from heaven without flesh and was made flesh from the very flesh of the Virgin unchangeable and inconvertible, in a way He Himself knew and willed. And He who is always perfect God before the ages was also made perfect man in the end of days for us and for our salvation.]

2. Condemnation of the Nestorian leaders: Chadwick states in his book "the Early Church" that the council went on to depose the leading Nestorians, such as Ibas of Edessa, Daniel of Charrae, Irenaeus of Tyre, Theodoret of Cyrus, Domnus of Antioch and Flavian of Constantinople. The minutes of this council in Syriac revealed their Nestorian dualism attitude.

Many Chalcedonians state that the schism which occurred through the council of Chalcedon was a reaction of what happened in the Second Council of Ephesus; first because Dioscorus omitted the Tome of Leo, and second because he was violent. But we shall argue these two charges.

## **THE OMISSION OF THE TOME OF LEO**

The Roman bishop considered this omission as a despise for his Petrine authority, describing the council as "the

Robbers' Council," a title which is still used by many westerns!

It is noteworthy that this "Tome" was not written as a document to the council, but as a letter to the emperor and a copy had been sent to the council and handed to the delegates. This document had been given wide publicity in the East, even before the council was held. The bishops - and not Dioscorus alone - did not read it out of respect for the See of Rome. This Tome was read by Nestorius while he was in his exile and he declared his approval of it <sup>8</sup>.

The Greek Prof. Florovsky says: [The tome of Leo, if taken alone by itself, could have created the impression of an excessive opposition of two natures especially by its persistent attribution of particular acts of Christ to different natures, without any adequate emphasis on the unity of Christ's Person, although the intention of the Pope himself was sound and orthodox. However the interpreters of the Tome by the Roman Catholic historians and theologians in modern times quite often transfer a certain quasi Nestorian bias, to which attention has been called recently by some Roman Catholic writers themselves<sup>9</sup>.]

### **WAS ST. DIOSCORUS VIOLENT?<sup>10</sup>**

1. The Council was not held on the demand of Pope Dioscorus, and there were no previous letters between the Alexandrian Pope and the emperors. This means that St. Dioscorus demanded no personal benefit.

2. The imperial letters did not describe St. Dioscorus with titles more honorable than others. This means that there was no previous agreement between the emperor and St. Dioscorus.

3. The imperial letters revealed the increased theological troubles that spread in the See of Constantinople.

4. Decisions were accepted through voting, and we do not hear that one of the bishops who were present resented or withdrew from the Council, except Flavian and Eusebius on giving a statement against them.

5. In the opening word which Juvenal of Jerusalem addressed, he described Leo of Rome as a "saint" and "lover of God." These titles revealed the council's spirit.

6. When Leo of Rome asked the emperor of the West, Valentinus, his mother and his sister Pulcheria to intercede before Theodosius II, to summon another council, the latter sent them a letter praising the Council of Ephesus, starting that it was controlled by the fear of God.

7. In the imperial message at the opening of the Council, the emperor revealed the violence of Theodoret of Cyrus.

8. In fact, until the last moment of this council, St. Dioscorus did not speak an evil word against Rome, while Leo in his epistles referred to our Pope as "that Egyptian plunderer," and "preacher of the devil's errors," who tried to force his "villainous blasphemies" on his brethren.

---

1. *The Coptic Church.. as a Church of Erudition & Theology*, p.100-1; 115.

2. Kelly: *Early Christian Doctrines*, 1978, p. 333; Jobland: *The Life and Time of St. Leo the Great*, p.216.

3. Gregorius B. Behnam: *Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria, Defender of the Faith*, Cairo 1968 (in Arabic), p. 93.

4. *History of Dogmas* vol. 3, p. 81.

5. *A History of the Early Church to A.D. 500*, 1965, p. 237.

6. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum (ACO)*, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1933, II, i, p. 45:10.

7. *Mgr. Hejela: Histoire de Conciles, Paris 1969, t2, p. 555-8.*
8. *Henry Chadwick: The Early Church, 1974, p.202 [See Methodios Fouyes, Archbishop of Theateria..., Theological and Hist. Studies, v .8, Athens 1985, p.15].*
9. *Methodios Fouyes, p.12,13.*
10. *The Coptic Church ... as a Church of Erudition & Theology, p.122.*



***THE MINUTES OF  
THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON  
LEO OF ROME AND THE COUNCIL  
OF CHALCEDON***

---

The delegates of Rome returned to their bishop declaring their failure to protect Flavian and his company. Leo wrote to Theodosius II against St. Dioscorus, and the Church of Constantinople and lastly asked Valentinian III, through his wife Eudoxia and his mother Galla Placidia, to write to his brother Theodosius concerning Dioscorus and the council of Ephesus of 449, but Theodosius refused his demand praising St. Dioscorus and the council of Ephesus.

Leo realized his aim with the help of the following events:

1. Leo received appeals from those who opposed the council of Ephesus (449), to attack the Alexandrian theology, calling the Second Council of Ephesus: "The Robbers' Synod."

2. The death of Flavian was an event which elicited sympathy for the cause of Leo, particularly in Constantinople. This incident came to be interpreted in later times by the opponents of the council of 449 as having been caused by physical injuries inflicted on Flavian at the council.

3. On July 28, 450 Theodosius died and his sister Pulcheria and her consort Marcian were declared emperors on 28 August 450. Pulcheria denied her vow as a virgin. She was a woman of remarkable ability and indomitable will. She

removed Chrysophius - the grand Chamberlain - from her way by a sentence of death, and banished Eutyches to Doliche in north Syria. Now, she supported "Rome" against "Alexandria." She and her husband gathered signatures on the "*Tome*" of Leo, to be introduced as a basic paper at Chalcedon against Alexandrian theologians. At the same time she decided not to let Rome enjoy supreme authority in the Church; she refused Leo's demand to hold a council in Italy, but insisted that it would be held in the East. When she saw that matters were turning out well and that it was impossible to hold the desired council in Italy, he expressed a wish that no council be held at all, but Marcian and Pulcheria were bent on having one.

Leo sent a letter to declare that he would send delegates to the council. For the first time Leo describes Eutyches as being malicious and wicked like Nestorius. This sudden change means nothing but that a conspiracy was hatched against St. Dioscorus.

Although the Council of Chalcedon is believed to have condemned Eutyches, the man whom it really dealt with was not the old monk, but Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria, for Eutyches was not present at the council but he was away in north Syria, where he had been exiled even before the council was held.

In fact, St. Dioscorus was condemned not because of theological heresy but due to political circumstances which played the principal role in this council. Some of the leaders of this council, such as Anatolius of Constantinople considered him quite Orthodox. Many of the scholars confirm his orthodoxy<sup>1</sup>.

## **SESSION 1 (8TH OF OCTOBER 451)**

When the judges started to declare the order of the acts of the council, Paschasinus said, "We have orders from the most blessed and apostolic man, the bishop of the city of Rome, who is the head of all churches, enjoining that Dioscorus should not have a place in the synod. If this is violated, he should be cast out. We are obliged to obey this injunction. Your excellency may order, therefore, that either he goes out or we depart<sup>2</sup>". When the judges asked if what Dioscorus had done was against the laws, the other Roman delegate replied: "He had seized the office of judge, and dared to conduct a council, without the authorization of the apostolic See, a thing which has never happened and which ought not to have happened<sup>3</sup>."

Now I will discuss all the charges which were brought against our Pope.

### **1. HIS PRESIDENCY OVER THE EPHESIAN COUNCIL**

It is clear that it was not in fact a charge against Dioscorus but it was an attempt to give the Roman bishop a supreme authority over the Universal Church. It was not Dioscorus who had summoned the Ephesian Council but the emperors, and their letter still survives. It is astonishing that Leo protested against the Ephesian Council as being illegal because he had not given permission for it, while we find him sending his delegates to the council, and they were angry as Leo's Tome was not read. It was not Dioscorus alone who was president of the council, but there were two co-presidents (Juvenal and Thalassius) attending according to an imperial order.



## **2. THE STORY OF THE BLANK PAPERS**

Stephen of Ephesus said that they were forced to sign blank papers, through violence. This story was fabricated for many reasons:

a- Eusebius of Dorylaeum who was present at Ephesian Council did not mention the story of the blank papers in his petitions to the emperor.

b- If this story was true why did they wait for over two years to hear it for the first time on October A.D. 451 from the men who had signed the tome of Leo and agreed to support it?!

c- When St. Dioscorus asked them about the recording of the acts of the Ephesian Council, they confessed that every bishop was accompanied by a clerk and there were many copies of the acts recorded by the clerks of Juvenal, Thalassius, Elesuis of Coronth etc. How then had they signed blank papers?!

d- When the bishops were asked about the excommunication of Flavian they did not say that they had signed blank papers, but said twice: "We all have sinned, we ask for pardon."

e- Throughout the acts of the Chalcedonian Council, the bishops' discussions reveal that this story was fabricated, as everyone told a different story.

f- St. Dioscorus openly blamed the bishops who said that they had signed blank papers because it is the bishop's duty to be brave especially when he signs what concerns the precious Faith<sup>4</sup>.

### 3. THE REHABILITATION OF EUTYCHES

When they discussed the words of Eutyches, his accuser said that Eutyches was a liar. St. Dioscorus explained that his concern is not persons but the apostolic faith.

### 4. THE CONDEMNATION OF FLAVIAN AND EUSEBIUS

The commissioners asked how Eutyches who had not accepted the Formulary of Reunion of A.D. 433 was acquitted, while Flavian and Eusebius who had accepted it were excommunicated. Here the main problem was raised, when St. Dioscorus explained how St. Cyril - confirmed by St. Athanasius - refused the formula "two natures after the union" as unlawful, but used "one incarnate nature of God the Word". On hearing "one nature," some bishops shouted, [Eutyches says these things! Dioscorus says these things!] Here St. Dioscorus clarified the Alexandrian point of view, saying: [We do not speak of confusion, neither of division, nor of change. Let him who says confusion, change or mixture, be anathema<sup>5</sup>.] St. Dioscorus tried to make his position clear, that he did not accept "two natures after the union," but he had no objection to "**From** two natures after the union."

The verdict of the Commissioners was announced:

Dioscorus of Alexandria, Juvenal of Jerusalem, Thalassius of Caesarea in Copadocia, Eusebius of Ancyra, Eustathius of Berytus and Basil of Seleucia in Insuria - these were the men who had been really responsible for the decisions of the second council of Ephesus, and should as such all be deposed.

At the close of the first session - and contrary to what Pope (Leo) had planned should be the main business of the

council - the commissioners decided that a discussion on the question of the true faith should take place at the following meeting, and that every delegate should produce in writing a statement of the faith, bearing in mind that the emperor believed in accordance with the decrees of Nicea and Constantinople, together with the writings of the holy Fathers, Gregory, Basil, Hilary, Ambrose and the two letters of Cyril which had been approved at the first council of Ephesus, besides the tome of Leo.

V. C. Samuel notices here that they refer to the two canonical letters of Cyril, i.e. the Second and Third letters addressed to Nestorius, but in fact the last one with its anathemas was not read at Chalcedon.

### **THE SECOND SESSION (ON 10TH OCTOBER)**

This session did not produce better results, despite the absence of the heads of Ephesian Council whose deposition was announced the day before. The assembly most strongly protested against the suggestion that they should dare to draw up "*another exposition of the faith in addition to what had been taught by the Fathers and set down in writing*<sup>6</sup>". Although many bishops signed the tome of Leo before holding the council, when it was read at this session there were men who raised objections to three passages in the Tome (especially the bishops of Illyricum and Palestine). Atticus of Nicopolis asked for a time to compare it with the third letter of St. Cyril to Nestorius.

The Illyrians pleaded that mercy should be shown to the heads of the Ephesian Council, but no attention was paid to them.

At the close of the session the commissioners declared that the following session would be held after five days in order that those who had doubts about the tome may meet with Anatolius of Constantinople and clear their misgivings<sup>7</sup>.

### **THE THIRD SESSION (ON 13TH OF OCTOBER)**

Suddenly the five-days recess was not respected, but on the 13th October the council met under the presidency of the Roman legate Paschasinus, and it was attended neither by the commissioners nor the six condemned men. Rev. V.C. Samuel states that the minutes contain no mention of the number of bishops who attended this meeting, which does not even deserve to be counted as a session, but it is clear that their number was small, and that it was held in the martyrion of St. Euphemia<sup>8</sup> (a small chapel) instead of the Church of Euphemia.

As they desired to realize the formalities so that their statement would be canonical, they summoned Pope Dioscorus who told them that he was in custody, thus he could not accompany them to the meeting unless he was given permission by the authorities, and he put conditions for his attendance: The presence of the commissioners and those who were condemned with him. In his absence, it was not difficult to incite persons to accuse him of many charges for example that his life was desolate, there was such disaffection against him in Alexandria, he prevented sending corn to Libya etc. These charges were false, for history itself witnesses how he was most warmly loved and honored by a vast majority of the people of Egypt. Even his adversaries didn't accuse him of any wrong conduct in his personal life. As for the story of the corn, it was a way to turn the emperor against him. They also accused him of excommunicating Leo.

It is worthy to note that the word of the Roman legates at the end of the session declared that his disposal had been issued by Leo, and the assembly merely had to approve the decision... In fact it was not a statement for theological dogma but for defending the Roman Papal supremacy. The Contemporaries were confused in giving reasons for his deposal, but the majority did not attribute heresy to him, nor was he excommunicated.

### **THE FOURTH SESSION (17TH OF OCTOBER)**

A new formula of faith concerning the nature of Christ was not discussed except after the deposal of St. Dioscorus. Even while Aloys Grillmeier states: [It was only under constant pressure from the emperor Marcian that the Fathers of Chalcedon agreed to draw up a new formula of belief. Even at the fourth session of the council, on October 17th 451, the delegates of the emperor heard the synod once again endorse its purpose to create no new formula over and above the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople<sup>9</sup>]. Tixeront also states: [Most of the Fathers were opposed to a new form of faith, but wished merely to approve certain documents, the contents of which would express their own belief<sup>10</sup>].

It was the emperor's favor that the council had to draw out Alexandria and declare a new formula to bring the entire church in the east under the leadership of Constantinople. Emperors - for political reasons - wished to bring down Alexandria from the hegemony which it enjoyed in the east and to set up Constantinople in its place. They used Leo as a tool to realize their desire exploring his enmity to Alexandria, that seemed to him an obstacle in spreading his papal supreme authority over the church world-wide.

## EVENTS OF THE 22ND OF OCTOBER

The eastern bishop came to the meeting with a draft statement of the formula to be adopted by the Council. According to Tixeront [its text is lost. All we know for certain is that it asserted that Jesus Christ is "of" two natures "*ek dus phuson*" on script. The expression was accurate, but ambiguous, and in a particular way, unsatisfactory, since Dioscorus himself had declared that he held it. However, the formula was accepted by most of the members of the council, except the papal legates and some Orientals (who held Nestorian attitudes)<sup>11</sup>].

This comment explains how the majority of the bishops were holding fast the Alexandrian formula of faith, and it is important to study why this draft had been lost.

Under the threat of the Roman legates the commissioners asked a new statement, but the bishop insisted that this was the definition of the Orthodox<sup>12</sup>. Kelly states [Only by dint of consummate skill and diplomacy was the assembly induced to accept the necessary amendments<sup>13</sup>].

The diplomacy that the commissioners used appears from what Hefele<sup>14</sup> states, that the minutes here seem incomplete; perhaps they refer to Leo's formula not as contrary to the faith of the church but as a defense for it against Eutychianism.

---

1. *The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition*, p. 129- 130.

2. *ACO II*, i, p. 65:5.

3. *Ibid* 65:9; *Mansi VI* & 581; *Benham* p. 134.

4. *Benham*, p.140-2.

5. *ACO II*, i, p. 112-263; *Mansi VI*, 676f.

6. *Sellers: The Council Of Chalcedon*, p.109, *Mansi VI*, 953.

7. *ACO II*, i, 279:31.

8. *Ibid* 199:2.

9. *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, London 1975, p.543.

10. *History of Dogmas*, vol. 3, p. 89.

11. *Ibid* [see *Mansi VII*: 105-105].

12. *ACO II*, i, p. 210:36.

13. *Early Christ, Doct.* p. 334.

14. *Early Christ. Doct.* p. 345.

## ***COULD THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON REALIZE A RECONCILIATION ?***

---

I do not wish to present detailed theological discussions, for I have presented them in brief, in the book: "*The Terms Physis and Hypostasis in the Early Church.*" I only want to clarify that some scholars who feel that the majority of bishops of the Chalcedonian Council preferred the Alexandrian formula: "*one nature of the Incarnation Word of God*" or "*one nature of two Natures.*" The Roman legates practiced pressure on the commissioners to offer a new formula: "*in two natures (en dus fuzzes)*", instead of "*ek dus phuson*" (*of two natures*), those scholars try to give a justification to the Council, that it did not reject the Alexandrian formula nor did it consider it heretical, but insufficient, therefore the new formula was issued just to clarify the old one.

We reject the Chalcedonian formula for the following reasons:

1. The formula: "one nature" has an evangelic base, and touches our salvation. H. H. Pope Shenouda III clarifies this argument in detail in his book "The Nature of Christ," of which I wrote a summary as mentioned in this book.

2. Some Chalcedonian Fathers and theologians stated that the Tome of Leo represents an insurmountable obstacle in the efforts made to unite with the non-Chalcedonians, for the

latter believe that two "physeis and ousia" in one person is Nestorianizing. This is supported by the fact that Leo's Tome was praised by Nestorius himself<sup>1</sup>, and that the Tome, if taken alone by itself could have created the impression of an excessive opposition of two natures, as Prof. Rev. Florovsky says<sup>2</sup>.

3. Kelly states that, unlike, their brethren in the East, the Westerns were concerned with the organization of ecclesiastical matters more than theological ones. He also states that with the exception of Tertullian, the west made little or no contribution to christological theology<sup>3</sup>.

4. We are in accord with the Tome in refuting Eutychianism and in confirming that Christ's manhood was real, Christ entered the mundane plane of existence and that the unity of Godhead and manhood had been realized without change... but the Tome consists of three statements, those which some of the Fathers of Chalcedon themselves rejected for their Nestorian attitude<sup>4</sup>.

5. Leo speaks of "*one person (prosopon)*" of Christ but this term does not suffice, for the Nestorians used it to mean "mask," i.e. external unity. There was a need to confirm the unity as a true and "hypostatic" one...

6. The Council of Chalcedon adopted the Tome of Leo. In Egypt many believers were martyred for they refused to sign the Tome... The acceptance of the Tome as a principal document of faith disfigured the Council in the sight of the non-Chalcedonians.

7. The "definitions" of Chalcedon admits the phrase "*one hypostasis.*" Some of the Nestorians objected on this



addition, but they accepted it when the word "*hypostasis*" was interpreted to them as an equal to "*prosopon*"...

8. We do not recognize this Council because it ignored all the traditional formulas of the Church, which confirm the oneness of the Person of Christ, as a true unity, such as: "*one nature of two natures*" and "*one nature of the Incarnate Word of God.*"

I conclude my discussion of the Council of Chalcedon by referring to the words of Sellers who defends this council... [In the first place, it should be understood that the (Monophysite) theologians were not heretics, nor were they regarded as such by leading Chalcedonians<sup>5</sup>.]

---

1. *Methodios Fouyas*, p. 12, 13.

2. *Christology according to the non-Chalcedonian Churches*, p. 12-3.

3. *Terms: "Physis & Hypostasis in the Early Church"*, p. 30-1.

4. *Ibid* 30f.

5. *The council of Chalcedon*, SPCK 1961, p. 269.



*The term "**monophysite**" was not used during the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, but was used later in a specific way and in a polemic spirit on behalf of the Chalcedonian Churches.*



# 4

## ***THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE BYZANTINE RULE***

---

### **AN ALIEN ROYAL PATRIARCH**

#### **THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON AND LEO**

The Fathers of the Council submitted to the delegates of Rome their objective which is to get rid of the Pope of Alexandria by sending him into exile to Gangra Island. Under strong pressure, the bishops of the Council accepted a new formula of faith so that Alexandria would not acquire a theological position. Yet when the delegates attempted to impose the papal authority upon the universal church, silence turned into revolt, then canon (act) 28 was issued to which the delegates of Rome rose in objection. Because of the desire to impose the papal authority, Leo of Rome announced in his repeatedly angry letters, his resistance to the Council and attacked Anatolius of Constantinople because he thought of Rome and Constantinople as equals.

#### **THE FIRST MARTYR AFTER THE COUNCIL**

A messenger (from Constantinople) arrived at Alexandria announcing the exile of Pope Dioscorus and the appointment of an Alexandrian priest named Proterius as the

patriarch of Alexandria with the approval of the Emperor and threatening anyone who disobeys. This ( royal ) patriarch who was appointed by the emperor came surrounded by soldiers willing to punish those who might disobey the Imperial command.

The ruler of Alexandria, who was an agent of Constantinople, asked to hold individual meetings with the bishops, thinking that he could influence them separately. The first bishop he met was St. Macarius of Edko who wanted to stay with the Pope in exile, but the Pope forced him to return, telling him that the crown of martyrdom was waiting for him. Indeed, when the bishop refused to submit to the ruler's orders a soldier killed him with a fatal stab, and Macarius was the first martyr of the Coptic church, martyred by Christian hands. This was an example how the Egyptian bishops, priests, abbots, monks and many laymen suffered oppression by the hands of their brethren the Chalcedonians.

### **THE SUCCESSORS OF ST. DIOSCORUS**

In the year A.D 450 and in the absence of the ruler of Alexandria, when the Copts heard that their pope had been departed to the Lord while he was in exile, the people met with the clergymen and had his disciple Timothy ordained patriarch. He was a monk from the monastery of Qalamon who had been ordained a priest in Alexandria by Pope Cyril the Great. Timothy was an ascetic zealous man, known for his theological knowledge. When Prof. Meyendorff wrote about him, and about Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus of Mabbogh he said that the non-Chalcedonians had at that time strong theologians contrary to the Chalcedonians<sup>1</sup>. When the ruler returned to Alexandria he considered their behavior as a rebellion against Byzantium (Constantinople). Therefore he took the side of Proterius the alien, keenly persecuting the

Egyptians. In spite of severe violence he only won to his side four bishops who followed the alien Patriarch. When Pope Timothy left Alexandria on a pastoral trip, Count Dionysius arrived at Alexandria to commit atrocities against the Egyptian church causing it to be wounded by Christian hands. Prof. Meyendorff says: [Emperors tried to solve the dispute by force . For us, today, there is no doubt about the fact that the military repression of monophysitism in Egypt, and in other places, the imposition of a Chalcedonian hierarchy in Byzantine (politics), the frequent exile of the real popular leaders of the Church of Egypt, all played a decisive role in giving the schism the character of a national resistance to Byzantine ecclesiastical and political control of Egypt, Syria and Armenia<sup>2</sup>.]

Upon the return of the Pope, the Count closed the gates of the city to prevent him from entering it. The people assembled and nothing could control their feelings. They had a clash with the army and fought a battle in which there were many casualties. A crowd of people entered the church and killed Proterius the alien and burned his corpse in the street.

Pope Timothy and his brother were exiled to Gangra, from where the Pope was careful to send letters of faith to his people. He explained in these letters the faith of the church cautioning the people from the Eutychian thought, giving reference to the writings of St. Dioscorus. The people of Gangra island loved him and called him "the miracle-performer" and "the charitable<sup>3</sup>."

The ruler then appointed "Salophaciolus" as patriarch, the people boycotted him for seven years. In the year A.D 474, Marcian the emperor died and was succeeded by Basiliscus. His physician who was from Alexandria inter-

ceded to the emperor to set the pope free. The pope then left his exile and went to Constantinople to thank the emperor. There he was welcomed by both the Church and state. He requested from the emperor the return of the exiled bishops. He called for a council that was attended by 500 bishops. In the council he confirmed the anathema against the Eutychian heresy and the rejection of the Tome of Leo. Reconciliation among the churches of Jerusalem, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria was established and lasted for a number of years. He also returned the relics of St. Dioscorus to Alexandria.

The alien patriarch calmly left his see and the pope lovingly gathered the bishops who yielded to the alien after they had proclaimed their rejection of Leo's Tome and of the Council of Chalcedon and acknowledged the Orthodox faith.

### **UNSTABLE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEE OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE SEE OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

The relations between the popes of Alexandria and the Patriarchs of Constantinople were changing according to the political situations and the attitudes of both the emperor and the patriarchs of Constantinople.

As an example, when Zeno took the throne of Constantinople by force he sent Pope Peter III (the 27th pope) to exile. The pope disappeared in one of the districts for five years and the people boycotted the alien patriarch Gregory who was appointed by the ruler. After a period of time the Copts decided to face the emperor, so they chose a delegation headed by John Talaia. This delegation went to see Zeno and claimed the people's right to choose their pastor. Zeno hesitated because he thought that John had

hopes to accession to take the See of St. Mark. John made an oath that he would not accept the See even if he was elected by all the people. Zeno assured them that he would respond to their request.

In the year A.D 482 Gregory died and John forgot his oath. He was able to undertake this position through his connections with the ruler. He sent two messages to the bishops of Rome and Constantinople. According to God's disposal, John's delegate went to see Apollos, a man of authority in the court, but he was absent. John's message arrived too late into the hands of Acacias of Constantinople who considered that lateness as an act of disdain, preferring the bishop of Rome over him. He advised Zeno to return to the Egyptians Peter III their legal pope. The bishop of Rome sent a message to each of Acacias and Zeno announcing his pleasure at the accession of John Talaia to the See of Alexandria, but Zeno replied that this person was not worthy of that high honor because he had broken his oath<sup>4</sup>. Indeed Pope Peter III returned to his See and exchanged fourteen messages with Patriarch Acacias who announced that he had renounced the acknowledgment of the Council of Chalcedon and requested reciprocal fellowship between Alexandria and Constantinople. Those messages are still preserved. They resulted in a delegation from Alexandria applying to attend a council in Constantinople, and the appearance of Zeno's proclamation called "Henoticon."

### **THE HENOTICON**

On the 28th of July A.D 482, Zeno issued the "Henoticon," presenting a description of the religious situation in the East. It was a realistic report stating the condition of the church following the Council of Chalcedon. It said: [For it happened that throughout the previous

decades (years), time has witnessed generations pass away, some deprived of the baptismal renovation, others without participation in the divine communion to the point of departure, and tens of thousands of death have been recklessly inflicted to the extent that not only the earth, but the atmosphere has been polluted. Who would not pray that such things may be substituted for better ones?<sup>5</sup>].

Emperor Zeno, who began his royal rule by canceling the resolution of Emperor Basiliscus and sending the non-Chalcedonian bishops to exile, came to understand how the church in the East suffered bitterly from the persecution of the royal court. We do not forget that Zeno, later became amicable to the church of Alexandria, in particular to the monks of this church especially after his daughter Hilaria (Hillary) disguised in a monk's uniform and led an ascetic life. Nobody knew anything about her until she had healed her only sister from sickness. The Emperor then, gave generously to the monasteries in Egypt.

In that proclamation Zeno ignored the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. In the meantime he took the positive side to confirm the unity of the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ without reference to any particular text. The "Henoticon" contained:

1. The Nicene Creed is the only creed approved by the 150 Fathers of Constantinople and by the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus; aiming to taking the church back to pre-Chalcedonian theology<sup>6</sup>.

2. Both Nestorius and Eutyches are anathematized and the twelve articles (anathemas) by St. Cyril were accepted.

3. He positively confirmed : [We confess that the Only Son of God, God Himself, who really became incarnate as our Lord Jesus Christ; He who is consubstantial with us as to the manhood; He who came down and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and of Mary the Virgin "Theotokos;" He is one Son and not two. For we affirm the Only Son of God both the miracles-Worker and the suffering which He endured voluntarily in the flesh. We do not at all accept those who make a separation, or introduce in confusion or fantasy. Since the true and sinless incarnation did not introduce any addition to the Son, the Trinity continued to be Trinity even when God the Word, one of the Trinity, became incarnate<sup>7</sup>.]

4. After the "Henoticon" had called for the reform of the church, an anathema was imposed on [all who have held or now hold or at any time, whether in Chalcedon or in any other synod, whatsoever, any different belief], and in particular Nestorius and Eutyches and their followers.

The Pope of Alexandria signed that proclamation explaining to the clergymen and the people in Alexandria the theological concept it bears. Some people had requested that the Henoticon should be clear with regards to the anathema against the Tome of Leo and the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon and assuring the one nature of Jesus Christ.

In fact the Henoticon did not return to the persecuted non- Chalcedonians their rights. It only allowed them the freedom of practicing their spiritual and ecclesiastical activities without being obliged to accept the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon. Therefore they welcomed it, not for the theology it bears, but because it gave them the



freedom to work regardless of the clear tendency it bears towards the thought of those who believed in one nature.

This Henoticon gave an opportunity for the four main Sees of the East to unite. The See of the west in Rome didn't occupy itself with that matter. The delegates of Rome expressed their line of thought in the meeting of the Council of Chalcedon held on the 22nd of October A.D 451, saying that the East should accept Rome's point of view or else withdraw, leaving Rome on her own. The Fathers of the Council didn't stand passively, but expressed their discontent.

On the 28th of July 484, Felix III of Rome called a synod of 27 bishops and excommunicated Pope Peter of Alexandria and Patriarch Acacias, yet they didn't give the matter any attention.

In spite of the death of Acacias in 489, Pope Peter III in 490 and Zeno in 491, Emperor Anastasius I (A.D 491-518) held to the Henoticon. The Patriarchs of Constantinople had to sign it when they were being ordained. This continued until the death of the emperor in 518. In that period St. Severus of Antioch (512-518) appeared as one of the most famous theologians on the subject of the one nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church of Alexandria lived in peace together with the other Sees in the East, and had a loving relationship with Emperor Anastasius. This lasted until the enthronement of Justinian when the troubles newly began..

---

1. *Christ in the Eastern thought.*

2. *See: Christology according to the Non-Chalcedon, p. 2,3.*

3. *Mar Sawirus Yacoub Toma: Hist. of the Syrian Antioch Church, vol. 2, p. 218.*

4. *Archmandrite V. Guettee Hist. de L'Eglise, 1806, t.5, p. 44-5.*

5. *C.V. Samuel: Council of Chalcedon Re-examined, Madras 1977, p.108-9.*

6. *Atiya: Hist. of Eastern Christianity, p. 72.*

7. *V.C. Samuel, p.109.*

## ***THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA IN THE REIGN OF JUSTINIAN I***

---

### **WITH POPE TIMOTHY III (31ST POPE)**

In the year Pope Timothy was ordained (A.D. 519), Anastasius died and Justinian became emperor. He inclined towards Chalcedonianism, yet his wife, Theodora the pious, played the role of trying to appease him at several occasions. Thus his era was characterized by periods of trouble and periods of rest.

Once, as Justinian entered the church with bishop John the Cappadocian, some Chalcedonians shouted against St. Severus of Antioch and demanded his trial, while others shouted with applause as a reaction to the former disapproval. The emperor then convened a council to settle the matter. When the Pope of Alexandria learned about the emperor's intention, he didn't go to that council. The emperor commanded that he would be put under arrest, and sent him to exile. A troop of soldiers entered the church by force while the people gathered in support of their pope. The matter developed into a battle between the armed soldiers and the unarmed congregation. The soldiers killed many of the people then arrested the pope and sent him to exile. The emperor imposed an alien patriarch named Apollinarius.

St. Severus attended the council and he was condemned to divestment and ex-communication. The emperor had insisted on cutting his tongue but he did not as a result of the

interference of Theodora. He was satisfied by dismissing him from his parish, so he took refuge in Egypt. In the council, the patriarch of Constantinople was granted the title: "the Ecumenical Patriarch," the matter that caused dispute on titles between Rome and Constantinople.

### **WITH POPE THEODOSIUS I 32ND POPE**

His era started with internal troubles. A party from Alexandria held a meeting and ordained an archdeacon called Kianus a patriarch, but Empress Theodora sent a delegation to investigate the matter. Kianus admitted his fault and the pope accepted his repentance and reinstated him to the rank of archdeacon.

The Pope returned from his exile, but he was chased from city to city and from one monastery to the other together with St. Severus of Antioch.

The Pope sent to the emperor and the empress to thank them for their attitude towards Kianus, but the emperor thought that the people's love for the Pope might constitute danger to him in the future so he planned to destroy him. He ordered him to endorse the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon, promising to appoint him a pope all over Africa. The Pope considered these promises devilish and refused to sign. The emperor then summoned him and received him with a great welcome and tempted him six times but the Pope refused. The emperor then imprisoned him in Constantinople and ordained an alien patriarch (Paul El-Tanisi) and sent him with an entourage of soldiers. The alien bishop remained for a whole year without any of the congregation to pray with him except the ruler and the soldiers. He often heard slogans like, "down with the traitor! down with Jude the alien!," so he asked the emperor to

relieve him. The Pope remained in prison for 28 years until he died in A.D 567.

## **THE SECOND COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (A.D 553)**

Emperors used to interfere in the theological discussions and resorted to violence in handling them. The Easterns, meanwhile, were concerned with the discussions because they affected their faith and life and created an atmosphere of tension that prevailed the empire. There existed three groups that could not be under-estimated:

1. The non-Chalcedonian group. Who didn't bear any authority yet they represented a theological power that could not be resisted. According to Prof. Meyendorff the Chalcedonians didn't have enough theologians capable of arguing with them. This group gained strong popularity particularly in Egypt and Syria. The people and their pastors suffered the bitterness of persecution which created tension against Byzantium and a national tendency to liberate their countries at least to be free in choosing their patriarch and bishop.

2. The Chalcedonian group who represented the authority, were supported by the royal court and the rulers.

3. A third group who wanted the church to go back to pre- Chalcedon, not to be asked to accept the Chalcedonian resolutions or to anathematize them, but just to ignore them.

Because of this tense atmosphere, emperors even those who were Chalcedonian tried to find solutions for the sake of unity of the empire and internal peace. One of these efforts was Zeno's Henoticon which Anastasius bound himself by.

Yet Justinian I thought that he was capable of bringing back the unity to the empire by condemning the "Three Chapters (*Tria Kephalaia*).\" These chapters were the writings of the semi- Nestorian authors and were included in the documents of the Council of Chalcedon [the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa.]

In A.D 553 the Council convened in Constantinople and affirmed the anathemas of the "Three Chapters". It also affirmed the emperor's anathema against the Origenists and Origen's writings.

Factors that have led to the failure of that council might be:

1. Probably both groups - Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians - felt that the emperor was double-faced, as Vasiliev notes, [Justinian's government was in its Church policy a double- faced... with one face turned to the west, asking for guidance from Rome, while the other, looking east, sought the truth from the Syrian and Egyptian monks<sup>1</sup>.]

Rev. V. C. Samuel<sup>2</sup> sees that this comment might bear some exaggeration. He was only trying to please Rome to get support for his plan of reconquering the west for the empire, and on the other hand to unite the parties in the Church without giving up Chalcedon.

2. Truly the condemnation of the "Three chapters" had given some comfort to the non-Chalcedonians, because we notice that the delegates of Rome announced the orthodoxy of Ibas' letter to Maris of Ardaschir in Persia, which was anathematized by the Council of Ephesus in 449 A.D. Now we find a council of the Chalcedonians anathematizes these writings as Nestorian. Yet most of the non-Chalcedonians

were demanding a clear text rejecting the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. In the meantime some Chalcedonians felt uneasy towards that council because although it acknowledged the Council of Chalcedon as an Ecumenical Council it attacked it by condemning the "Three Chapters" that had been already approved by the council.

3. This council did not provide comfort to the people of Alexandria while their legitimate Pope spent the greater time of his papacy in a prison in Constantinople. Even when Paul El-Tenaisy, the alien patriarch, died, another named Apollinarius was ordained by the emperor's command. This man entered Alexandria in the uniform of a military commander and gave his orders to the people to assemble in the church. He then took off the military clothes and put on the priestly clothes and read to them the imperial decree. At that time cries of protest were heard aloud as the alien patriarch ordered the soldiers to use force and many were martyred. People called that day "The Massacre"... at that time the emperor was about to depart<sup>3</sup>.

Some historians assure that Justinian acted in good faith, but what happened to the Copts stirred them up against Byzantium.

---

1. Vasiliev: *Hist. of Byzantine Empire*, p. 149.

2. V.C. Samuel: *Council of Chalcedon Re-examined*, p. 130.

3. Dr. Zaher Riad: *Church of Alexandria Africa, 1962*, p. 56 (in Arabic).

## ***THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA AFTER THE JUSTINIAN ERA***

---

Emperor Justinian died on November 14th, 565. He was succeeded in turn by Justine II (565-578), Tiberus (578-582), Maurice (582-602) and Phocas (602-610). They all followed in the line of Justinian I in supporting the alien patriarch who represented the Byzantine authority not the ecclesiastical ministry. The tension between the Egyptians and the aliens was rather slight during the days of Justine II and Tiberus, though the legitimate pope was unable to enter Alexandria. Yet no sooner was Emperor Maurice seated on the throne of Constantinople than the tension became more severe, this matter pushed the Egyptians to rebel against the emperor. Three Egyptians, Mina and his two brothers Abuskhayron and Jacob led a revolution that triumphed over the Roman forces. The emperor then asked the alien patriarch Eulogius to negotiate a reconciliation with the leaders and with a deceptive plan he could be able to arrest and behead them.

This picture shows the ecclesiastical, psychological and national situation of the Copts. They were under pressure from Byzantium as a result of interference in their faith and deposal of their legitimate popes.

Emperor Phocas was so much more oppressive than other emperors that the bishops were obliged to escape from the cities to the deserts to practice their worship and minister

by letters. In spite of that Pope Anastasius, the son of a noble family in Alexandria was ordained during his reign. The ruler was unable to send him away from Alexandria and the Pope faced the threats with indifference. He was able to ordain a large number of priests and regain some Churches from the Chalcedonians.

The alien patriarch Eulogius sent a message to Emperor Phocas informing him that the Pope had held a council in which he condemned the Council of Chalcedon and excommunicated its supporters. So the emperor commanded the ruler to confiscate the church of "SS. Cosman, Damien, their mother and sister" and to put more pressure on the Egyptians. The ruler acted by entering the church accompanied by Eulogius and a battalion. The congregation revolted and many fell dead, so the Pope was obliged to withdraw to the desert of Shiheet wailing the daughter of his people like Jeremiah the prophet.

## **THE INVASION OF THE PERSIANS**

The Persians immigrated to Egypt. They were fond of destruction for the sake of destruction. They destroyed the monasteries and dispersed the hermits then entered Alexandria where the king announced his desire to meet with all the people of the city to put the basis of mutual understanding. They were about 800,000 persons whom his army massacred on that day.

Egyptians remained under the persecution of the Persians who were themselves sun worshipers but who oppressed the Egyptians and Syrians and commanded them to accept Nestorianism. When they refused they fell victims of their brutality. This lasted until Emperor Heraclius came and expelled them from Egypt.



## **THE HAND OF GOD AT WORK**

If we have presented a picture that might look gloomy of the state of the Egyptian Church under the yoke of some emperors, now we need to talk about the bright side.

1. The flourishing of monasticism and the presence of abbots in the wilderness who were saints, was an occasional soothing factor to some emperors, from time to time. This also served as a support to the popes who were deprived of entering Alexandria most of the time of their papacy and also to the bishops who were banished away from their people.

We will not forget when King Zeno found out about his daughter Hilaria who escaped to Egypt and lived in disguise as a monk in solitude, he opened his heart and coffers to the monasteries in Egypt, in particular St. Macarius' Monastery. Enormous castles and beautiful churches with beautiful marble pillars were also built.

2. The appearance of a number of highly spiritual personalities who had the gift of miracles making was as a support to the church. Among those were Anba Psentiaus of Qift and Abbot Samuel the Confessor.

3. Many Copts were obliged to immigrate to Nubia, probably because of the severe oppression. Those immigrants did spread the Christian faith in Nubia. In the year 542 the emperor sent a delegation to the kingdom bordering with Egypt, but its King Silko refused the imperial delegation and announced that he was satisfied with the services of the Copts among his people.

4. In this stormy atmosphere, the popes found the opportunity not only to write spiritual, educational and

doctrinal letters to their people, but some of them wrote books and articles of great value.

In brief, we can say that the Egyptian Church which carried the cross and endured even at the hands of her sisters churches, experienced the invisible hand of God supporting her according to His promise: "Blessed be Egypt my people" Isa. 19, granting her His heavenly consolation, and helping her to surmount all difficulties with true inner joy.



## **SOME PERSONALITIES OF THAT TIME**

### **1. ST. PSENTAIUS THE BISHOP<sup>1</sup>**

St. Psentaius (Psenthaisus, Psenda) was born in A.D 568, at the village of Shamir in the district of Armant in Upper Egypt from pious parents who raised him on the evangelic thought. His heart became aflamed with the monastic life. He rushed to see Abbot "Elijah the Great," the head of "Abu-Fam" Monastery on the mount of Shama.

He was known for his serious ascetic life, his love for the Bible and his continuous prayers.

There is a story told that a brother was watching him from the opening of his cell when he saw him read the Prophets. While he was reading a prophet came to him and towards the end of the book the prophet kissed him and ascended towards heaven. This brother saw him praying with great fear. His fingers were glowing with light.

One day a monk entered into the cell of that father after knocking on the door several times. He thought that he was sick, unable to rise up and open the door, but he found him talking with another person. The monk kissed that man before he left them, then said to St. Psentaius: "I ask you father to tell me the name of that saint, because when I held his hand to kiss it and put it on my face, I felt great power overwhelmed me. My heart was filled with happiness and joy, and I became as if intoxicated with wine. St. Psentaius answered: "God has regarded my weakness, fatigue and loneliness, as my body was very weak and overcome with sickness, and I haven't seen anybody since I left you, so He sent me one of His favorite saints, Elijah the Tishbite of Mount Carmel who consoled me with his divine words."

This saint was known for the miracles God performed through him.

He accepted the bishopric in the time of Pope Damianos in the year A.D. 598, after a divine revelation. He was known for giving every spiritual care to his people, and for his vow of poverty. He was always cheerful, entertaining and venerable. Nobody could look straight at his face, and when he went up to the altar, his face glowed like fire also while watching the Holy Spirit coming down onto the oblations.

He was contemporary to the Persian invasion of Egypt.

---

*1. Manuscript 97470 History 18, Library of the Coptic Museum, from the 14th century, published by Mr. Nabil Selim (in Arabic).*

## **2. ST. YUANIS (JOHN) BISHOP OF BURULLUS**

He was contemporaneous to St. Psentaius. He joined the monastery headed by Abbot Daniel, the priest of Scetis, then he was chosen to be bishop of Burullus. He was known for his love for the word of God, and personally serving the poor and the strangers. It is said that his face glowed while he was serving the holy liturgy. He wrote many biographies of the Fathers, martyrs and confessors to be read to the congregation. This was the beginning of using the Sinaxarium (biographies of the saints) in the church.

## **3. ST. DANIEL, PRIEST OF SCETIS**

The biography of this saint remains a living witness to the vitality and glory of the Coptic monasticism in the sixth century.

He was born in A.D 485, and when he was still a boy he set out to Shiheet Desert. He was captured three times by the barbarians during his early monastic life, probably because of his desire to penetrate into inner desert. On the third time he threw a stone at his captor who fell dead on the ground. He fled away, yet his conscience was troubled for the rest of his life. He asked Pope Timothy III (A.D 518-536) to impose a penalty on him because he felt badly embittered. The pope tried to convince him that what he did was in self-defence. He was not convinced; so he departed to Rome, Constantinople, Ephesus, Jerusalem and Antioch asking the bishops of these cities for punishment. When he could not find comfort he surrendered himself to the court in Alexandria, but the judge released him telling him he wished he had killed seven of those violent barbarians.

This saint's life was marked by his numerous travels throughout Egypt and abroad.

Many church leaders became his disciples and later became venerable bishops. He also cared for the communities of virgins.

He was a guide to St. Anastasia, one of the deaconesses who escaped with St. Severus of Antioch to Egypt in A.D. 518. She was so rich that Justinian wanted to marry her. She lived disguised as a monk in a cave close to the monastery. She lived for 28 years as a hermit in solitude under the guidance of Abbot Daniel.

St. Daniel met with Eulogius in about A.D. 52. At that time Eulogius was a stone-cutter and was concerned with taking care of strangers. St. Daniel prayed to God to give Eulogius generously that he might increase his loving deeds. While Eulogius was cutting stones he discovered a valuable treasure (a pot full of gold), so he went to Constantinople where he tried to influence the authorities using this gold to nominate him a minister. The saint tried to see him but the soldiers refused and sent him away. The saint prayed that Eulogius' soul might be saved. Indeed Eulogius took part in a conspiracy against Emperor Justinian in A.D. 532. When the emperor wanted to punish him, he fled to his hometown to work again in stone-cutting. St. Daniel came to console and support him and brought him back to loving the poor.

St. Daniel revealed the truth about St. Anasimon the queen, who disguised herself as a foolish woman to live at one of the Egyptian convents. He also revealed the personality of a great saint named Mark who was begging in front of the patriarchal building.

A thief once wanted to steal the possessions of a convent, so he disguised himself as St. Daniel and entered

the convent by night. One of the nuns asked him to pray for a blind nun. Because this man was not a Christian he asked the nuns to wash her face with the water they washed his feet with. When the nun's eyes were healed the thief was deeply touched and rushed out to see St. Daniel who met him cheerfully. He told him that he was with him in spirit when he entered into the convent. The thief was converted and became a disciple of St. Daniel.

St. Daniel was subjected to severe beating that he was about to die when he condemned the Tome of Leo and the doctrine of Chalcedon in front of the delegate of Emperor Justinian. He was obliged to take refuge in the city of Tambuk (town of Shubrakheat) beside which he built a monastery where he stayed until Justinian died in A.D 565.

St. Daniel was connected with the story of Andrewnicos and his wife Athanasia. They were of a wealthy family from Antioch. All their children died suddenly, so they were badly grief-stricken. Later they had a life of submission and decided to lead a monastic life. The husband came to St. Daniel who advised him to commend his wife to one of the convents and come back to him. Whence Andrewnicos became a disciple of St. Daniel for 12 years. One day he desired to visit the holy place in Jerusalem. He encountered another monk who also wanted to visit Jerusalem. They kept talking together along the road and vowed to stay together when they returned from Jerusalem. Indeed they settled at the 18th monastery in Alexandria (*Octocaydiceathon*), and remained there for 12 years where St. Daniel used to visit them. At last the monk died and Andrewnicos discovered that the monk was his wife Athanasia. He dwelled in her cell for a short time after.



***THE COPTIC CHURCH  
FROM  
THE SEVENTH TO THE TWENTIETH  
CENTURY***

---

**THE CENTURIES FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE TWENTIETH**

It is very difficult to write in few pages on the history of such a long period of time that extends from the seventh to the twentieth century. However, it is not my objective to present historical review of the Coptic Church; I leave that to the historians. I rather aim at manifesting the wondrous and immeasurable work of God with His church throughout the centuries, to establish His Kingdom.

During these fourteen centuries, the church passed through critical events, and dealt with rulers belonging to various countries. This period could be subdivided into the following phases.

1. From the Seventh to the Tenth century, i.e., from the Arab Conquest of Egypt to the beginning of the Fatimid era.
2. The Fatimid Era, (969-1171 A.D.).
3. The Time of the Crusades.
4. The Turkish Era.
5. The French Expedition.
6. The Nineteenth Century.
7. The Twentieth Century.

## ***THE CENTURIES FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE TENTH***

---

By the Arab Conquest of Egypt, the yoke of Byzantium was removed from the Copts with regard to the heavy taxes. More important still that they obtained the right to choose their church leader, allowing him to practice his pastoral duties. The church restored from the state many church buildings and the Copts started repairing what was destroyed. Friendship prevailed in the relations between Pope Benjamin (38) and Amr-Ibu-Alaas.

The rulers who came in succession over Egypt bore a spirit of indulgence, like Maslama at the time of Pope Aghathon (39) who resorted to seven bishops to help him handle the problem of the city of Sakha where some people set fire to a number of government employees. Indeed they succeeded in bringing back security. God granted the bishops the gift of healing those who were wounded and punish the aggressors.

However, Dr. A. S. Atiya<sup>1</sup> mentions an important point, that is the fear of the Caliphs lest the rulers of Egypt would separate and rule Egypt independently. This made the Caliphs refrain from allowing the rulers of Egypt to stay in their posts for a long time. According to the tables compiled by Stanley Lane-Poole<sup>2</sup>, Egypt was ruled by 108 rulers over 226 years. That extended until the Tulunids Era (869-905) which marked the first Muslim rulers to administer independently, followed by the Ikhshids (935-969). The average period of each ruler was about two years, so short a period



that each ruler was never concerned about the welfare of the public or the future growth of the land resources. The sole matter that concerned them was how to send the largest amount of tribute to the Caliph, apart from what he collected for himself. For example Abd-Allah-Ibn-Saad, the first ruler after Amr collected two million dinars over what Amr used to collect. This weakened the potentiality of the country and the Egyptians could not afford to pay. The ruler therefore began to ask the clergy and the monks to pay tribute which they calculated according to the (*Hijrah*) moon calendar and not to the Coptic solar calendar.

Five rebellions took place in the period between 739 and 773 as a result of the intense oppression exerted in collecting tributes and taxes. Some Muslims took a part in those rebellions side by side with the Copts. Probably the most serious of them was that which broke out in 831 during the caliphate of Al-Mamun. He was obliged to go to Egypt when peace returned to the country in order to appease its people. Financial oppression was renewed in 869 when Ahmed Ibn-Al-Mudabbir, the last of the Abbassid rulers counted the clergy and imposed a certain amount of money upon the Pope.

We can give a true picture portraying the avarice of some of the rulers and governors in collecting money in two stories:

(1) In the 1st year of the papacy of Anba Michael I it happened that Usama-Ibn-Yazid the tax-collector overburdened all the Egyptians with heavy taxes which was doubled on the Copts to the extent that some of them denied their faith<sup>3</sup> under the stress of ultimate need and financial hardships. His exaggeration in embezzlement of money

shows in imposing a tax of ten dinars on whoever wants to move from one town to another through the River Nile. It once happened that a widow took a boat with her son who was abducted by a crocodile in front of all the passengers who were unable to save him. When this lady arrived to her destination, the tax collectors who work for Usama asked her to pay the tax, while she was weeping and wailing at the loss of her son. She told them that she had already paid and that the receipt was in her son's pocket. All the passengers witnessed that, but they insisted that she should sell some of her possessions to pay the taxes again<sup>4</sup>.

(2) When the Caliph Marawan took over the rule by force and terrorism, he ordered the ruler to double the taxes on the Copts in order to destroy their will and abolish their chances to revolt against him. Consequently the ruler asked Pope Michael to pay him a huge sum of money. When the Pope could not pay, the ruler sent him to prison, put an iron collar around his neck and tied his feet to heavy blocks of wood. He also imprisoned with him Anba Mouisius bishop of Ausim and Anba Theodore bishop of Babylon and Elias the disciple of Anba Mouisius. The prison was a cave in the rock without an opening for air or light. He also sent to prison a large number of Copts, and the Pope kept consoling them with words of grace. After a month the ruler set the Pope free on the condition that he would travel all over the country to collect money for him. When the Pope returned from Upper Egypt a violent earthquake struck the city of Fustat, so the ruler's heart softened at the anger of nature and accepted the sum collected by the Pope without discontent<sup>5</sup>. When Keriakos the king of Nubia heard about the imprisonment of the Pope, he led his army and conquered Upper Egypt until he reached Fustat. But the Pope interceded to him and asked him to return back to his coun-

try in tranquil. This intercession had the deepest effect on King Abd-el-Malek Ibn-Marawan who loved the Pope, became kind to the Copts and developed good relations with the bishops.

The non-Egyptian caliph being out of the country all the time tempted many people to covet and slander the Copts. For example, after the death of Anba Benjamin, Aghathon the priest was chosen to be patriarch. This priest used to disguise as a carpenter during the period when the Pope disappeared from the Byzantians. He did that to minister the Orthodox people and offer them the Holy Sacraments in secret. At the time Theodosius the Chalcedonian and Yazid-Ibn-Muawiah the governor of Damascus acted in concert to entrust Theodosius with the leadership of the Church of Alexandria. So he imposed a general tribute on all the Orthodox people as well as annual tax on Pope Aghathon and his close disciples. He announced that whoever found the Pope will be free to stone him to death.

We give another example: The Chalcedonians aroused the governor Abd-Al-Aziz Ibn-Marawan against Pope Yuonis III by telling him that the Pope did not come out to receive him because he felt he was a descendant to the Pharaohs and the legitimate ruler of the country. He was also told that the Pope had abundance of riches. The governor summoned him to pay one hundred thousand dinars on the Paschal Tuesday. Only two days had passed after which the governor honored the Pope and both became friends. Good relations increased between them and the governor favored to stay at the "Abu-Sefein Monastery" at Tamuh when he felt he was in need of some rest. In that visit he gave to the monks twenty thousand dinars. He recovered fast from his illness, so he took interest in setting up parks in Helwan. He also built

many mosques there and granted the Pope permission to build a church. When he learned that the Pope was sick and that he wanted to visit Alexandria, he ordered his men to prepare him a special ship.

A third example: During the time of Pope Simon I, a delegation from India arrived to Egypt and requested the Pope to ordain a bishop over India because they could not reach Antioch. The Pope advised them to get the permission from the prince of the country. On their way to see the prince a group of Chalcedonians encountered them and convinced them to resort to the alien patriarch. They listened to them and went to see the alien patriarch who ordained for them a bishop and two priests. At their departure from Egypt they were arrested by the border guards and were sent handcuffed to the Caliph Marawan, yet he sent them back to his son in Egypt rebuking him for his unwatchfulness. The Pope was arrested for trespassing the governor's authority and Abd-al-Aziz refused to listen to the Pope. The Pope then requested to be granted a grace period of three days. Indeed on the third day a member of the Indian delegation escaped from prison and came to the Pope who assured him and both went to the governor. The Indian delegate recounted what happened to the governor who apologized for what had lapsed from him towards Pope Simon.

## **THE COPTS AND THE INDEPENDENT GOVERNORS "THE TULUNIDS" AND THE "IKHSHIDS"**

The Tulunids and the Ikhshids ruled Egypt independently although they remained under the authority of the Abbassid caliphate. Baker regards that the history of Islamic Egypt started by the Tulunids when Ahmed-Ibn-Tulun separated the country (Egypt) from the central authority. He was not

so much interested in abusing the country as he was in its welfare. He changed it from a subordinate governorate to the center of a great empire and the situation in the country improved<sup>6</sup>. The Tulunids wanted to take the Coptic people to their side, so they treated them favorably, although the Pope was imprisoned during this era. Some account to the fact that Ibn-Tulun took every chance to impose fines on the Pope to keep the church in a state of poverty and deprive him from any public leadership. Therefore he treated the Coptic people indulgently while he treated the Pope with occasional rigor. In any case the Tulunid era - short as it was - was marked by indulgence with the Copts generally. The Ikhshids were not as tolerant because Mohammed Ibn-Taghaj the Ikhshid resorted to oppressing the Copts and embezzling their possessions, when he failed to pay the salaries of his soldiers.

1. Atiya *History of Eastern Christianity*, p.85.

2. *Egypt in the Middle Ages*, p.45-58 (London 1936).

3. Anba Sawiris Ebn Almokafa, *Bishop of Al-Ashmoneen...history of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, p. 134-136.

4. Iris Habib Al-Masry: *The Story of the Coptic Church* item 456- 460.

5. Previous reference, item 461-462 Stanley Lane-Poole; *Egypt in the Middle Ages*, p.27.

6. *Encycl. de l'Islam, Egypte*.



# ***COPTIC PERSONALITIES IN THE FOUR CENTURIES (FROM THE 7TH TO THE 10TH)***

---

## **1. POPE BENJAMIN I**

Pope Benjamin ascended the chair of St. Mark in the period from 623 to 662 A.D. He lived in three different eras:

1- The Persian occupation (623-628). The Persians occupied Egypt as a result of the immense chaos all over the country where the Egyptians suffered under the Byzantine high handiness and public deprivation. They were deprived of practising national, human and religious rights. At least in the time of the occupation period by the Persians some of the Coptic patriarchs felt relief from the alien patriarchs appointed by Byzantium to oppress the Egyptian Church, yet we find that the Persians ruined and plundered the country and destroyed the churches and monasteries.

2- The return of the Byzantine rule (628-640 approximately). This was a bitter period in which all the concern of Emperor Heraclius was to resist and shatter the church. Pope Benjamin was obliged to flee, and he disappeared for ten years during the time of that rule and three more years in the following era.

3- The Arab Conquest of Egypt in 640 A.D. when Al-Muqauqus a name which was mostly pseudonym of the Byzantine governor gave the country up to the Arabs. The

Pope was treated kindly by Amr Ibn-Alaas, and returned to his see after three years to practice his pastoral work.

### **CYRCUS' RESISTANCE TO THE CHURCH**

The Persians took over Egypt by force from Heraclius. Later he took it back and gave orders after three years to transfer bishop Vasis of Asia Minor to Alexandria to administer both ecclesiastical and civil authorities. By a divine declaration Pope Benjamin 38 escaped with his bishops to Scetis desert where he felt very badly to see the land being devastated at the hands of the Persians, while he was powerless unable to act under the Byzantine arbitrariness. From there he fled to Upper Egypt where he lived in one of the small monasteries scattered around Thebes.

When Cyrus came to Alexandria and did not find the Pope, he arrested his brother Minas. The soldiers tortured him by burning his sides with fire to force him to reveal his brother's hiding place. He was enduring all that in silence, but the alien patriarch commanded to put him in a bag full of sand and throw him into the sea. He was the first martyr at the hands of that alien patriarch.

### **THE ARAB CONQUEST**

Amidst that tense atmosphere, when Cyrcus had nothing to occupy him other than chasing after the Coptic bishops, priests and the monks to the deserts torturing and killing them with a military campaign, the Arabs were advancing. They conquered Persia then headed towards Syria and Palestine, while Heraclius was motionless in Constantinople.

The Arab marched under Amr Ibn Alaas reached Egypt at Pelusium (Al-Farama) on the Red Sea. The fighting lasted

for a month until they conquered the city and headed south. After another month they occupied Belbais in the Nile delta and rushed towards Babylon in Old Cairo where Trajan built his castle in the second century. They besieged Babylon for seven months, then Al-Muqauqus negotiated with them to surrender the land to the Arabs. After that they marched to Alexandria fighting on their way separate battles in each city as the country had lost its unity and the governors appointed by the emperor were lacking military experience. Nothing concerned them other than collecting taxes and resisting the church. Indifference was the common attitude.

Alexandria was capable of resisting the Arab invasion, especially that it is a marine city and supplies could reach it from the sea, yet factions ripped the city apart and caused it to surrender in a few months. The power then shifted from the Byzantines to the Arabs.

Jean Maspero<sup>1</sup> regards that the secret behind the Arab Victory over the Byzantine army lies in the following reasons:

1. Emperor Justinian had concealed the system of unified leadership in Egypt lest the army commander might lead an independence movement, so he abolished the civil unity previously kept by the Romans. This resulted in Egypt being ruled by five dukes directly appointed by the emperor. Everyone had his own independent civil and military authorities and none cared to support the other.

2. The army was burdened by police duties and by helping the tax collectors and interfering in the church disputes for the benefit of the empire. There was no combat army or a military leader in Egypt. Most of the soldiers were from the



simple inhabitants of Egypt who never practiced any military training or worked under a true leadership.

3. The spirits of the Byzantines declined after they learned about the Arab victories over the Persians.

4. The orientalist Alfred J. Butler<sup>2</sup> thinks that there was not a single Copt (probably from the military point of view) in the battlefield and that it is wrong to assume that the Copts were at that time capable of assembling or negotiating with the Arabs. Indeed the Copts were suffering from the Byzantine colonialism, but never calculated liberating themselves from that rule by negotiating with the Arabs.

As for Al-Muquauqus who conferred with the Arabs, his behavior remains a mystery. Many scholars think that he was the alien patriarch as mentioned in one of the rare Coptic documents discovered and referred to by Amelineux: [As for Al-Quqious the alleged bishop, whose heart was filled with hatred reached Fayoum, and when Father Samuel realized that he was going to die he said to him, "You too the deceitful Caledonian (Chalcedonian)<sup>3</sup>.] Butler tackled the problem of the name "Al-Quqious," showing that it's not a Coptic name. And that his name is derived from his native land because he came from the land of Qolchice<sup>4</sup> (Cyrus the Colchian).

## **THE RETURN OF POPE BENJAMIN<sup>5</sup>**

Amr Ibn Alaas settled in the "Fustat" and when everything stabilized, a dialogue started between him and the Copts about the return of the Pope and his bishops to their chairs.

Sanathius who was a believer, spoke to Amr about the matter. He asked him to send a message to the Pope to return

to his see in peace. It was Sanathius who carried the message and delivered it to the Pope in Upper Egypt.

Amr canceled the heavy Byzantine taxes and did not ask the Egyptians to pay more than the tribute. He claimed for reasonable moderate sums of money and differed in this matter with Omer Ibn Al-Khattab (his commander the caliph). He also gave the Egyptians freedom to worship and free disposal in legal and administrative matters. He appointed some Copts as directors in various districts, yet he exempted them from the military service, depriving them of the honor of defending their country in case of need.

In an amicable atmosphere the Pope met with Amr who showed him esteem and veneration.

### **A BATTLE WITH THE BYZANTINES**

Professor Iris Habib Al-Masry<sup>6</sup> says that the Caliph Omar-Ibn Al-Khattab was not happy with Amr because he was expecting Amr to provide him with larger amounts of money than he actually did. In one of his fits of anger at Amr, he appointed Abdallah Ibn Said governor of Upper Egypt and limited Amr's authority to Lower Egypt. Amr did not accept that and resigned from his position as governor of Egypt.

Before he departed, Byzantium sent her navy to take Egypt back. A fierce battle occurred and both sides suffered immense losses in lives. Amr was victorious and he vowed to destroy the fences of Alexandria and ordered to burn the city.

With regards to burning the Library of Alexandria, we find in the writings of the Persian traveler, Dr. Abd-Al-Latif

Al-Baghdadi (d. 1231 A.D.) and also of the Syrian prelate Bar Hebraeus that Amr used the contents of the library as fuel in the public baths at the orders of Caliph Omer Ibn-Al-Khattab who said that if the contents of the library agreed with the Quran (the Islamic book), they were unnecessary, hence superfluous, and if they disagreed let them be burnt. This opinion provokes discontentedness among the Islamic circles<sup>7</sup> which think that this never happened.

---

1. Jean Maspero: L'organisation militaire de l'Egypte byzantine, Paris 1912.

2. A.J. Butler: The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the thirty years of the Roman dominion, Oxford 1902, p.252.

3. Fragments Coptes pour servir a l'histoire de la conquete de l'Egypte par les Arabes, Journal asiastiques, nov.-dec. 1888.

4. A.J. Butler, Appendix C., p. 508-26.

5. The author's dictionary of the Church's fathers and saints p.915, 1986.

6. The Story of the Coptic Church, item 289.

7. Historia Aegypti Compendiosa, ed. J. White, Oxford 1800, p.114; Hist. Dyrastiarum, ed. E. Pococke, Oxford 1663 p. 180 Arabic; Atiya p.81.

## **2. ANBA SAMUEL THE CONFESSOR**

Born about 597 A.D., in the city of Daklube. When his parents became sure of his persistence on monasticism, they spent most of their money on building a superb church where Samuel was ordained deacon to serve with his father the priest. When his parents died he headed to Scetis' desert by a divine proclamation where he was accompanied by an angel in the form of a monk. He was a disciple of Anba Aghathon and God granted him the gift of healing and performing miracles. A large crowd came to him and many became his disciples.

When Heraclius imposed Cyrus as bishop of Alexandria and governor over Egypt, he chased after Pope Benjamin and sent his military commander out with two hundred soldiers to the Natroun Valley where he occupied St. Macarius' church. He called the monks to a meeting while St. Yuanis (John) the protopriest of the desert was out to hide the altar's vessels from the barbarians. Anba Samuel was arrested and Maximian read to him the letter of "Actisius" or "Cuchianius" (The letter of Cyrus who was from Vasis in Colichius, Cyrus the Colchian) that contained the Chalcedonian doctrine and Tome of Leo. When the commander received no response he began to threaten him, and St. Samuel shouted, "We do not agree to that Tome or accept the Council of Chalcedon. We also do not recognize any archbishop other than our father Anba Benjamin." He asked the commander to show him the Tome, and when he held it in his hand he announced the excommunication of the Tome, the council, the Pope of Leo and whoever accepts their doctrine, then he tore up the Tome. He was flogged until his eyes scooped out and was left between life and death. The monks carried him to a nearby cave and prayed on him because they thought he had died. The saint recov-

ered and accompanied four monks to Mount Qalamun in the Fayoum region. There, crowds of people carrying their sick came to him to pray for them, and many became his disciples.

Al Muqauqus visited Fayoum and proceeded to the monastery, so the saint escaped with his monks. Al Muqauqus returned to Fayoum and commissioned his soldiers to the monastery to arrest him. In Fayoum the saint proclaimed his firmness of belief in front of Al-Muqauqus who slapped him and ordered his soldiers to flog him to death. Some of the nobles interfered and saved him.

Later he went to the "Rayan Valley." The barbarians attacked this region, arrested the saint again and took him to their country where he met in prison St. Yuanis (John) the head of Scetis' monasteries. He suffered a lot from Zarkandus the chief of the tribes who worshiped the sun. Many loved St. Samuel because God made many signs and miracles at his hands, yet Zarkandus was still tough with him. One day his wife begged him to allow the saint to visit their home and pray for her that God might heal her and give her a child as she was barren. When she gave birth to a child Zarkandus loved the saint so much and sent him back to Egypt with great honor.

### **3. ANBA YUANIS (JOHN) AL-NIQUSI**

A well known Coptic historian, who wrote the history of the world from the creation to his time in 122 chapters focusing on Egypt and the Egyptians, showed that they were the first people to mold the gold, excavate the mines and make war tools; he also wrote about the pyramids. His writing about the Arab conquest of Egypt is concise but considered one of the reliable references. Unfortunately the

Coptic origin was lost and the orientalist Zotenberg translated the Ethiopian edition (which was translated from a lost Arabic edition), to the French and published it in Paris in 1883.

He lived in the seventh century and acted as a secretary to four Popes, from Pope Aghathon to Pope Isaac, then he was installed bishop of Noqios, presently the village of Zawiet Razine near Menuf in the Nile Delta. He was appointed director of the Scetis' Valley monasteries in 694. It was said that he gave an order to beat a monk because he committed adultery in the desert and the monk died. He was suspended from his clerical duties.

#### **4. ANBA YUANIS (JOHN) PROTOPRIEST OF SCETIS**

Born around 585 A.D, he became a monk and dwelt in the Scetis' desert around the year 603. He was the unknown soldier who spared no effort in establishing the spiritual life of the monks for more than 70 years until he passed away in 675. We do not know much about his biography except that he was captured by the barbarians three times and suffered great humiliation and agony. Anba Samuel the Confessor met him in captivity. He returned from captivity at the beginning of the Arab conquest of Egypt where he was installed protopriest over Scetis'. It was said that he never participated in Serving the holy Eucharist without seeing our Lord the Savior in a revelation together with Virgin Mary.

Evelyn White says that the disciples of that saint were two groups: one group kept the traditional conduct of the mono

theistic life in Scetis, while the other group tended towards renewal of monasticism.

## **5. THE SAINTS ABRAAM AND GAWARJI**

Abraam was born in 608 A.D. His father loved the poor and his mother was abducted by the Persians in 616. When Heraclius conquered the Persians in 627 she was able to go back to her son in Alexandria. He talked to his mother about his desire to become a monk and found that she was supportive to him, so he went to see Anba Yuaniss the protopriest of Scetis. St. Abraam had the gift of discernment and miracle working. He also enjoyed heavenly revelations.

While he was wandering about in St. Orion's (Horion) mountain, he met St. Gawarji and they agreed to dwell together in Scetis to support one another.

When he passed away, St. Macarius the Great and St. Yuanis with a troop of angels appeared receiving his pure soul. About five months later his friend St. Gawarji passed away in the Lord.

## **6. POPE SIMON I**

Many Syrians were attracted to Egypt following the death of St. Severus of Antioch there. In the seventh century Simon the Syrian came with his parents to Alexandria where he was ordained deacon. His parents brought him to Pope Agathon who noticed his monastic tendencies and sent him to Al-Zujaj (the Glass) monastery to be a student of Yuanis the head of the monastery. When Yuanis was chosen Pope, Simon the monk was a member of the delegation who went to see Prince Abd-Al-Aziz Ibn Marawan, the Islamic ruler of Egypt at that time, to inform him of the choice. Suddenly a bishop said in front of the prince, "The monk who deserves

this honour is Simon." The prince gazed at Simon to explore his opinion, so he replied, "Yuanis is my spiritual father, and is more entitled to this ministry. He is pure like angels. It is he who taught me all I know of theological sciences." They were all touched by his answer and insisted on choosing him Pope. He put the administration of the church into the hands of his teacher Yuanis until he departed in the Lord, honouring him as a student does to his teacher. Pope Simon was not the only Syrian the Copts chose to be their Pope.

## **7. YUANIS THE SCRIBE**

Abd-Al-Aziz Ibn Marawan was succeeded by a group of governors over Egypt who treated the Egyptians in general and the Copts in particular with severity and violence. Those were Abd Allah, Qurrah, Usamah and Ubied Allah....etc. In the meantime God used some elder (*archon*) Copts filled with wisdom and grace to bring back peace to the church. One of them was Gawargius Al Defrawy who boldly faced the ruler Abd Allah and asked him: "Does my master aim at arresting the Pope or getting money?" Then he asked him to give Pope Alexandros II two months delay with his warranty, so that he might travel across the country with him to collect the required money.

In the same spirit Yuanis the Scribe acted with Qurrah the governor who asked to permit him collect the tribute according to everybody's capability. He acted this way in order not to overburden the poor.

## **8. SAID IBN-KATEB AL-FARAGHANI**

This great architect appeared during the rule of Ahmed Ibn Tulun the Turkish who was brought up in the court of Caliph in Baghdad. He wanted to rule Egypt independently, so he appointed the Egyptians to collect taxes instead of



aliens. He gave the Copts the chance to enjoy their religious rights, build churches and monasteries, and run their commercial and agricultural businesses. The governor tended to lead an affluent life yet he was fast in using the sword, in one day he killed 18,000. He did not impose new taxes on the Copts but asked the Pope Mikhael III to pay 20,000 dinars. The Pope did not possess that amount so he was sent to prison, and he had to sell a piece of land owned by the patriarch to pay the money.

Said built the Nile gauge at Al-Rodah, Suburb of Cairo during the days of Al-Mutawakil the Abbassid Caliph. When Ahmed Ibn Tulun came into power he asked him to build a barrage to provide the city of Qataieh which he took as his headquarters with water. Ibn Tulun admired that achievement but he sent the architect to prison and forgot completely about him. After some time Ibn Tulun wanted to build an unique mosque to be decorated by 300 columns. This required the destruction of a large number of churches to provide the columns. When the imprisoned architect heard of that, he sent to Ibn Tulun telling him that he could build an unique mosque that rises upon two columns only, replacing the other columns by supports of baked brick that resists fire. So Ibn Tulun summoned the imprisoned architect and put hunderdthousand dinars at his disposal. This mosque remains until the present time, a marvelous piece of art, known as Ibn Tulun mosque in Cairo. Ibn Tulun was delighted with the mosque and distributed a lot of charities and gifts on the inauguration day. Ibn Katib Al-Farahani got 10,000 dinars but Ibn Tulun asked him again to deny his Christianity and when he refused he was killed by the sword.

Al-Massoudy, an Arab historian born in Baghdad and died in 906 recounts that Ibn Tulun heard a Coptic philosopher

from Upper Egypt who was 130 years old. He was a genius in astronomy and geography. One day Ibn Tulun summoned him to the city of Qataieh and asked him about the secret behind reaching that old age. He answered: "I have trained myself, master, on moderation in clothing, food and drink, and I think this is mostly the reason." He asked him about the Nile sources. He said that he believed these sources "lie on the top of high mountains where there is a vast lake and where the day and night are equal all the years long." Ibn Tulun liked him, honoured him and gave him generously. His answers about the Nile sources were accurate and came to be confirmed by the European scholars nine centuries later *1*.

*1. Iris Habib Al-Masry, The Story of the Coptic Church item 586.*

## ***THE FATIMID ERA***

---

### **THE BENEVOLENCE OF THE FATIMID**

The Fatimid era is considered as one of the best Islamic eras for the Copts - During which they enjoyed much freedom in practising their worship. They also had tremendous artistic activities of which splended traces fill the Coptic Museum. Moreover, they were allowed to assume important stately positions, and among them were found many famous writers, scribes and physicians.

Al-Muizz conquered Egypt in 972 and established the Fatimid empire. Since he was afraid of the Syrians' attack on Egypt, he has left Tunisia and founded Cairo as the capital of his empire which extended from Morocco to Syria. During his reign, Egypt flourished economically and artistically. Since he was known for his knowledge capabilities along with broadmindedness and justice, he was able to channel all energies to work for his empire, and an atmosphere of security spread all over the country.

He allowed the Copts to rebuild and renovate their churches, and he chose a Copt, Abu-Al-Yomn Youssef to administer collecting taxes from Egypt and from Palestine.

His son and successor, Al-Aziz (976-96) continued his father's policy of religious tolerance. As a result, the Copts were able to live in peace, their incomes increased, they prospered and became able to pay the taxes with ease and

satisfaction. They built numerous churches and renovated the monasteries. Because of the sympathy between Al-Aziz and his princes, and between him and the Copts, a Jewish minister called Ibn-Kelsus, said spitefully that whoever wishes to succeed should convert to Christianity, which is the religion of both truth and gain.

One of those who wined Al-Muizz's favour and honor was the Coptic physician Abu-Al-Fath Mansour Ibn-Makhashar.

### **CALIPH AL-HAKIM (996-1020)**

The Fatimid era was darkened by Caliph Al-Hakim, who was known for his brutality towards all, even the muslims, and his bizarre actions. He lived during the first seven years of his rule with justice, although his personality was obscure and he was schizophrenic. He used to ride a grey donkey during the night and climb the Muqattam hills pretending that he was practicing astrology. Then he started to be aggressive against all. For example, he confiscated the shoes of all women to prevent them from going out, and prevented them from looking through the windows or staying on the house roofs. He ordered the killing of all the dogs, and forbade slaughtering cattle except during the Islamic feast of Al-Adha (Redeeming day). He also forbade selling beer and wine, left the vines to dry and poured the honey in the Nile.

After three years he concentrated his violent acts on the Copts (and the Jews):

1. He ordered the Copts to wear black garments and forbade them to wear soft or coloured clothes.

2. He prevented any muslim from working as a servant in a Coptic household, or a boatman on a ship that belongs to a Copt.

3. Every Copt had to wear a five pounds wooden cross.

4. He beheaded his Coptic minister (Vizier), Fahd Ibn-Ibrahim, and fired the Copts from the government posts.

An order was given to destroy the churches and confiscate their property. These acts agitated the populace against the Copts; they used to insult them kill them, and plunder their belongings.

5. He summoned Ghabriel Abu-Nagah, a Coptic archon and requested him to deny his Christ in order to appoint him his Vizier (minister). When he refused, an order was given to be logged one thousand lashes, but he died half way through scourging.

6. He summoned ten Coptic archons and ordered them to renounce their faith and to accept Islam. When they refused, the soldiers fell on them heavily with lashes. Six of them were martyred, one died after renouncing his faith and the other three declared their penance after Al-Hakim's death.

7. He imprisoned Pope Zakaria, and ordered to release hungry lions to kill him, but they did not approach him. Al-Hakim supervised keeping the lions hungry and threw the Pope again after staining his garment with blood. Once more the lions did not hurt him, so Al-Hakim released him.

8. He ordered his Coptic scribe, Ibn-Abdoon, to sign on his behalf a decree for burning the church of the

Resurrection. The scribe signed cowardly, however, after few days he was fired from his job and his properties were confiscated.

9. The Coptic scribe, Bakira, did not bear anymore to see all these atrocities. He quit his work at the Caliph's court and went to the Caliph's palace carrying his cross. At the door he shouted: "Christ is the Son of God." Al-Hakim summoned him and ordered him to renounce his faith. He refused and was imprisoned, and a steel chain was put around his neck. Bakira stood praying fervently in joy. One of his friends, called Mina came and asked him if he wished to convey a message to his family, upon which Bakira said, "Tell them to be in peace since I shall be among them tonight." Indeed, Al-Hakim released him and he went around encouraging the afflicted. Three days later, everything changed and Al-Hakim allowed the Copts to carry on with their affairs in freedom.

Al-Zahir (1020-1036) was tolerant, he allowed those who renounced their faith under pressure to return to Christianity, and declared that conversion to Islam must not be by force but voluntarily. This unique declaration is considered to be the most important event of his era.

During the era of Al-Mustansir (1036-1101) the Fatimid state became weak. The Turkish mercenaries plundered the Caliph's palace, and he became in need of money, Pope Christodoulus was imprisoned at that time.

Al-Aamer (1102-1131) was tolerant towards the Copts, and he used to visit the monasteries. On the other hand, he ordered that every Copt had to pay a tribute, regardless of rank.

During the reign of Al-Hafez (1131-1149), Bahram the Armenian was appointed as a minister (Vizier) but when Radwan took Bahram's position, he afflicted the Copts severely.

Generally speaking, we may say that the Fatimids were known for their tolerance. However, towards the end of their era their kingdom was weakened, they entered into war against Europeans in Syria. This was costly for them, and was a reason for oppressing the Copts.

# ***COPTIC PERSONALITIES DURING THE FATIMID ERA***

---

## **1. POPE ABRAAM I**

### **HIS ORDINATION**

Abraam Ibn-Zaraa was Syrian by birth. He was a wealthy merchant who visited Egypt several times and finally stayed there. He was known for his goodness and piety, particularly his care for the poor and for his knowledge. While the bishops were convening in the church of St. Sergius (Abu-Saga) for the ordination of the Pope, Abraam entered the church. They admired him and unanimously consented to elect him. They immediately took him to Alexandria where he was consecrated in St. Mark's Church as the 62nd Patriarch. He distributed half of his properties among the poor, and the other half was spent on church buildings.

### **HIS LOVE FOR THE POOR**

This Pope was known for his love and care for the poor. A Coptic vizier (minister) called Kozman Abu-Al-Yomn, was appointed as a ruler on Palestine. He entrusted the Pope with his wealth (about 100,000 dinars) and asked him to distribute it among the needy and the churches if he would die in Palestine. When the Pope heard of a rebellion broke in Syria and Palestine he thought that Kozman died and so he distributed the money. However, Kozman returned safely and when the Pope told him of what he did with his deposit Kozman rejoiced.



## **HIS PASTORAL WORKS**

He stopped bad habits and forbade accepting any bribe in the church. He also firmly forbade his flock from having concubines. Many feared God, freed their concubines, and repented. However, one of the prominents did not care about the Pope's forbidding. The Pope advised him several times patiently, at last he went to his house to advise him for he became a bad example to the people. The Pope knocked on his door, but he would not open the door of his house. The Pope remained for two hours knocking, then he said, "His blood is on his head." He shook off the dust from his feet on the door's step. Immediately, the stoned step split in front of those who were present. After a short period the man was fired from his job, lost all his wealth, suffered incurable diseases, and became an example for sinners.

## **IN AL-MUIZZ'S COURT**

Al-Muizz was known for his tolerance, justice and his interest in religious discussions.

He had a Jewish vizier (minister) called Ibn-Killis (Celsus) who asked the Caliph to allow a jewish person called Moses to debate with the Pope in his presence. Al-Muizz told the Pope courteously about this matter, then the Pope went to meet him, he came together with Anba Sawiris (Severus) Ibn-Al-Maqaffa, bishop of Al-Ashmunain. The Pope allowed the bisop to speak, and the bishop said, "It is not suitable that I speak to a jew in the presence of a Caliph." Moses became extremely angry and considered this an insult and an accusation of ignorance. The bishop answered calmly; "The prophet Isaiah says: The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master crib, but Israel does not know" Is.1:3.

The caliph liked the jest and wanted to stop the debate, but the Jewish vizier considered this a great insult and started to read with his friend Moses in the New Testament until they found this verse: "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move: Matt.17:20; Mark 11:23. They showed this verse to the Caliph and enticed him to ask the Pope if he had faith as a mustard seed to move the Muqattam Mountain. The Caliph sent for the Pope and asked him if such a verse really exists, and Anba Abraam affirmed it. Upon this the Caliph asked him to fulfill it or else the Copts would be subjected to the sword. The Pope asked for a three days' respite, he went directly to St. Mary's Church (Al-Muallaqa "Suspended"), sent for some bishops, priests, monks, laymen and requested them all to fast and pray during these three days. All, along with the Pope, prayed in one spirit with bitter hearts. Before the dawn of the third day, as the Pope dozed off because of the severity of grief and vigil, he saw the Virgin Mary asking: "What is the matter with you?." He answered: "You, the Lady of the Heavenly Hosts, know what is happening." She comforted him and asked him to go out of the iron gate leading to the market, and told him that he shall meet a one-eyed man carrying a pitcher and he will move the mountain. The Pope waked up and hurried out when he found the mentioned man, the latter tried to decline but when he knew about the Pope's vision he put himself at the patriarch, pleading that he tell nobody about him until the matter ends. The Pope came to know that the man was called "Simon," and that he worked as a cobbler. One day a woman came to repair her shoes and tried to incite him with her beautiful legs, he poked his eye with a needle and pulled it out, and thus the woman cried and fled. He used to wake up early every morning, fills his pitches with water to distribute among the

aged and infirm. After this he goes to his work and stays fasting till sunset.

The Pope, bishops, priests, monks, archons and some of the people went up to the Muqattam mountain. The Caliph stood beside the Pope, and the vizier had already aroused many people against the Copts. Simon stood behind the Pope. All prayed, and when they cried "Kyrie layson" or "Lord have mercy" and knelt, the mountain was raised up. The Caliph cried seeking safety. The matter was repeated thrice, then the Pope embraced the Caliph, and the two became close friends.

Al-Muizz requested the Pope to ask for anything he wished. He refused but on the Caliph's insistence the Pope asked for rebuilding of the churches, particularly that of St. Mercurius in Babylon. The Caliph issued a decree for rebuilding the churches and offered him a great sum of money. The Pope thanked him for the decree but refused the money, and thus Al-Muizz honoured him highly, for his piety and renouncement. Al-Muizz went by himself to put the foundation of the church.

## **HIS DEPARTURE**

Anba Abraam remained for three years and six days on the chair of St. Mark, and he departed in the Lord on the 6th of Kyahk.

## **2. ST. SAWIRIS (SEVERUS) IBN-AL-MOQAFFAA**

He was one of prominent personalities not only in the Fatimids' era but also in the history of the Coptic church. He wrote many books and essays, mastered the Greek, Coptic and Arabic languages, had a vast knowledge in the Holy Bible, the church laws and rites. He wrote many books as

well as saints' biographies. His most known book is "History of the Coptic Church of Alexandria," for which he extracted material from Greek and Coptic references. It includes the biographies of the Fathers from St. Mark to Anba Shenouda the 55th Pope. He departed in the Lord at the age of 90, without finishing the book, but many people helped in completing this interesting work after him.

His religious discussions with the Jews, Muslims and the Chalcedonians, even before the rulers, showed his courage and wisdom, and encouraged him in writing theology. His writings on the Oneness of God and the Holy Trinity are considered as principal sources for the Christian Arab writers, because he wrote them in a style that suited the era and the atmosphere surrounding him. He applied expressions that were appropriate to the culture of his epoch.

### **3. ANBA ELIJAH (ELIAS) OF TAMOUH**

Towards the end of the Fatimid state the situation of the Copts changed. They underwent many troubles and tribulations, because the ruler changed the tolerance into oppression, and due to the miss- ruling, famines, diseases etc. However there were many witnessess for Christ. His divine work was in many persons during the papacy of Christodulus, here are some examples:

1. While Anba Elias, the bishop of Tamouh was praying, a very bright light shined on St. Mary's icon, and the worshippers became exceedingly glad in their hearts. By that God confirmed His presence among His people, and that the saints were supporting them.

2. Twenty-one thousand children were victims of small-pox. Some people hurried to Psois, a saintly monk in the

monastery of Anba John (Yuanis) Cama at the Scetis, asking for his prayers on behalf of the Egyptians. He prayed all night long and at dawn he told the delegates: "Return comfortably and inform those who have sent you, that Jesus Christ had compassion upon us, and with His grace He will lift up the epidemic disease." On their return they found the disease completely subsided.

3. Anba Michael, the bishop of Tanis, whose name in full was Abu-Habib-Mikhail Ibn-Badir El-Damanhoury, became a monk at St. Macarius Monastery, and was a friend of Bakir Al-Rashidy. He hidded with him and others for fifteen days in the Monastery of Anba John (Yuanis) Cama at Monk Psois' cell. They were busy in writing and reviewing the biographies of the Patriarchs (from the 56th to the 65th Pope), and they used to keep vigil until midnight. Pope Philotheos (63rd Pope) elected him as his private scribe, and Pope Christodoulus (66th Pope) ordained him Bishop of Tanis near Lake "Manzalah."

## *AGES OF CRUSADES*

---

The First crusade (1096-1099) commenced at the end of the Fatimid age. This and Mamluk's are considered the worst ages the Copts had lived through.

The Copts' position, during the ages of Crusades, may be summarized as follows:

1. An Italian monk, Peter the Ascetic, succeeded in enraging European's kings and princes to prepare an army bearing the banner of the cross with the purpose of freeing the holy lands from Muslims' hands. Hence, Barons' armies whose number was about half a million horsemen at that time were sent to raid these lands. Nevertheless, they lacked congruence of leadership, diplomacy and knowledge of the environments of the countries they were attacking. Let alone the personal ambition of European nobles who in fact aspired to become rulers of rich countries of the East under the cover of defending the holy lands.

Alexius the emperor of Constantinople thought that these raids could fortify his kingdom. The Caliph Al-Afdal, also thought of it as a buffer against the Saljuks' expansionism (Turkic-Tatar tribes), but they soon found out how wrong they both were.

As for the Copts, they were the victims of all these raids. On one hand as the Muslims saw the invaders carrying

crosses on their chests, they assumed that the Copts would side with the invaders, especially that the Muslims coincidentally were imposing heavy tributes on the Copts. On the other hand, the Latins viewed the Copts (miaphysites) as outcast schism and in general worse than heretics in their view. That was the reason why subsequent to their occupation of Jerusalem, the Crusades disallowed the Copts from going on pilgrimages to the holy city as Copts were considered atheists. Renaudot reported that a Coptic historian complained about this treatment of the Copts saying that the Copts sorrow was not less than that of the Muslims. He also wrote: ..."Whose right is it to prevent the Nazarene Copts from pilgrimages to Jerusalem or from coming near the city? The Crusades hated the Copts as if they had deviated from the steadfast faith<sup>1</sup>.

Futhermore, the Crusade wars exhausted the resources of these countries which resulted in raising their spending dramatically and henceforth led to raising the taxes in general and more persistently on the Copts. The tribute ranged between 3,000 to 6,000 dinars for the enthronement of the Pope with the fear that it may still not be ratified by the Caliph.

In this rather difficult atomsphere it was highly possible to elude to the Caliph that the Copts give churches' collections to help the Europeans.

2. Subsequent to the peace agreement between Shawer, the Egyptian ruler and the Europeans, they both reneged on their promises. Jerusalem's Latin King Amalrich as he invaded Egypt through Bilbeis, he killed all its natives, enslaving women and children. He killed the Muslims and the Christians indiscriminately. When Shawer sensed the

danger approaching, he poured 20,000 barrels of tar on the city of Fustat (Egypt's capital for three centuries), and had his men inflame it with 10,000 torches. The inferno went on for 54 days. The majority of the inhabitants were Copts, they lost all their possessions. As a whole Egyptians felt that their capital had been destroyed because of the betrayal of the Europeans and Shawr (Fatimid vizier). Therefore many joined up with Shirkuh who brought with him a young nephew by the name of Saladin (Salah-Al-Din the Ayyubid), to defeat Shawar and take his palace in two days time.

Shirkuh acknowledged through this event - the burning of Fustat - that the Europeans did not distinguish between Muslims and Copts, and that many Copts had been martyred by the Europeans, and also their Crusade had been burnt down by them, but he still acted violently against the Copts.

3. In the period between the Fatimid era and the beginning of the Ayyubid rule, Egypt suffered from troubles, and famines; the Copts were laid off from their jobs, banned from riding horses and forced to wear certain clothes and a heavy tribute beyond their potentialities was imposed upon them. It was so much that some in Upper Egypt had to enslave themselves to survive and many others denied their Christ. At that time the orders were given to destroy St. Mark's Cathedral with the excuse that the Crusades could take shelter in it when they land at Alexandria. St. Mark's Cathedral was unique in its art and size. The Copts in vain offered to pay 2000 dinars to save it.

In the year 1173 a raid attacked Nubia (south of Egypt), destroyed St. Simon's monastery near Aswan and another near Ihrim. Monasteries' inhabitants were arrested including the Coptic bishop, and were sold in the slave market. The



destruction prevailed over the city of Quft in Upper Egypt which was leveled to the ground.

4. In Salah El-Din's era stability and justice were restored along with generosity and abundance which made all Egyptians, both Christians and Muslims, cherish him and become loyal to him. In his era the Copts enjoyed peace for the following reasons:

a. He ended the confusion and vandalism which prevailed at the end of the Fatimids.

b. He abolished the various "Crescent" taxes which were imposed by the last caliph of the Fatimids.

c. Although on the first of his appointment by the Caliph Al-Adid as a minister, replacing Shirkuh, he gave orders banning the Copts from all government jobs, he soon realized how efficient and capable the Copts were and that they did not pose any danger to his rule as the Prime Muslim leader in the Middle East. He selected a Copt Safi-Al-Dawla Ibn Abi Al-Ma-al, surnamed Ibn Sharafi - as his private secretary, who loyally served him until the day of his death<sup>3</sup>. He also had many Copts as friends, and readmitted the Copts to the government jobs. Moreover, he returned to them their properties which were previously confiscated. These are the things that made some historians view his dismissal of the Copts at the onset of his era as a clean up against Fatimids then against the Copts. Besides, he felt that the eastern Christians in general are those who, through their persistence against the Crusades, enabled him to regain Jerusalem.

Furthermore, in his raid on the holy lands, he was accompanied by a large entourage of Copts as his clerks,

workers and craftsmen, as a result he granted them "Deer-Al-Sultan" (Al- Sultan Monastery), and allowed them the pilgrimage to the holy lands after they were disallowed under the Crusades.

d. His citadel on the Moquattam Mountain, which was designed by two Coptic architects Abu-Mansour and Abu Mashkour, became the main government office and remained as such until Ismail built "Abdeen Palace" in 1874. The Copts also contributed to many magnificent works in all aspects of art. Although they did not obtain the same concessions as they did under the Fatimids, they however enjoyed peace and security.

5. In spite of the ease, with which the Ayyoubids were characterized, the two Crusades waged by Jean De Brienne and king Louis IX left deep scars on the Copts. On one side the Crusader treated the Copts as atheists. When the First Crusade occupied Damietta they ordained a metropolitane from the Latin Church of Rome. They took the liberty to kill the Copts regardless of their age or sex. On the other side, when the Crusade reached Damietta's Shore violent strifes took place in Cairo because the public thought that the Copts allies themselves with the Crusaders<sup>4</sup>. During these strifes the ruler pressed the Copts - including the clergymen - to pay for the war exuberant sums. When the soldiers were sent from Cairo to Damietta they had immense hatred to the Crusaders, they avenged by robbing the churches that paced by and destroying them. Because of many hardships some Copts had to flee from Egypt. The Nubian king "El-Nagashi" gave a permission to "*Labilela*" to accept 10,000 Copts to refuge in his country<sup>5</sup>.

As the King "Al-Malek" regained Damietta he realized the true position of the Copts, he brought them closer and restored what was taken from them. He visited with his entourage many monasteries in the Secits Desert. Hence, congeniality prevailed between Muslims and Copts. As for the Muslims they appreciated the Copts and appointed Henein Ebn Isaac as "the chief physician of his time."

6. The Mamluk's era started in 1250, they were originally slaves who were set free. They committed massacre after massacre among themselves. However they finally united to face their common enemy. The Mamluks and Turks were not afraid of revolutionary movements by the Copts. They realized this from their long experience since the beginning of the Crusaders. They were all assured that the Copts were peace-lovers. The Copts never took advantage of the Crusaders neither did sympathize with the western invasion against their Muslim brethren in Egypt.

All the Mamluks cared for was to make use of the Copts' artistic, administrative and financial abilities. This era was known for its severe poverty and confusion along with the involvement in wars which exhausted the country's financial resource. Therefore, the Sultan had sometimes to resort to a Copt to run the financial affairs and tax collection in the meantime, however, he also resorted to abuse the Copt's wealth.

There were some moderate Sultan as Qalaun and his son Al-Ashraf Khalil who restored the Copts to their positions subsequent to laying them off. This whole era however, is considered a chaos for Egypt in general and for the Copts in particular. Henceforth the Copts lived in isolation from the rest of the world. Ethiopia's kings, however, had to resort

from time to time to pressing the Sultans to deal kindly with the Copts.

The Muslim historian "Al-Makrizy" and also the Coptic historian Al-Mofadal-Ebn-Abi El-Fadel both reported that in Pipurs' era, in 1265, a large number of Copts were brought around to be burnt alive near the citadel. It took quite an effort to get the Sultan to agree to accept a heavy tribute from them instead.

In 1301 as a Morocan minister visited Egypt, while the Copts were then living in peace, he provoked the king Al-Nasser Ibn Qalaun to humiliate the Copts, by closing their churches and forcing them to wear blue turbans and sacks around their waists.

The year 1320 was one of the worst years for the Copts. The Muslim historian Al-Maqrizy (1364-1442) reported in bitterness how the churches were destroyed and the worshippers were killed, and how the general atmosphere was charged against the Copts throughout the country. All the energies in the country were directed towards humiliating the Copts in every way. Al-Maqrizy reported these events with great sorrow.

During the reign of Al-Narrer Mohamed Ebn Qalaun, the Aragon Spanish government sent emissaries to the Sultan appealing to reopen the Melkites' churches and to free a Spanish person who was detained in Egypt. The Sultan at first agreed to both requests. However, shortly after he went back on his word and demanded a ransom otherwise he would bring the hostage back into captivity before leaving Alexandria. The emissaries refused to pay the ransom and further they kidnapped the Sultan's emissaries to Spain. So

the Sultan was enraged against the Copts, laying them off their jobs because they were Christians as the Spanish were.

As King Al-Saleh II came to power, he was extremely malicious, not only against the devout Copts but also against those who had denied their Christ and converted to Islam. He appointed Alaa-El-Dine Ibn Zenbour as his vizier (minister) for he was converted to Islam together with his whole family. But as the King later was told that Alaa's Islam was only superficial, he had Alaa, his family and servants all tortured until he knew all about Alaa's properties, then he confiscated them and exiled Alaa to Quos, in Upper Egypt. He also destroyed many churches and monasteries and confiscated all church properties. Besides he had Pope Mark IV jailed and tortured, and ordered all local governors to lay off the Copts from their jobs. The Nubia's king intervened and had the Pope set free.

During the papacy of Yuanis (John) X, the Crusaders in 1365, confiscated the properties of both Muslims and Christians alike. The daughter of a priest by the name of Girgis Ibn-Fadel, had to offer all she owned in order to save the Church. Also the authorities summoned the Pope to the court where he and his companions were severely humiliated and lost all their possessions.

So every time there was a foreign attack on Egypt, the Copts suffered heavy afflictions. During the papacy of Matthew (Mathewos) I, the Europeans waged a raid on Alexandria where they looted, vandalized and took women as hostages and fled. Prince Yalbougha was enraged against the Copts, seized the abbot (President) of St. Anthony's Monastery and some of his monks and took them to Cairo. On the way they were beaten, humiliated and were not given

food or drink. When they asked for some water he mocked them snobbishly. The elder St. Markos the Antonian who was among them raised his eyes to heaven and said, "For you refused to give us water, the Lord will do so Himself." As soon as he finished these words heaven actually poured rain and they all drank. However, Yalbougha's heart was not changed, but by the time they reached "Atfeeh" the Sultan had decreed to free them.

As for Sultan Barquq (1382-98), he trusted Pope Matthew I. It was said that he consulted the Pope prior to accepting the "Sultanship," and they continued to have a good relationship, so much that the Sultan asked the Pope to mediate between him and king David of Ethiopia. Also when the mobs were enraged and wished to burn the "*Muallaqa*" (Suspended) Church and Shahrān Monastery alleging them being repaired, the Sultan sent their designate "Four Islam Judges" who found all allegations were unfounded.

At the end of that period as the relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia soured, it became difficult for the Pope of Alexandria to ordain a bishop for Ethiopia. Therefore, the Portuguese advised the Ethiopian King to request a bishop from the Roman Pope instead. An army-physician by the name of Boas-Barmodaz was ordained for Ethiopia and named "Patriarch of Alexandria."

At the end of their era the Mamluks were preoccupied with external wars and domestic strifes themselves which diverted their attention away from the Copts, who together with their Muslim brothers - were relieved during the era of Qansuh Al-Ghuri.

As approximately the centuries succeeded the Council of Chalcedon another attempt was initiated to unify Rome from one side with the Copts and with the Ethiopians from the other, at the synod of Florence in 1438/39. The unity was announced but remained totally unmoved. Another attempt was initiated at the end of the sixteenth century, but as the declaration of unity was ready to be signed, Pope Yuanis (John) XIV (1571-1586) of Alexandria died the night before. Rome's delegate was arrested and accused of espionage. Rome had to pay a huge ransom to free him and bring him back to his country.

- 
1. E. Renaudot: *Historia Patriarcharum Alexandruinorum Jacobitorum, Paris 1713, p. 479.*
  2. Iris Habib El-Masry: *Story of the Coptic Church, vol. 2, article 160 (in Arabic); Dr. Stiya: Hist. of East Christ., p. 95.*
  3. Yacoub Nakhla Roufails: *HIST of the Coptic Nation, 1899, p.176 (in Arabic).*
  4. Dr. Abdel Aziz Mirzik: *El Nasser Mohamed Ibn Klawoon, p.13 (in Arabic); J. Tager: The Copts and Muslims, p.168 (in Arabic)*
  5. Coulbeaux: *Hist. of Ethiop., p.256,226.*
  6. Dr. Atiya, p.97.
  7. 7. Iris H. El-Masry, vol. 3 article 286 (in Arabic).

## ***COPTIC PERSONALITIES DURING THE AYYUBID AND MAMLUKS ERAS***

---

During this long era many Coptic personalities appeared among the clergy, laymen of high ranking positions in the state, and those of artistic and literary talents like physicians, architects etc... I have mentioned some names when we discussed that epoch, and here I will limit the discussion to some of the writers, particularly those of the thirteenth century, since a great literary movement took place from the eleventh to the thirteenth century.

### **1. ST. BOUTROS (PETER) EL-SEDMANT I**

He was a monk in the monastery of St. George in Jebel Sedmant in the province of Faiyum. He left to us as a legacy about 14 books of great religious and theological value, most of them are in the National Library of Paris, the Vatican Library and libraries of some monasteries in Lebanon. The Jesuit monk Van Akberg was interested in these writings. One of them called "Al- Tasheeh..." (The Elucidation of the Passions of Christ).

### **2. IBN-KATEB-KAISAR (CEASAR)**

He lived in the thirteenth century. He wrote an introduction to the Coptic language, called "Al-Tabserah..." [The enlightening of the Coptic language rules]. A copy is in the National Library of Paris (Bibliotheque Nationale). He also wrote expositions to the Gospel according to St.



Matthew, the Acts, the Epistles of St. Paul, the Catholic Epistles and the Revelation.

### **3. IBN-AL-MAKIN**

He was one of the prominent thinkers of the thirteenth century. He died in Damascus in 1273. His name was Girgis Ibn- Al-Amid, and his brother was Al-Assaad Ibrahim, the scribe of armies during the rule of King Al-Aadel (The Just).

We do not know much about his biography; however, in his love to God he abstained from the world's glory and dedicated his life to worship, asceticism and study in the monastery of Abbot Yuanis El-Kasir (the Short) in Torah, south of Cairo. He became proficient in Coptic, Arabic, Greek, Logic, astronomy and history.

He wrote dogmas (doctrines), civic history and completed the history work of "El-Tabari."

---

*Iris Habib El Masry: Story of the Coptic Church, vol.3, 1971, p.251,252 (in Arabic).*

### **4. IBN-KEBR**

He was the scribe of Sultan Baybars (1260-77). He was loyal to him and helped him in writing a valuable book still present as a manuscript: "Zobdat Al-Fikr Fi Tarikh Al-Higra" [The precious thinking in the history of the immigration].

He left the Sultan's service and was ordained a priest on St. Mary's Church (*Muallaqqa*-Suspended). He gave much attention to the spiritual pastoral care for his people, and wrote many books which prove that he is an honorable scholar, deep theologian and a church historian. He died on 15 Bashans 1040 Coptic (A.D. 1323).

Amongst his work are:

- 
1. *On Holy Chrism (Mayroun)*.
  2. *"Galaa-al-Eqoul..."* contains 18 chapters on the oneness of God and the Holy Trinity and on the incarnation. A copy is preserved in the Vatican Library and another in Danascus.
  3. *"Misbah Al-Zolmah..."* [*The Lamp of Darkness and Elucidation of Service*], a church theological encyclopedia. Copies are preserved in the Vatican, Berlin and Paris (National) Libraries.
  4. *The Great Ladder*, a Coptic Dictionary, was published in Rome in 1643, in Coptic, Latin and Arabic. It is considered one of the most valuable Coptic books.
  5. *Against predestinarianism*.
  6. *Sermons on feasts and occasions*.

---

*Iris Habib Al-Masry: The Story of the Coptic Church, vol.3, 1971, p.298-300 (in Arabic).*

## **5. AWLAD (SONS OF) AL-ASSAAL**

They were eminent Coptic scholars in the thirteenth century. Apparently they were from Sedmant in Upper Egypt, migrated to Cairo and settled there. Some of them worked in government services and other dedicated their lives to serving God. They had high ranking status during the Ayyubids era, particularly "Abu-Ishaq" who accompanied the Ayyubids to Syria. They were also prominent in the Church. One of them, namely "Al-Safiy Abu- Al-Fadil" was chosen to act as the "First Secretary" for the holy Synod which was assembled to solve a church dispute during the patriarchate of Pope Kyrillos Ibn-Loklok (75th Pope).

They were well-educated in science, arts and languages, and were well known for their beautiful Arabic writings and to them is attributed the "Asaadi Arabic writing." They excelled in Coptic, Arabic, Greek and Syrian languages, beside their interest in the "Law" and Canons. They wrote Arabic poems at a high level.

Here is a note of their works and short accounts of the life of each of them:

### ***A. AL-MUTAMAN ABU-ISHAQ IBRAHIM IBN-AL-ASSAAL:***

He was ascetic, true worshiper and lover of studying and searching for knowledge. After the death of his pious wife his brother, Al-Safiy, sent him a message urging him to continue his ascetic life after the loss of the helpmate. This message was well accepted and he became a disciple of St. Boutros (Peter) the Confined. His contemporary Bishop of Damietta, Ibn-Al-Dahiry, called him: "The elder, ascetic chief, worshiper and the faithful (Al-Mutaman) One."

He was ordained priest, then protopriest, and remained in the patriarchate as a secretary of Pope Kyrillos Ibn-Loklok.

He wrote more than 10 books in theology, Coptic language, sermons etc...

***B. AL-ASAAD ABU-AL-FARAJ HIBAT-ALLAH:***

Eight books are known from his works in the Coptic language, introduction to the Pauline Epistles, "Al-Abaqti" system in astronomical and historical principals etc...

***C. AL-SAFIE ABU-AL-FADIL:***

Ten books are known from his works in defending the Gospel, the church canons, in the Holy Trinity, in church history, sermons etc...

**6. ANBA BOULOS AL-BUSHY: (Bishop of Babylon:)**

He is considered one of the most eminent Coptic thinkers in the thirteenth century. He was born in "Bush" (in Beni-Suef province, and became a monk in the monasteries of Faiyum, along with Dawud Ibn-Loklok who lately became Pope Kyrillos Ibn-Loklok (75th Pope).

The Dutch Fr. Jacques Muysier stated that Anba Boulos had self-control, loved his people, far from impartiality, had no aim except church's edification. He was a dignified scholar who had deep knowledge in religious affairs. A priest whose heart was inflamed with the zeal of the apostle Paul, and a mighty interpreter of the word of God, who explained the obscure, and clarified any ambiguity as regards the Bible's teaching. He was a successful preacher who lifted the hearts of believers towards the highest and inflamed them. Being an excellent apologist he had a brilliant mind. His

arguments are like the five smooth stones from David's brook used against Goliath.

He was nominated for the papal candidacy along with Archdeacon Abu-Shaker Boutros of *Al-Muallaqa* (Suspended) Church, and Dawoud Ibn-Loklok. The election battle was warm and the church was divided into many parties. However, Anba Boulos who was self-denying was not eager to take this position, but during the storm of election he was busy with his close friend Dawoud Ibn-Loklok in writing a book on the principals of religion and in arguing against those who renounced their faith. On the other hand Dawoud was very anxious to occupy this position and inflamed the battle. Because of this disaccord the papal throne remained unoccupied for nineteen and a half years. During this time all bishops of Egypt died except three. At last Dawoud was elected in June 1235, and his era was marked with mistakes that caused lots of troubles to the church, inspite of his good-education, as manifested in the church laws he issued, and his book on "Confession" which is known as, "The Teacher and The Student." Anba Boulos helped him in these works.

One of the main tasks accomplished by Pope Kyrillos Ibn-Loklok was the ordination of many eminent bishops, among whom were Anba Boulos Al-Bushy, Anba Christodolus of Damitta, Anba Yuanis of Samanud and Anda Yusab of Fuwwah who wrote "History of the Patriarchs" as a continuation of that of Sawiris Ibn-Al- Muqaffa.

Anba Boulos remained the close friend to Pope Kyrillos, helped him during his troubles as he used to calm the people who were agitated against him and gave wise advice to the Pope. He gave much attention to teaching the people, with a

spirit of true humility, thus he attracted many to the Kingdom of God.

When the mistakes of Pope Kyrillos Ibn-Loklok increased, the holy Synod assembled and appointed two of the bishops - including Anba Boulos to help him in running the affairs of the Patriarchate.

His writings still exist, but are not published till now, except some sermons (mymers) on the feasts of the Lord.

He wrote on the mystery of incarnation, spirituality, apologetical writings between Christians and Muslims, and an interpretation of the book of Revelation.

## **7. BASTAWRIUS THE MARTYR**

He was martyred during the tribulations which occurred in Pope Benjamin's (II) era, in the fourteenth century.

Some people incited the ruler against him, for his mother renounced her Christian faith and he stayed with his father. The ruler tried to lure him to renounce his faith but he refused. As he was thrown in prison a white pigeon came and settled over his head, and the prison guard informed the ruler of this incident. He was brought back to the ruler who threatened him with burning. Bastawrius remained calm and addressed the ruler with courage: "Do whatever you wish for you have authority just on my body."

He was sent to the arena where he was insulted, cursed and beaten by the mob. He endured all hardship with patience and calmness. Finally, he received the crown of martyrdom as he was beheaded. Many wonders and miracles were brought by God through the martyr's body.

---

Wallis Budge: The Ethiopic Synazarium, Cambridge 1928, p.842.

## **8. ST. BARSOUM AL-ERIAN (THE NAKED)/**

One of the saints of the thirteenth century, lived in the midst of severe troubles and tribulations, bearing a living faith, through it he not only trampled the serpents and scorpions but he also offered the comfort of the Holy Spirit to the suffering people. Moreover, God granted him the gift of performing signs and miracles.

He was born in A.D. 1257 from pious parents. His father was called "Al-Wagieh Al-Mafafal" [The Honorable], whom Queen Shagaret-Al-Dur appointed her Chief Secretary (Chief of Staff).

His parents recieved him as a divine gift, for he was the fruit of their fasting and praying. They brought him up in the fear of God and cared for his spiritual life and Bible studies. His father died followed by his mother within a year. His uncle was greedy and coveted the inheritance. Barsoum did not enter with him in a strife, remembering the words of the wise man: "Vanity of vanities all is vanity" Eccl. 1:2. Some of his relatives tried to incite him to sue his uncle but he utterly refused.

### **HIS LOVE FOR SOLITUDE**

He went out of Al-Fustat to live in a cave, bearing the heat of summer and the cold of winter, heedless to the danger of the wildness. He stayed there for five years in serious ascetic life, practising unceasing prayers and kneelings (Metanias). He used to wear only a goat-skin around his waist, therefore he was called "Al-Erian" [the Naked].

## **IN THE CAVE OF ST. MERCERIUS' CHURCH**

God guided him to a cave beside the northern entrance of St. Mercerius' Church in Old Cairo, (which is still preserved to this day). It was a huge serpent which hindered the people from descending the cave. When St. Barsoum tried to get into the cave he was prevented by the servants of the church because they feared for his life. However, he raised his hands towards heaven and prayed, then he made the sign of the cross on himself and preceded towards the serpent saying: "You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra. The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot" Ps. 91:13. God tamed the serpent and it became a companion to the saint in the cave for 20 years. He smelt the fragrance of Christ, thus the crowds came from all the cities seeking his prayers.

## **HIS AID TO THE SUFFERING PEOPLE:**

In his time, the church suffered severe tribulation towards the end of Khalil Ibn-Qalaun's rule. Churches were closed all over Egypt except Alexandria. St. Barsoum continued praying in the church and refused to put on the blue turban imposed on the copts. Some people incited the ruler against him. He ordered him to be flogged, and imprisoned him. Then he set him free. St. Barsoum then went to live on the roof of the church, offering prayers and kneelings (metanias) with tears, practising a severe ascetic life. The Divine Grace supported him and granted him the gift of performing miracles. The suffering people came to him seeking Divine comfort. Through his prayers God stopped the tribulations.

---

Al-Mahaba Bookstore: Anba Barsoum Al-Erian, Cairo, Egypt 1978 (in Arabic).



## **9. POPE MATTHEWS (MATTHEOS) I<sup>1</sup>**

Some historians consider him to be St. Mattheos the poor (Al-Meskin), from the monastery of Al-Fakhoury (the Potter), in Asfoun-Mataana, west of Esna in Upper Egypt, who was known for his friendship with the wild beasts.

As a young lad he tended the sheep, used to distribute his food among the shepherds and spend long hours in praying. When he was fourteen years old he was admitted to the monastery to practice asceticism and worship. He was ordained a priest at the age of eighteen by the bishop of that era. When he felt the honour bestowed on him he escaped to St Anthony's Monastery. He did not tell the monks there about his priesthood and served as a deacon. While he was reading the gospel, a celestial hand appeared and offered him incense three times. The elders of the monastery recognised that he would be ordained patriarch. He left vainglory and escaped to the holy land to work as a builder and practise worship during the night. The glory followed him again so he returned to St. Anthony's Monastery. He was made the abbot of this monastery when Prince Yalpogha led some of the monks, including the abbot, in humility to Cairo to avenge in them deeds of the Crusaders.

Once again he escaped from the monastery to Al-Muharraq Monastery to carry sand, work in the kitchen and serve the sick, elders and visitors. He led a life of self-denial, and had only one garment. He was exposed to many fearful wars against the devil but he conquered him. The wild beasts used to keep him company outside the monastery.

When he was chosen to be ordained patriarch he escaped hiding in the bottom of a ship, but God revealed him by a lit-

tle child. Then he cut the tip of his tongue hoping they would release him, but God cured him at once. Finally he sought the counsel of the elders of St. Anthony's monastery and accepted the ordination.

He cared for the poor, loved to give alms, and he was self-denying. He did not keep any properties to himself and distributed even his clerical vestments. He bought some crops before a famine and when it took place he distributed the crops among those who asked without any discrimination between Muslims, Jews or Christians. He used to give generously and God blessed the crops so they did not diminish.

Out of his love towards his people he used to help those who worked on the meanest jobs, at the same time he was extremely venerated. When he stood before the sanctuary his face often glowed with divine light and his eyes glittered, looking towards our Lord Christ who often appeared to him.

Because of his heavenly wisdom, people used to ask for his counsel in all their private matters. The ruler Barquq asked his advice before accepting the "*Sultanism*," and he in turn asked for the prayers of Father Markos Al-Anthony.

Sultan Barquq asked the Pope to write to the king of Ethiopia, namely "Wedom Asgar," who was a wicked person, but the Pope wrote to his older brother, David (Dawoud), and when the messengers objected because they feared the king he insisted on writing to David. On their arrival to Ethiopia they found that David became the king, he received the patriarchal letter and asked them about the two presents sent to him by the Pope, namely a cross and a handkerchief. They were astonished that he knew about these

presents, but he told them that the Pope had appeared to him in a dream and told him, what was going to happen.

A monk denounced faith and became a tyrant, as he slandered the monks to the rulers. Someone asked the Pope to curse him, but he told them that he prayed for his return to the true faith and to gift him the crown of martyrdom, and this took place.

Through his cordial relations with Sultan Barquq he stopped the mob from burning "al-Moallaqqa" church and the "Shahran" Monastery, claiming that new constructions are taking place therein. The Sultan appointed the four Judges of Islam who declared the falsehood of that claim.

Two of the Mamluks princes, Mentach and Yalpogha, banished Sultan Barquq and took the reign. Mentach inflicted severe sufferings upon the Pope who did bear them bravely, this made the prince feel ashamed of himself. Yalpogha was very severe in his persecution but the Pope sternly objected to that, and therefore the prince imprisoned him. When he wanted to behead the Pope by a sword, the Pope stretched his neck; saying: "Kill me at once." The prince was astonished and released him. Yalpogha himself was later imprisoned and died in prison in Alexandria.

When Barquq returned to his rule, the copts and the Jews came joyfully together with the muslims to welcome him. When David, the king of Ethiopia raided Aswan; the Pope sent him a bishop with a message, accompanied by a delegate from the Sultan, the king responded favourably and returned to his country.

The Pope was involved in shepherding his people, particularly the poor and sick. God granted him the gift to perform signs and miracles and to heal the sick. During the renovation of St. Mary's Church a large stone fell over a labourer and he died. The Pope prayed over his body and the Lord raised him up.

Al-Nasser Farag took the reign after his father Sultan Barquq, and behaved like him. However, a prince known as Prince Sodon plundered the palace of Al-Nasser. He was violent, and plotted with some of his followers to massacre the copts. The Pope devoted seven days to fasting and praying in St. Marcorius' Church until St. Mary appeared to him and comforted him. He came out of the church, and his face was glowing like an angel. Sodon summoned the Pope and confessed to him about the plot he intended against the Copts and then released him.

Yet the tribulations inflicted upon the Copts by Sodon's supporters became very severe. The Pope retreated to the Archangel Michael's Church resorting to fasting and prayers. He sent one of his disciples to the palace, who got to know that a horseman stabbed the prince six days ago (i.e., at the time the Pope started his retreat) and that he remained in anguish until he died.

Gamal-Al-Din, one of the Mamluks, raised troubles against the Pope and persecuted the Copts. He imposed on the Pope a tribute of five hundred thousand dinars which the people collected for him. Gamal-Al-Din continued his persecution and summoned the Pope, but the latter asked the messengers to wait till the following day. God took the Pope's soul at that night. God also did not let the Prince go unpunished, for Sultan Abd-El-Aziz Ibn Barquq was agitated

against him, arrested him and ordered the soldiers to beat him to death.

---

*I. Kmael Saleh Nakhla: Hist. of the Alexandrian Patriarchs.  
Iris Habib Al-Masry: Story of the Coptic Church, vol.3, p.330f.*

## **10. ST. RUIES**

H.H. Pope Shenouds III says the St. Ruies was a layman, never received the grace of priesthood nor lived away in the desert as a monk, but he surpassed many of those who had clerical ranks. Many patriarchs and Popes asked him to pray for them.

A boy by the name of Foraig was born in a village called "Meniet-Yamin" at the western province in the Delta Nile. He used to help his father in the farm and to sell salt on his little camel named "Ruies." He gained the love of all his fellow villagers.

### **HIS MIGRATION**

At the end of the 14th century, the Copts were subjected to great pressure to such a degree that his father denied his faith. Ruies fled to a nearby wilderness called "Sheikh wilderness." Afterwards he went to Cairo and travelled all over Egypt from far south "Quose," to far north "Alexandria" and "Damietta," bearing his camel's name "Ruies." He never ceased to tell with tears whoever he met about their salvation.

He was ascetic, who used to seive corn and give money to the needy. As he became famous, he called himself "Tegi Eflo," i.e. "the mad neighbour." It was said that once he locked himself up in a spiritual hermitage in the house of a woman called "Mother of Jacoub" in Cairo. When he got

hungry, she offered him some bread to eat, but he only ate a bit of wet pollard, which made her unhappy. He said to her: "Why do you become upset when I eat the pollard and not the bread while you ought to be sad for the sins of others? Don't you know that sin destroys the spirit, but the pollard supports the body in any case? And if the body suffers a bit, it is only to reduce sin?"

### **HIS FEAR OF GOD AND OF HIS SACRAMENTS:**

The saint used to partake of the holy Communion in fear and great hesitation, looking to himself as unworthy to partake of these holy sacraments. Once he saw the sanctuary brightly lit up and God's glory on the partakers' heads. Another time he saw the Cherubim and the Seraphim above the baptisary waving around a child who is being baptized.

He was granted many spiritual visions and performed miracles, attracting many to repentance.

### **HIS SUFFERING**

Sultan Barquq heard about him and yearned to see him. When Prince Sodon flared his tyranny against Pope Matheos, he summoned Anba Ruies and asked him about his life and deeds, but he did not utter a word. So he ordered that he should be beaten four hundred lashes until his blood flowed, but he remained silent. The soldiers paraded in the streets while they were beating him, spitting upon him, and pulling out his beard, but he remained silent. Finally they threw him in prison along with one of his disciples. The Lord of Glory appeared to them and healed them. The imprisoned Copts who were about eighty asked him to pray for them. On the same day Pope Matheos came to them in prison with the order of their release.

When Prince Yalpogha imprisoned the Pope, Anba Ruies prayed for him, and said, "St. Mary will deliver him." In fact, some of Yalpogha's opponents broke the prison's gates and released all who were inside.

Anba Ruies spent the last nine years lying on the ground because of the severity of his illness. However, during his sufferings many were granted healing through his prayers. In his illness he continued to counsel the visitors with deep spiritual advices.

One of the believers who lived close to him said about Anba-Ruies' reposal in the Lord: "I saw at that time a woman who was bright like the sun sitting behind this father, and she received his blessed soul according to his desire (which was St. Mary who might have come to help him at that moment)."

## ***THE TURKISH ERA***

---

By the time Selim I (the Turkish Sultan) seized power in Egypt in A.D. 1517 after he had conquered Toman-Bay, the era of the Mamluks "Circassians" came to an end. Selim I removed from the Mamluks the public authority and government leaving for them the regional and local authorities. The Turkish era is known for its tyranny, violence and utter destruction of the Egyptian civilization by moving the skillful artists, laborers and craftsmen to Turkey. This changed Egypt from an empire to a subordinate country subject to foreign rule, thus losing its prestige.

The Turks had two objectives: secure their authority and collect money from all Egyptians and Copts in particular, therefore, they reorganized the state as follows:

(a) The "Pasha" was given the authority to collect the tribute. His term did not last long for fear that he might seize the government. This put the Pasha in the position of money collector on account of the public welfare.

(b) The army had an independent council.

(c) The Mamluks remained to manage the affairs of the local regions and look after collecting revenue for the governing authorities and for themselves as well. Whenever the governor conveyed by "Al-Bab-Al-Ali" [the Turkish



Sultan] showed any weakness, the Mamluks held monopoly over the actual authority.

Under such circumstances Egypt survived three centuries in political disgrace, scientific and financial poverty and social inferiority to the extent that an English writer said that they (the Turks) left nothing on the map of Egypt other than the eternal pyramids.

We can imagine the situation of the Copts in such a crucial age from the following examples:

1- Sultan Soliman son of Selim the conqueror resorted to a Jewish astrologer who advised him to kill all the Nazerites in the East because they represent danger for his kingdom, but byruz Pasha the minister brought the sultan back to his senses. This happened during the time of Pope Gabriel VII (1525-1568).

The sultan imposed such huge sums of money on the non-muslims, that the Pope was obliged to flee to St. Anthony's monastery. He kept praying bitterly that God might be merciful to His people, and he passed away there.

2- Sultan Murad forced Pope Yuanis the fourteenth to pay a surtax he had to collect during his pastoral voyage for the purpose of visiting his people and collecting the tribute.

At that time the Turkish rulers tightened control over Christians in Nubia through terrorism, and relieving the people of their money. Many were obliged to immigrate, others fell martyrs and the rest denied their faith. As a result Christianity disappeared from Nubia.

3- In December 1582 Yuhanna Al-Qaliubi the monk from Anba Pishoy's monastery was martyred, when one of the governors arrested him while coming out of the monastery and tried to force him to deny his faith. When the monk refused he stabbed sharp knives into his hands and put fire into his shoulders, mounted him on a camel's back and handed him to the mob to show him around the city. At last he tied him up to a wood beam and kept torturing him until he died.

4- When Pope Matthews III was installed in 1631 somebody slandered him at Khalil Pasha's the governor that the Pope ignored him by not paying the tribute of his installation. When the Coptic archons heard of that they requested to meet the governor; so he levied on them four thousand piastres to be paid immediately. They borrowed the amount from a jew until the Pope was able to pay it back after his trip to upper Egypt.

The governor destroyed the great church at Mehalla-Al-Kubra and built a school in its place.

5- Pope Mark VI was imprisoned and the governor announced that he was the heir of any Copt. In order to inherit he killed one or two every day. His victims reached about one thousand and two hundred who were killed leaving behind them widows and orphans without any inheritance.

6- In the time of Anba Matthews IV a tax was levied on every man (Copt) getting out of home. The Copts were subject to two kinds of taxes: one, which was a small amount to be paid either to the mosques, or the Sheikh Al-Bakry

(descendent of Abu-Bakr Al- Saddiq), or to some nobles (the sadat). The second was to be paid to the sultan's coffer.

In 1664 the governor issued a decree to consolidate both taxes into one tax to be paid to the sultan. The governor would pay the share of the mosques and the nobles, then deposit the rest into the sultan's coffer after deducting his personal share. He established a fixed tax on everybody regardless of the individual capabilities, so the poor had to escape to the mountains in fear of the whip of the governor and his followers.

7- In the time of Pope Yuanis VI the governor issued a decree that every Copt should hang two sleigh bells around his neck before entering the public bath and wear a black turban. A Copt was not allowed to wear clothes made of broadcloth or wool, and the Coptic ladies had to wear black not white garments.

The Pope urges the rich to help the poor.

8- In the time of Pope Peter VI a discussion erupted in 1719 putting the country in a state of semi-civil war. In that period the Mamluks enjoyed strong influence while the governors appointed by Turkey lost their prestige. The land suffered from anarchy, looting and plundering. Everybody - Muslim or Christian felt insecure. In Alexandria the Copts fell subject to heavy fines, churches were destroyed and many had to flee from the city. This situation remained for 78 years until the French Campaign came to Egypt. Periods of stability were very rare and lasted for short.

9- In the days of Pope Mark VIII, although Hassan Pasha the Turkish designee was busy fighting the Mamluks

especially Murad Bey and Ibrahim Bey, he issued very harsh decrees against the Copts. He ordered any copts not wearing the clothes designed for the Copts to be stoned.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH OF ROME AND THE WESTERN CHURCHES**

Every Copt yearns from all his heart for the unity of churches on the basis of unity of faith. Unfortunately during that rough period in which Egypt in general and the Copts in particular suffered under the Ottoman rule, Rome played a painful role. She seized every opportunity to benefit from the degradation and hardships that surmounted the Coptic Church as a chance to impose Copts to accept Rome's leadership. Pretending to play the role of saviour and helper if the Coptic Church do resign, an attitude that the Copts in general did not comply with. For example:

1. In the Mamluks' era, the relations between Egypt and Ethiopia deteriorated badly. The Mamluks refused to let the Pope contact the church in Ethiopia or install a bishop for her. Rome seized that opportunity and installed a Catholic Portuguese bishop and named him "Patriarch of Alexandria"; yet King Gladius stopped him. The attempt to affiliate Ethiopia to Rome was repeated more than once during the hard times the Coptic Church went through.

2. In the time of Pope Gabriel VII the Pope of Rome sent messengers to Alexandria suggesting the affiliation under his patronage. Pope Gabriel met them with benevolence and affirmed his strict adherence to the faith of his fathers.

3. In the time of Pope Yuanis XIV the same thing was repeated. The Jesuit monks dispatched by Rome assured that Rome would not ask Egypt to give up her faith, offering many attractive promises. A council was convened in February 1583 in Manf but it split into two camps. Some considered joining up with Rome but the majority refused the principle ecclesiastically and nationally regardless of how severe the persecution was. The matter was again repeated in the epoch of Pope Gabriel VIII.

4. In the time of Pope Yuanis VI certain people from the west tried to gain favours from Al-Bab-Al-Ali (the sultan) concerning the holy land on account of the Orthodox Church. This matter happened repeatedly.

5. In the Turkish Era the system of "foreign privileges" came to existence. No foreigner had to pay taxes no matter how much income he earned. A foreigner was exempted from standing in-front of the Egyptian courts even if he committed crimes. This happened while Copt suffered from heavy taxes and fines regardless of his limitations, and bore the burden of anguish guilt. Besides, money poured forth from aboard on foreigners to attract the Copts to abandon their church.

6. The missionaries built schools and offered some to travel to Rome to complete their studies like Roufail Al-Toukhi whom they promised to become bishop over Arsino (al-Fayoum). But the Pope of Rome called on him to stay there for the rest of his life and work on printing Coptic prayer books after making some alterations to agree with the Catholic faith.

Twelve young men were brought to Rome where Roufail received them and taught them to invite their families to adopt Catholicism. He was the first catholic bishop to be installed over the Catholic Copts in 1741 by the name of Athanasius. He resided in Jerusalem and appointed a general representative for the whole of Egypt.

7. In the time of Anba Yuanis XVIII the Pope of Rome invited him for affiliation.

✠✠✠

## ***COPTIC PERSONALITIES DURING THE OTTOMAN ERA***

---

### **1. POPE MATTHEOS (MATTHEW) IV**

He was called Guirguis. He descended from a pious and rich family. He was educated in the Kettab (a school attached to the church), and became a monk in the Scetis wilderness. After six years he saw in a dream that his parents were sad because they did not know his whereabouts. After consulting the fathers, he went to visit his parents. They were glad to see him and wished to see him married, but he fled back to the monastery. His parents realized his wish in the monastic life and were comforted.

He was much liked by the monks, who chose him as their spiritual father and he was ordained priest. He was faithful and vigilant as being their shepherd. He was elected as pope of Alexandria on the 3rd of Hator 1376 (1660 A.D.), and became a great support for his people during the tribulations which the rulers inflicted on them.

Once a Copt did a favor to the ruler, and started collecting taxes from the Copts in additions to the required tax. The Pope admonished him to stop that cruelty, and when he disobeyed he was excommunicated and died in bad circumstances shortly after.

A lady went to the Pope complaining of her husband who married another woman. The Pope called the man and the

second wife and exhorted them, but the woman replied that she had conceived and could not separate from him. The Pope answered earnestly: "The Lord Christ discerns the truth from the false," and then he kept silent. As soon as the woman returned, the fetus was aborted and people were filled with God's fear.

Some of the rebellions went to St. Mercerius' church aiming at destroying it. They requested the "Dewan" [the government office] to appoint an "Agha" [a responsible man] to facilitate and assist them in their vicious play. The pope had no resource other than the Heavenly Father, and he spent the night in vigilance and prayers. The rebellions stayed overnight beside the church planning to commence their work at dawn. However, the wall of the adjacent house fell on them and they all died. Then no one else ventured to destroy the church. One of the known writings of Pope Mattheos IV is an essay, with an upright orthodox mind, about the "Divine presence in the Eucharist."

When He felt that the end of his sojourn on the earth was near he went to pray near the tomb of the popes in the church of Abi-Seffin (St. Mercerius), and was heard saying: "Open and allow me to dwell among brothers."

During his era, Vansleb<sup>1</sup>, a Dominican monk, visited Egypt and wrote "History of the Coptic Church," in which he recorded his observations about the Coptic ecclesiastical life. He carried with him 300 manuscripts.

Also during his era some of the Venicians stole the icon of the Archangel Michael from St. Mark's church in Alexandria and took it to the ship on their way to Europe, but the ship



could not sail until they returned the icon to its place. It was said that the icon was one of St. Luke's work.

1. Also known as J.M. Wansleben, a German traveler, visited Egypt first in 1664, then in 1672, and in 1673. His works were published in Paris in 1677, under the title: "*Histoire de l'eglise d'Alexandrie fonfee' per S. Marc., que nous appelons celle des jacobites - Coptes d'Egypte, Ecrites au Caire meme en at 1673.*"

## **2. MUALLEM RIZK (RIZK AGHA)**

He was one of the prominent Coptic personalities of the eighteenth century. He had knowledge in ecclesiology, mathematics and astronomy. Ali-Bey Al-Kabir, the ruler at that time depended on him and appointed him as his vizier (minister).

When Bruce, an English traveler, visited Egypt on his way to Ethiopia, the Port authorities thought that what he was carrying of astronomical and geographical instruments were military equipments, thus they confiscated them. However, Muallem Rizk released the materials and learnt how to use them. The traveler tried to reward the vizier but he refused his gifts. Moreover the vizier honored the traveler as his own guest<sup>1</sup>.

He was the source of great comfort to the Copts. In spite of his loyalty to the ruler he was assassinated by Abu-Al-Dahab and his body was kept hanging at Zewela's gate for two days and nobody dared to bring him down for burial.

---

1. Kamel Saleh Nakhla: *His. of the Coptic Nation, p.140-1 (in Arabic).*

### **3. ANBA YUSAB AL-ABAHH**

He was born in Al-Nekhela, South of Abu-Teeg in Upper Egypt and was educated in the "kettab" annex to the church. He was inflamed by divine love and earnestly desired the celibate life. At the age of 25 he went to the city of Bush where the abbot of St. Anthony's monastery lived. He was admitted to the monastery and he devoted his life to worship along with continuous reading and study, and a sincere desire of serving his brothers. He was ordained priest, then protopriest without changing his name "Youssef."

Pope Yuanis XVIII asked for him and wanted to ordain him bishop. He was ordained bishop on the Bishopric of Akhimin and Girga, under the name of "Anba Yusab."

His predecessor was Anba Antonius who sided with Catholicism and the people revolted against him. The ruler became doubtful and ordered his imprisonment until the French Consul intervened on his behalf and he was released. However, he could not bear the fact that his people neglected him and denounced his actions, and he left to Rome.

Anba Yusab visited his people and explained to them the orthodox dogmas and erased the confusion caused by Anba Antonius.

When the Pope of Rome requested the Alexandrian Pope to join under the former's authority, the Pope of Alexandria asked Anba Yusab to explain to Rome the Orthodox dogmas.

Many books, letters and articles were written by this bishop, although he related some of them to Pope Yuanis as a kind of humility and self-denial.

#### **4. MUALLEM IBRAHIM AL-GAWHARY1**

He was born in the eighteenth century of poor, humble and pious parents. He was known for being diligent. His father, Yousef Al-Gawhary, was a tailor in Qalioub. He was educated in the "Kettab" of his town and mastered writing and mathematics since his early boyhood. He used to transcribe the religious books and present them to Pope Yuanis XVIII (107th Pope). The Pope was pleased with his piety and zeal, drew him near to himself, and used to say to him, "May the Lord exalt your name, bless your work and preserve your remembrance for ever."

He started his work as a scribe for a Mamluk prince. The Pope intervened on his behalf to Muallem Rizk, the Chief Scribe of Ali Bey Al-Kabir who took him as his private scribe, and he remained in this task until the end of Ali Bey Al-Kabir's rule. Then he employed him in his service. When Mohamed Bey Abu-Al- Dahab took over the rule, Muallem Rizk left his position and was succeeded by Muallem Ibrahim. The latter's star began to glitter until he became the Chief Scribe for the whole of Egypt at the time of Ibrahim Bey, a post which nowadays is equivalent to that of the prime minister. This position increased his humbleness, humility and generosity, and all the hearts of Egyptians were attracted to him.

#### **HIS TRIBULATIONS**

He had a son named Yousef and a daughter named Demiana. The former died after his father had arranged a fully equipped house in preparation for his marriage. The

parent's souls became bitter to the extent that the father locked the door and demolished the stairs so that no one enters his son's house. However, this bitterness changed to a strong desire for helping the widows and orphans and comforting the grieved and the afflicted. St. Anthony appeared to Ibrahim and his wife one night and comforted them.

A coup did take place in the ruling regime, and Hassan Pasha Qaptan came to Egypt sent by the Sultan. He fought Ibrahim Bey and Murad Bey who were compelled to flee to Upper Egypt along with Ibrahim Al-Gawhry and some of their princes and scribes. Qaptan Pasha looted the palaces of the "Bey's," princes and sheikhs and persecuted the Christians and took the properties of Muallem Ibrahim, those of his family and all he had endowed to the churches and monasteries.

His wife fled and hid in the house of Hassan Agha of Ali Bey, but some people informed the Pasha about her. He summoned her and she guided him to her properties. Her daughter Damiana was also brought before the Pasha and she asked him to give her sometime to present her case. She gathered some of the poor and needy and presented them to the Pasha saying: "All my father's wealth is in the bellies and bodies of these people," and it seemed that the Pasha was somewhat impressed by this conduct and did not harm her.

Ibrahim Bey and Mourad Bey returned to Cairo on August 7, 1791, and with them Muallem Ibrahim. The latter was much loved by the rulers and the people who used to call him "Sultan of the Copts," this was shown in an old inscription on an Iconstasis of a church in Anba Paul's

monastery in the eastern desert, and also in a "Lectionary (Katamaris)" which is kept in the same monastery.

The well-known historian Al-Gabarty writes about Muallem Ibrahim: [He surpassed all his country men in attaining glory, authority and a great fame for a long period. He was consulted in the major and minor problems for he was one of the brilliant men of his time. He had a good memory even even for the finest details. He used to cover the weaknesses of everybody, and the people hearts were attracted by love towards him. At the beginning of the month of "Ramadan" [the month of fasting for the Muslims] he used to send candles and gifts to the prominent Muslim people as well as others who were not well known. During his time, the churches and monasteries flourished and he endowed on them many properties and lands. Besides, he arranged considerable amounts of money and grains to be sent regularly to them.]

Anba Yusab Al-Abahh of Guirga and Akhmim said about him that he loved everybody regardless of his religion, was a peace-maker who, fulfilled the needs of many without discrimination and executed justice.

Through his good relations with the authorities in Egypt and Turkey he obtained favourable decrees (firmons) concerning the building and renovations of churches. He offered much of his properties and endowments to the churches and monasteries, and payed attention to the transcription of many religious books at his expense and offered them to churches.

## **HIS MODESTY**

One day his brother, Guirguis, came complaining of some of youth who insulted him on his way home, and he asked Muallem Ibrahim to take an action against them through his authority. The answer was that he would cut their tongues. The next day while he was walking along the same route he found himself being much loved and honoured by the same youth. When he inquired about what happened, Muallem Ibrahim told him that he sent them many gifts and thus he cut their tongues, and they abstained from pronouncing evil.

He used to pray in St. Mary's Church in Haret Zewela. One day he was in a hurry and sent to the protopriest Ibrahim Al- Asphoury one of his contemporary scholars saying: "The Muallem tells you to hast and to start the prayers early so that he can be in time for the "Diwan (The government office)." The priest answered, "The Muallem (Master) in heaven is One, and the church is God's and not of anybody else; if he is not happy let him build another church." Muallem Ibrahim accepted the answer with neither fury nor anger. He considered this as a voice of God to built a church on the name of St. Merceruis Abu-Sefein in the northern side of St. Mary's Church. The priest came to congratulate him saying, "Thank God who made your dissatisfaction a cause for building another church and thus your heavenly inheritance and good deeds had increased."

## **HIS LONGING FOR SERVING OTHERS**

Muallem Ibrahim returned after the Easter liturgy at midnight and found his house in darkness. When he asked his wife about the cause, she answered, "How could we be joyous and celebrate the feast of Light that shone through the empty tomb, while the wife of an imprisoned Copt and her children are in need of food and clothes?!" She added,

"God helped me, I went to Muallem Fanous' wife, whose husband succeeded in procuring his release." Muallem Ibrahim used his influence to release the imprisoned man and he put on the lights and celebrated the feast, together with the man and his family. What is more astonishing is that when Muallem Ibrahim offered this man a job, he told Muallem Ibrahim that he had a friend who was in more need of this job. The Muallem was very delighted by the man's openness of heart and love, and offered another job to his friend.

### **LOVE THAT CONQUERS DEATH**

Muallem Ibrahim departed in the Lord in the 15th of Bashans 1511 (31st May, 1795). The ruler of Egypt, Prince Ibrahim Bey was grieved as he esteemed him very much. He attended his funeral service, and Pope Yuanis delivered the obituary.

His life did not end by death. It was said that a man used to come, perhaps from another city, asking financial help at regular intervals. When he came to the Muallem's house and knew that he died he was deeply grieved. He went to his tomb and wept bitterly until he slept from weariness. Muallem Ibrahim appeared to him in a vision and said to him, "Do not weep! Mr. N. the merchant of oil (el-Zayat) in Boulaq owed me ten golden coins (Bondoga). Go to him, give him my greetings and ask him for the money and he will hand the coins to you." When the man woke up, he felt ashamed to go to El-Zayat. At night, Muallem Ibrahim appeared to him again in a vision and asked him to do as he was told. He hesitated again, and for the third time he said to him "Do not have inquietude, go as I told you and I will inform him about the matter." The poor man rose up and went without mentioning anything to El-Zayat. The latter asked him to recount what happened, and when he informed

him, he said "You said the truth because Muallem Ibrahim appeared to me too and told me about the message he gave you. Take what I owed him, and an additional equivalent amount from me."

## **LOVE WITHOUT FANATICISM**

Tawfik Eskaros tells us in his book, "The prominent and famous Copts of the nineteenth century," that a Syrian Orthodox family from Aleppo continued to celebrate a holy liturgy of Eucharist (Mass) in the name of Muallem Ibrahim. It happened that their head of the family suffered a severe tribulation and lost his properties in Aleppo. So he went to Egypt where Muallem Ibrahim took care of him and managed to support his trade. The Lord helped him, he succeeded and collected a vast fortune then went back to his family recounting what Copts had done to their good. Since then, they dedicated a yearly liturgy of Eucharist in his name in acknowledgement of his favour.

---

*1. Fr. Malaty: Dict. of the Fathers of the Church and her saints, 1986, vol. 1 (in Arabic).*



## ***THE FRENCH EXPEDITION***

---

Although the French expedition lasted for a very short period (AD 1798-1801), it played an important role in the history of the Copts.

Napoleon Bonaparte, the son of the French Revolution, came to Egypt for the establishment of a Middle Eastern empire under the pretext of the defence of Islam. At the walls of Alexandria Napoleon said: "We are not the atheists of the barbarian ages who came to attack your faith. We acknowledge the splendour of your faith, and we will accept your religion at the time when the mature French people become true believers." Thus he gained every chance to declare his favours toward Muslims and Islam. Shortly after conquering Egypt, one month before entering Alexandria, he gave orders to celebrate the "Prophet's (Mohamed) Birthday" in an exceeding way to attract the Muslims' attention. Muslims realised that Napoleon was atheist in his innermost, though he had put on eastern clothes and a turban. Then he accompanied all his generals along with hundred sheikhs (Muslims' pastors), and went to the main mosque to recite religious songs (Tawasheeh) and moved his head in pretended piety.

Bonaparte felt that Muslims accepted his reign unwillingly and were waiting for a chance to get rid of him. This was apparent from the revolution that erupted against him in "Al-Azher" mosque in Cairo, where large numbers of the French and their supporters from the Muslims and Copts were killed

. Bonaparte forgave the revolutionaries, and inspite of this when the Ottoman force occupied Abuqir's castle (near Alexandria) the Muslims expressed their joy. Napoleon defeated the Ottomans, and when the Muslims' sheikh and leaders came to congratulate him pretentiously, he said to them: [I am amazed of your sorrow for my victory. Till now you can't appreciate my stand towards you, even though I have repeated to you that I am Muslim, that I believe there is only One God and that I love your prophet and the Muslims]. He continued to show his sincerity but they continued to look at him as an atheist who commanded an army of atheists.

Bonaparte tried to gain the Muslims' favour by all means. On the other hand he did not persecute the Copts, maybe because he gained the fraternity spirit from the French Revolution, or because he needed their experience in collecting the revenues. However, he did not grant the Copts any rights that are worth mentioning. He wrote in August 22, 1799 to General Kleber: "I intended, if everything took its normal path, to set a new system for tax-collecting which would have made the services of the Copts dispensable." He might have wanted to collect higher sums of taxes, more than that the Copts used to collect, or he might have wanted to please the Muslims populace to accept him as their leader.

We can say that Napoleon did not persecute the Copts, but he was not a friend to them, and he sought to substitute them with Europeans so as to collect the taxes.

The Copts did request Bonaparte to delete the restrictions which were put on them. He sent a letter, dated December 7, 1799, to "Muallem (Master) Guirgis Al-Gawhary" in which he mentioned: "You can inform them that from now on they

are allowed to carry weapons, ride mules and horses, put on turbans, and get dressed in suitable clothes<sup>1</sup>." However, Bonaparte retracted his short lived plan and ordered the continuation of the restrictions taking into consideration the feelings of the Islamic majority and ignoring the Coptic minority<sup>2</sup>.

The French started to give attention to the Copts only in Kleber's reign when the second revolution took place in Cairo against the French. At that time, the restrictions against the Copts were stricken out<sup>3</sup>. However, after Kleber assassination, leadership was taken up by Mino who converted to Islam in order to marry a Muslim woman<sup>4</sup>. He became harsh with the Copts and fired them from the government jobs and tax-collection<sup>5</sup>.

The story concerning "Muallem" Yaqub (Jacob) Hanna, who seemed to be an ally of the French as he was appointed leader of Klebers army, was obscure, and many could not understand his intention. The majority of Muslim historians did not doubt his patriotism and he was not accused of being a traitor. Truly, he was the first voice to come out of Egypt calling for her independence from the Ottoman empire. He made his utmost to create a patriotic Egyptian army. The French felt the need, for him so they liked him and depended on him. Likewise, he liked them and did not betray them. However, his motive was not to request their occupation but to seek the independence of his country. He saw in the French occupation an opportunity to be separated from the Ottoman. He fought with the French against the Memluks in Upper Egypt, seeking the independence of his country. The French granted him the rank of "General."

When the French signed a treaty in A.D. 1801, leaving Cairo in the hands of the Turks, Muallem Yaqub preferred to leave Egypt, and was going to France on a British battleship "Pallas." He was carrying with him a plan for Egypt's independence. The essence of the plan was that the opposing interests of the great European countries, particularly France and England, required the independence of Egypt so that all the European countries could benefit from trade<sup>6</sup>. However, the death of Yaqub during his sea trip buried his plan with him.

---

1. Tawfik Iskaros: *Illustrious and Eminent Copts in the 19th century*, 1913, p.290.

2. Riad Sorial: *The Coptic Society in the 17th century*, 1984, p.103.

3. *Ibid*, p.103.

4. Abdel Rahman El-Rafae: *The History of Nationalism*, 1958, 2nd Ed. p.197.

5. Yacoub Nakhla Rafail: *The History of the Coptic Nation*, 1988, p.295.

6. cf.: Riad Sorial, p.95-101 Shfik Gobrial: *General Yacoub and Laskarious & Egypt Independence Project in 1801*, 1932, p.41-51. Dr. Ahmed Ezat Abdel-Karim: *Research in the Egyptian History*, 1942. Dr. Mohamed Sabry: *Egypt Mordern History*, 1926, p.29. Ahmed Zaky Badawy: *History of the Egyptian Society*, 1935, p.209.

# ***COPTIC PERSONALITIES FROM THE ERA OF THE FRENCH EXPEDITION***

---

## **1. GENERAL YAQUB**

The name of General Yaqub is associated with the French expedition. Before this expedition he was an assistant scribe (director of finances) for Soliman Bey, one of the influential Mamluks. He was well-known for the financial and administrative circles, and was a master horseman. Hence, he became a man of great fortune. He joined up with Murad Bey in the battle of Manshiya near Assuit where he conquered their enemy. When the French expedition started, he wanted to support it temporarily in order to deliver Egypt from the Ottoman rule. He joined up with Desaix in his war against the Mamluks in upper Egypt and he conquered them with a lot of courage and because of his acquaintance with the Egyptian roads and means of communication. The army of Desaix was called in Upper-Egypt: "The Army of Muallem Yaqub."

His aim was the liberation and the independence of Egypt. He set a plan for independence which he yearned to present to Britain and France, but he died on his way to Europe.

## **2. ANTOUN ABU-TAKIA (ANTHONY THE HEADRESS HOLDER)**

He was called "Abu-Takia," "The Headdress holder," because his father was a merchant of headdress "takias,"

Egyptian hats were used by the majority of Egyptians, but now usually used only in villages.

It is said that he was called "Abu-Takia" because when Napoleon visited him at the end of 1799 and he was in financial need, Muallem Antoun took off his headdress (hat), filled it with gold coins and offered it to him. He was highly appreciated by Napoleon, who appointed him in outstanding positions. But since he treated all the Egyptians mercifully in collecting taxes, the French arrested and imprisoned him in the citadel until he pays all taxes appointed on the Country, and he paid it from his own money.

When the French left Egypt, Mohamed Ali arrested him and put him to death in 1802, along with another two high ranking Copts, namely Muallem Ibrahim Zeidan and Muallem Adb-Alla Barakat, and sold their possessions in a public auction.

In 1853, his grandson, Muallem Ibrahim Awad, went to Paris and asked Napoleon III to remit the money which his grandfather gave to Napoleon I. However, Napoleon III answered him that what "Abu-Takia" has paid was a tax on behalf of the Copts, and gave Ibrahim Awad the travel expenses only.

---

*1. Rev. Mennasa Yuhanna: Hist. of the Coptic Church, 1983, p.490-1 (in Arabic).*

### **3. MUALLEM MALATY**

He was a scribe to Ayoub Bey the Defterdar (i.e., the Minister of Finance at that time), who was one of the Mamluks of Mohammed Bey Abu-El-Dahab. The Coptic

cathedral of Al-Azbakia was built in the property of Muallems Malaty and Yaqub.

When the French Expedition came and Ayoub Bey was conquered, Muallem Malaty remained in his house. After sometime, Bonaparte appointed him the president of the commission instituted for local justice, which had twelve members, six were Muslim business men and six of them were Copts. The president, Muallem Malaty liked all, Muslims and Copts.

Before the withdrawal of the French from Egypt , Mino was converted to Islam to win the Muslims' favour. He fired the Copts, among whom was Muallem Malaty. When the Turks returned to Egypt's rule, they arrested him, beheaded him and threw his head at Zewela's gate where it remained for two days, nobody dared to bury it. The Turks confiscated his home and belongings, but his biography still remains witnessing his love for his country.

## ***THE NINETEENTH CENTURY***

---

### **MOHAMMED ALI PASHA**

I am not in a position to evaluate the works of Mohammed Ali Pasha who saved Egypt from the troubles of the Memluks and the Turks, by leading the movement of Egypt's independence of the Ottoman empire. He was supported by many Egyptians, among them was Rizk Agha, the grandson of Muallem (Master) Rizk the chief of Ali Bey's mint. Therefore, Mohammed Ali appointed Rizk a governor on the Sharquia province, among some Copts who were appointed governors on other provinces.

In spite of his care for developing agriculture and all the other resources of the country, Mohammed Ali Pasha prevented every private property, considering himself the only owner of cultivated land, and he monopolized commerce and industry. Afterwards he created a class of landlords, namely members of his family, his government and his supporters from the Turks and Circassians. He rarely gave a Copt some of these dominions.

Mohammed Ali was greedy and requested more and more taxes. Muallem (Master) Girgis opposed this trend but Muallem Ghali fulfilled Mohammed Ali's desire. The former sensed the danger and fled to Upper Egypt, while the latter was appointed the chief-supervisor. At the end, Mohammed Ali's increasing greed led to the firing and the imprisonment of Ghali, then his exile to Damietta. In 1822, Ibrahim Pasha killed Ghali in Zafta. This was due to a forged letter which



was written by Muallem Francis, in Mohammed Ali's name, to Leo XII of Rome, asking him to appoint Ibrahim Kashour an Archbishop over Memphis in return for putting the Copts under his papacy. This letter came as a consequence to a dispute that took place between Francis and Maximius (the Catholic bishop) over a divorce case.

Mohammed Ali sent to console Basilius, Ghali's son, for his father's death. Basilius bent to kiss the Pasha's hand, saying: "May God prolong your rule, for as long as you are alive I consider myself one who hasn't lost his father," and so Mohammed Ali appointed him his father's former position.

By the conversion of Ghali, his son, his brother and their families and their followers to Catholicism, the Catholic Church had her roots in Egypt.

It is worthy to note that the Copts were forbidden from having the honour of military service during Mohammed Ali's rule and consequently also prevented from entering government schools which Mohammed Ali established for military purposes.

Therefore, he did not send any Copt to educational missions to Europe. Although some Christian names were found among the later missions, however they were not Copts.

History testifies that Copts remained faithful to their country even during the darkest ages. This was clear when the Ceasar of Russia sent his delegate to the Coptic church, offering to Pope Boutros (Peter) El-Gawli Caesar's protection to the Orthodox. The Pope asked the prince: "Does your Ceasar live forever?" When the prince answered

that he would die like all human beings, the Pope told him that the Coptic Church was under the protection of the Great God whom she would not substitute<sup>1</sup>. The prince admired the Pope's faith and his patriotism, and said, "I am not moved by the greatness of the pyramids and their height, nor by the height of the obelisks and their inscriptions, indeed, the numerous antiques of the ancient Egyptians, their inscriptions and workmanship did not excite my soul as much as the example which I saw (in the Pope)<sup>2</sup>." When Mohammed Ali heard about the incident, he considered this action from the side of the Pope to be an honour to himself and to the Copts, and hurried to thank the Pope. The latter said to him, "Do not thank someone who fulfilled his duty toward his country which embraces him and his brothers in the same nationality and patriotism." The tears flew from Mohammed Ali's eyes, and the church enjoyed freedom and peace.

Zahra Pasha, Mohammed Ali's daughter and the wife of Ahmed Bey El-Defterdar, was possessed with an evil spirit and the physicians could not cure her. On the recommendation of some people from the royal palace, Mohammed Ali asked the Pope for help. The Pope sent to him Anba Sarapamon of Menoufia who exorcized the evil spirit by praying.

During the reign of Mohammed Ali, his son Ibrahim Pasha called Pope Boutros and asked him about the light that shines out of the holy tomb of Christ on Saturday of the Holy Week. Ibrahim pasha asked to accompany Pope Boutros to Jerusalem to see what happens. When they arrived, Pope Boutros told him that the Roman Orthodox Patriarch is accustomed to enter the tomb for praying before the light's emission, and they were allowed to enter together. The crowd were let out of the church of the Resurrection

and the door was closed. As the two Patriarchs were praying fervently that God may save His church, the light emitted from the Holy tomb, went around the church and split on the left side of the entrance and was seen by all the crowd.

Ibrahim Pasha was known for his love to Egypt and the Egyptians, and he was loved by both, Muslims and Christians. He used to speak only the Arabic language. Since he was asked by one of the soldiers why was he against the Turks although he was one of them, he answered, "I am not a Turk. I came to Egypt as a young lad, and her sun made me Egyptian and changed my blood..." Ibrahim ruled Egypt only for a few months at the end of his father's reign.

### **SAID PASHA'S ERA**

Said Pasha did renew the freedom of worship, in contrary to his predecessor Abbas I who prohibited the Copts from building new churches or even renovating the old ones, and also neglected education in general.

During Said's reign, the tribute was lifted up from the Copts and this was proclaimed as a law (firman) in 1855. He also ordered the recruiting of the Copts to the army. This order was abused, as they recruited many Copts who were the only bread-winners in their families, and some of the Copts suffered persecution in the army service to renounce their faith.

Pope Kyrillos (Cyril) IV was ordained one year before the beginning of Said's rule, and so he had a chance to practise many progressive efforts, in the spiritual, educational and social fields. One of his patriotic stands was his role in settling the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia.

When the pope requested the emperor of Ethiopia to cast out the English missionaries, they put agent provocateur between the Pope and the emperor on one hand, and between Said and the Pope on the other hand<sup>3</sup>, and this ended by poisoning the Pope and his reposal in the Lord.

### **KHEDIVE ISMAIL PASHA'S ERA**

When Ismail Pasha saw that Pope Demetrius II has great zeal for spreading the education like his predecessor, Pope Kyrillos IV, he granted him 1500 acres of land for building Coptic Schools. He also helped the Pope in opposing the Protestant missionaries, maybe because he thought that they would publicise the oppression of the Egyptian peasants in Europe.

When the Protestant denominations attacked the Coptic Church and burnt the icons, Pope Demetrius complained about this act to the Khedive who exiled them. However, the consuls of America and England protected them from being punished.

Ismail Pasha is considered to be the most tolerant ruler of Mohammed Ali's family. He appointed the Copt Wasif Bey Azmi his chief-protocol, and Abd-Allah Bey Serour governor of Qalubia province. He renewed the recruitment of the Copts in the army service in regularity.

When the Khedive discussed with Nubar Pasha the election of members of the "House of Representatives" he said to him: "We have also Copts among the elected. We have opened the doors for Muslims and Copts without discrimination." Among the members of the "House of Representatives" in 1866 there were two Copts: Girgis Barsoum, Mayor of Beni-Salama, and Mkhail Salama,

Mayor of Ashrouba. As we said before there was almost no class at the time of Mohamed Ali because of the monopolization of all sources. Personal ownership started only with Said's regulation in 1858, but it was incomplete until Khedive Ismail opened the door for everybody to work and to own lands. The Copts seized this opportunity and gave attention to commence, particularly with the Sudan, and made great fortunes. Tadros Al- Mankabady in 1884 established an incorporated company in Assuit, to deal with household equipments. From its tithes a land was bought and dedicated to the Coptic School of Assuit. He also promoted the idea of "Savings" in 1890 before it was adopted by the Post Office. In 1896 Wisa Boctor's family established a factory for extraction and refinement of sugar from sugarcane, and bought most of the shares of "Fayoum Train Co." Boushra Bey and Senout Bey established a bank in Upper-Egypt to protect the merchants from the greedy moneylenders. High orders were given that some Copts were to be appointed judges.

As far as the Cabinet is concerned, no Coptic minister was appointed (in the 19th century) until Khedive Abbas' era, when Boutros Ghali Pasha was appointed and remained the only Coptic minister until 1910. Nevertheless, Abbas' era was severe for the Copts as he hated Christianity and expelled many of the Copts from civil service. He requested the Coptic Supervisors (in Revenue Department) to train young Muslim students to take over their places, threatening that if they did not accomplish this within a year they would be thrown into the Nile. Some supervisors noticing after one or two months that the students were not apt for learning and practising the job, were preparing themselves to face death. However, the marvellous hand of God rescued them

because before the end of the year Abbas fell dead in his palace in 1854<sup>4</sup>.

During the era of Tawfik Pasha, who succeeded Ismail Pasha in 1879, a delegation from the Ethiopian emperor visited Egypt and presented valuable gifts to the Khedive and the Pope, asking the Khedive for continuation of the friendly relationship between the two countries.

### **ORABIN REVOLUTION**

The army, which included Muslims and Copts, supported Orabi in his attempt to cast away the foreign influence and stop Khedive Tawfik's tyranny. When the Khedive ordered his dismissal, Arabi asked the Copt Yaqub to call for convening the General Assembly which was held at the ministry of the External Affairs on Saturday July12, 1882. The meeting was attended by about 500 of the prominent Egyptians. At their forefront were the Sheikh of Al-Azher and Pope Kyrillos V, supporting Orabi. At the populace level both Copts and Muslims offered supplies, and donations flowed to support the army against the British overrun.

The mob in Alexandria committed a great massacre during which the Christians suffered all kinds of tortures. Some of the Christians from all denominations took refuge in the patriarchate, but the majority of Christians were forced to leave Alexandria. Thus, Orabi's revolution took a religious attitude.

At the same time, the Mahdi's Revolution took place in Sudan, and before it ended, the Copts fled to Egypt, and the bishop of Sudan and some of the priests and laymen who could not escape were forced to deny their faith and many were martyred<sup>6</sup>.

- 
1. *Ramzy Tadrous: The Copts in the 20th century, 1911, 1st Ed. p.50.*
  2. *Tawfik Eskarous: III.*
  3. *Riad Sorial: The Coptic Society in Egypt in the 19th century, 1984, p.106.*
  4. *Ibid. p.65.*
  5. *Fr. Menasa Yohana: History of the Coptic Church, 1979, p.610.*
  6. *Ibid., p 610.*



# ***COPTIC PERSONALITIES IN THE 19TH CENTURY***

---

## **1. POPE KYRILLOS (CYRIL) IV**

### **FATHER OF THE COPTIC REFORM**

Pope Kyrillos IV (110th) the greatest Coptic person in the 19th century, led a strong and large state spiritual, scientific and social movement, therefore he is known as the "Father of the Coptic Reform." He established many schools. He opened the first girl's college in Egypt, preceding even the government in female education. He imported the first national printing press from Italy and on its arrival at Alexandria he ordered an impressing official reception of deacons in ecclesiastical vestments chanting hymns all the way from Cairo station to the Patriarchate. He asked Said Pasha the Khedive of Egypt at that time to permit the Copts to be recruited to the army like the Muslims, so that the Copts might not feel that they are foreigners, while they live in their own country. According to Said Pasha's wish he went to Ethiopia to make a reconciliation between the Khedive and Theodore II, Negus (emperor) of Ethiopia. Said was jealous of the Pope's success and he planned to get rid of him by putting poison in his coffee. The Pope accompanied with the Roman Orthodox Patriarch and the American Orthodox Patriarch went to the city of Bush to visit St. Anthony's Monastery in the eastern desert. The English Consul slandered against the Pope saying that the three patriarchs met in the monastery to ask the protection of Russia for the



Orthodox Churches of Egypt. Said Pasha asked the Pope to return immediately to meet him, but the Pope ignored him and continued his trip. On his return he met the Khedive, and in his palace he knew that they had put poison in the coffee for him, as he understood the Turkish language. He refused to drink then, but Said Pasha succeeded in poisoning him through his medication, in January 1862.

This great reformer believed in the importance of education. He opened schools to all students, Muslims and Christians without discrimination<sup>1</sup>, and to all nationalities, and made education free in these schools. He even distributed books and stationery without charge. Outstanding professors were appointed to teach Arabic, Coptic, English, French, Italian, Turkish as well as the usual subjects of an academic curriculum. He was very generous with professors who were Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese, Italian and English. He used to be present among the students and to enter in dialogues with them.

Beside the scientific subject he took care of the students' talents, encouraging them to practise playing music, hymns, chanting, painting pictures etc. He set a chorus for chanting hymns.

The Church teachers (*Muallems*), who were often blind, and were teaching children in special schools (*Katateeb*) attached to the church, became agitated, making rumors about the schools which the Pope opened, accusing these schools of being sources of atheism. The Pope did not resist them but kindly met them and granted them monthly stipend as compensation for closing their "*Katateeb*," and asked them to teach in the primary schools.

He also established a national public library in the Coptic School of Cairo.

---

*J. Rev. Shenouda Hanna: Who are the Copts? 1955, p.288*

## **2. POPE DEMETRIUS II (11TH POPE)**

He was ordained in 1863, during Said Pasha's era. After his ordination, he met the Khedive who honored him, and said: "Don't be like your predecessor; ask me directly for all your needs and I will realize them." Perhaps he meant that his predecessor, Pope Kyrillos IV did not return when he summoned him but continued his trip to the monastery then he came after the trip was over.

When the Western missions saw the good relations between the Khedive and the Pope, the American Consul met Said Pasha asking him to grant the American mission a spacious mansion and a large building on Mouski Street, which was then one of Cairo's main thoroughfares.

As the Egyptian government permitted the Western missions to establish foreign schools in Egypt, it realised later that these schools had their role in weakening the students' patriotism. Ismail Pasha then encouraged Pope Demetrius to visit Upper Egypt and ask his people to return to their Orthodoxy, for these schools encouraged them to leave their church and to renounce their Orthodox faith. The Western missionaries roused the vehemence of their proselytes to burn the Coptic Church in Assuit in upper Egypt, claiming that she was full of fable and pagan doctrines. When they could not burn the building as it was awesome, they destroyed the icons and some church articles.

On the occasion of Sultan Abd-Al-Aziz visit to Khedive Ismail Pasha, Pope Demetrius came to salute the eminent guest. It was the custom that everybody had to kiss the hem of the Sultan's garment. The Pope kissed the Sultan on the left side of his breast. All were astonished, and the Sultan asked about the cause of this conduct. Through the priest Salama who spoke Turkish fluently, the pope said, "In our Holy Book it is written that the king's heart is in the hand of God, so in kissing your breast, I have kissed the King of Kings and the Sultan of Sultans." This statement so pleased Abd-Al-Aziz that Ismail granted the Pope 1500 acres of land for building Coptic schools and other Coptic institutions.

The Pope was interested in building schools and in progressing education. Elias the Ayyubid described the American school of Egypt in comparison to the Coptic one, saying: "Their great schools for boys was at first in the hands of the Copts who accepted Protestantism, they did not succeed with in administration or in education, everything was in confusion. On the contrary the two girl's schools in Haret-El-Saqayeen and Al-Azbakia (Coptic schools) were among the best schools at that time<sup>1</sup>."

---

*1. Elias Ayyubid: Ismail Era, vol. 1, p. 221 (in Arabic).*

### **3. ANBA SERAPAMON OF MENOFIAH**

He was a contemporary of Mohammed Ali Pasha and Pope Boutros Al-Gawly, and was known by his saintly life, his eagerness to give alms, and his gift for exorcism.

He was called Salib (Cross). When he was young some evil woman seized him and accused him of murdering a young man they had killed in the market. In the court, he

lifted up his heart to God and with tears he asked the help of St. Mary and other saints. He looked to the slain person and asked him to confess before the judge who killed him. The slain person rose up and told the judge about the murderers. The judge was astonished and set Salib free.

Salib left the court and went immediately to St. Anthony's Monastery to become a monk. The Pope chose him to be a bishop of Menofiah. And when Mohammed Ali Pasha asked the Pope's help concerning his daughter Zahra Hanem who was possessed by an evil spirit, he sent him Anba Serapamon who healed her with praying over her. Mohammed Ali offered him money, but he refused to take the money announcing that God's gifts are free. As Mohammed Ali insisted, the bishop asked him to reinstate the Copts to their jobs in civil service, and he took a small amount of money and distributed it among the guards of the palace.

He used to stay a long time at the patriarchate in Cairo and converted it to a hospital for sick people who visited him asking for his prayers.

In one of his pastoral visits to an archon, who was the uncle of Youakim Bey Mansour, the mother of Youakim brought her dead child (Youakim) of 10 months only, put him in the bishop's lap, saying: "This is my only child, who died yesterday." The bishop bore him on his hands and blew in his face, saying, "Don't be afraid your child is well by God's grace. God blesses him and makes him householder of your family." Immediately God granted life to the child, and he lived till he retired in 1909, repeating his story which he heard from his mother.

After a violent struggle between a couple, the wife left her house and went to a brother, and her husband went to the bishop to complain of her. The bishop asked him not to be quick in his judgment against her, and asked him to come back on the next day. The bishop disguised and met the woman who confessed that she had not committed adultery yet. He asked her to go to the house of a pious priest, and on the next day the husband found her in the priest's house. The husband left with peace in heart, and the bishop whispered in his ears to be kind to his wife.

While the bishop was praying the liturgy of the Eucharist in Shebeen-Al-Koom, he cried: "O, mother of Light, help!" Then he asked a person who was near him to go towards the well in the yard of the church. There he found a child by the name of Michael Tadros who had fallen in the well while he was playing with other children. He threw down a rope to the child who held it fast and was saved. All were astonished that the child's garment was not wet. The child said that when he fell down he found a woman sitting on a throne floating on the water, and her face was shining, she received him in her bosom until the rope was thrown to him.

Once a thief met him while he was riding a donkey on one of his pastoral trips. The thief lifted up his hand to strike the bishop with a stick to steal his money. The bishop said to him, "You lifted up your hand! Let it be like that and leave me!" Then he continued his trip and when he returned, he saw the thief standing in his place crying from the agony of having his hand lifted up all that time. The bishop then had mercy upon the thief, and said, "How great is your sin, Salib (his name before ordination)! May God bless you, my son!" The thief was immediately relieved and he repented.

Abbas Pasha, who ordered that all magicians and astrologers must be killed, summoned the bishop. He mocked at the bishop, saying: "Did you heal Zahra Hanem? How?" The bishop replied: "By God's power." The Pasha cried out with terror, "*Aman Ya-Baba- Aman*" [Peace! O my father; Peace!].

He was contemporary to Pope Kyrillos IV, and he was called "Abu-Tarha (The veiled person)," for he used to cover his head with a veil covering his eyes<sup>1</sup>.

---

1. *Tawfik Iskaros: Nawabegh Al-Akpat Wa-Mashaherhom (The Illustrious Copts), 1910, p. 131-156.*

#### **4. ANBA ABRAAM OF FAYOUM**

In France, the English writer "Leeder" heard about an Egyptian saintly bishop. He hastened with his wife to visit Egypt, in order to meet him. He wrote a special chapter concerning his biography, wherein he said, "This old saint, whose power is known all over the Eastern world, is the direct and unbroken succession of those early Christians." His wife expressed how they felt about their meeting with the bishop, saying: "We were in the presence of Christ, we were filled with the Spirit of God."

#### **HIS EARLY LIFE**

This saint was born in A.D. 1829 in Galad, a village in the diocese of Deirout. His name was Boulos Ghabriel. His parents were righteous and feared God. He recited the psalms and studied the Holy Bible from his childhood. As his heart was filled with Divine love he joined Virgin Mary's Monastery "*El-Muharraq.*"

Anba Yakoubos of Minieh called him to serve God. He changed the Bishopric to a shelter for the poor. He remained in this service for four years and was ordained a priest in 1863.

His desire for monastic life urged him to return to his monastery where he was chosen to be in charge of the monastery. Many young men heard about him and asked him to be their guide. However as he opened the gates of the monastery to the poor, offering all that he had for Christ's brethren, some monks rebelled against him, took away his authority and asked him to leave the monastery. Father Boulos and his disciples were dismissed because of their love for the poor, so they went to the Monastery of St. Mary the Virgin "El-Baramous" at Wadi-Al-Natroun where he devoted himself to worshipping and studying the Holy Bible.

In 1881 he was ordained Bishop of Fayoum, Beni-Souef and Giza, by the name of "Anba Abraam." Once again he converted his home to a shelter for the poor.

### **THE FRIEND OF THE POOR**

The bishop assigned the first floor of his house for the poor, the blind and the sick people. He gave them his personal attention to see that they got the required service. Whenever a poor person entered his home, he stretched his hand under the pillow to give him all the money there, and if he did not find any money, he gave his shawl or his robe. There are many wonderful stories in this respect.

### **A BISHOPRIC IN HEAVEN**

It was said that the nobles of the bishopric realized that the bishop's home was not convenient, and decided upon his agreement to renovate it. Every time they collected a sum

of money they gave it to him to keep it. Eventually they came asking him to make an appointment with the building contractor to discuss what should be done. He looked at them, saying: "My sons, it is already gone, I have built you a house in Eternal life <sup>4</sup>."

### **A MISUSE OF HIS LOVING KINDNESS**

One well known story was told about three young men who plotted to take advantage of the Bishop's love for the poor. Two of them approached him saying that the third had died and that they had nothing to bury him with. He asked them, "Did he really die?" They answered, "Yes, he died." Then he nodded his head and gave them an offering , saying, "Take it to bury him ." They left him and laughed, but soon they burst into tears when they found out their friend had actually died.

### **A MAN OF PRAYER**

Many persons who slept in the room next to his, related that he used to rise up at midnight to pray the psalms and stay until dawn. And he used to repeat the words, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and righteous spirit within me," saying it with zeal.

All who met him testified that his prayers were very deep in spirit even in his senility, Mr. Leeder said: ..." never had I heard prayer which seemed to establish a link with the Throne of Grace with such instant security, it seemed as if earth fell away, to leave this man speaking in the clear presence of God Himself."

We would not be exaggerating if we said that hundreds but thousands of miracles had happened thanks to his prayers.



## **HIS ABSTEMIOUSNESS**

He was simple in his food and clothing, He lived on virtually nothing, having self- control. Once he desired to eat a chicken. He asked his disciple to cook one and bring it to him. When the table was prepared he prayed and asked his disciple to take the chicken away and to bring it next day. The same thing happened on the second and the third days. And on the fourth day the chicken was spoiled, so he looked at it saying to himself, "O myself, eat what you have desire."

## **HIS MODESTY**

Mr. Leeder said, "he was distressed that I felt obliged to kneel (before him)..."

One of his great habits was that he never permitted any of the deacons to say in his presence any statement, that they usually say before reading the Bible to show their respect to him. He absolutely did not distinguish himself from his people, and he never sat on a chair different from that of his sons. He was very pleased when any of his sons called him "Our father, the Bishop," and never permitted anyone to call him "Our Master, the bishop."

When Prince Serguios (uncle of Nicola, the Tzar of Russia) and his wife, heard about him they visited him in 1898. The governor received them, and the Coptic Noblemen of El-Fayoum tried to buy new furniture for the Bishop's home for this occasion, but the Bishop refused completely. The visitors came and bowed in front of him on the ground, and he prayed for them. When they offered him a bag full of golden pounds he refused, and lastly he took one pound and gave it to his son "Rizk." The Prince said that he never felt such an inspiring awe all his life as at that moment when he was standing in front of this saint.

## **AN EVANGELISTIC BISHOP**

Anba Isidore (Isizores) said that he loved to read and study the Holy Bible, to such a degree that he learned the texts by heart and recited them repeatedly. It is said that he used to read the whole Bible every forty days.

He used to gather his people every evening for praying and studying the Holy Bible.

## **HIS POWER IN EXORCISM OF EVIL SPIRITS**

The English writer Leeder said; "The Bishop's power in exorcism of evil spirits has perhaps brought him more visitors from distant parts than any of other gifts for which he is famous.

## **HIS DEPARTURE**

Before our father's departure he summoned Fr. Abd-El-Sayed and some deacons, and asked them to recite the psalms outside his room and not to open his door before half an hour. When they opened the door they found him resting in Christ.

It is well-known that Mr. Selim Saeb the governor of Fayoum called his wife and said to her "Oh! The Bishop of the Nazarenes died...Look at those horses and the people who are riding them, they are around him crying; "EQOUAB! EQOUAB." Then he went out and met Mr. El-Barnachawi asking him the meaning of the word "EQOUAB." He told him that it means "Holy" and it is the hymn of the heavenly creatures.

---

*Fr. T.Y. Malaty: Anba Abraam, the Friend of the poor, Alexandria, 1974.*

## **5. MARTYR SIDHOM BISHAY**

Sidhom Bishay was a native of Damietta, who worked as a clerk in Alexandria. One day someone accused him falsely of insulting Islam, and two persons - one a barbarian and the other a donkey-driver - witnessed against him. The judge gave the verdict that he would be scourged. He was put on a buffalo facing backward in order to mock at him in the streets. They poked him with steel rods, and threw boiling tar on him until he arrived to the government-building, and they did not stop until he was nearly dead, then they threw him before the door of his house.

After 5 days he died as a result of his wounds and sufferings which he accepted with thanks. The Christians were agitated and the European Consuls interfered, the case was raised to Mohammed Ali Pasha who ordered to renew the case. The judge and the governor were fired and Mohammed Ali permitted the Christians to lift up the Cross in the funeral processions as a kind of recompensation.

## **6. IBRAHIM BEY AND SALEH NAKHLA**

Two brothers, Ibrahim and Saleh together with the Coptic archons of Alexandria were involved in building a great cathedral on the tomb of St. Mark in Alexandria. They also built a school and renovated the patriarchate building.

Pope Demetrius II and Pope Kyrillos V admired the two brothers, prayed for them and encouraged them to do God's work. Pope Kyrillos V appointed Ibrahim supervisor on St. Mark's Church legacies and its school, and his brother Saleh a supervisor on St. Mark's Church.

## **7. PROTOPRIEST PHILOTHIUS BAGHDADY SALEH**

He was one of the well known priests who stood beside Pope Demetrius II and helped him in his efforts to keep the Orthodox faith and to update the educational system for the Coptic schools.

He was born in A.D. 1837, in Tanta, He was educated in the Kettab (a school attached to the church), learned the Coptic and Italian languages and then got some experience in business and accounting. When Said Pasha visited Tanta, he was met by the prominent Copts who asked him to permit them to build a new church. Their old church was destroyed and they were not allowed to build another one. Said Pasha gave them permission, but the building was stalled by the local authorities. Muallem Philothius (his name before ordination as a priest) was elected along with Muallem Awad Saleeb, and with the help of the ruler's scribe Muallem Philothius Bishay, to meet Said Pasha and present their grievance. They succeeded in their mission.

He worked in the "Clerks Department" in "*Rowdet-El-Bahrien*" province which included the provinces of Gharbieh and Monofia. When he went to Cairo with his friend Muallem Erian Moftah to visit Pope Kyrillos IV and ask for his blessings, the Pope admired him and asked him to join the "High School," and he agreed. The Pope appointed him the headmaster of the school which he established in Mansourah, but he left after the Pope's martyrdom. He was appointed a teacher of Coptic language at the "High School" and the School of Haret-El-Sakayeen. He was ordained priest in Tanta and there he cooperated with the protopriest Tadros Awad Saleeb Al-Byrawy.

He was known for his ability to preach and to defend the Orthodox faith. He used to deliver his sermons in the Holy Land, Beirut and Damascus where he was admired by the Antiochene patriarch. He also preached in Upper Egypt in the presence of Pope Demetrius II. Besides his pastoral work in Tanta he looked after the Coptic Schools. He took part in establishing a "Community Religious Council" (Maglis Melli) to oversee the general projects of the church. When the disputes took place between the Council and Pope Kyrillos V, the protopriest Philothius limited himself to the priestly work. A medal of the fifth grade was bestowed upon him by Tawfeek Pasha, and another of the fourth grade by Abbas Helmi.

In his preaching he was able to attract children to their mother church, and at the same time he continued to publish books and write articles in contemporary magazines.

He slept in the Lord on the first of Baramhat 1620, March 10, A.D. 1904.

## **8. YAQOUB BEY NAKHLA RUFAILA**

He graduated from the "High School" which was established by Pope Kyrillos IV. He became a teacher of the English and Italian languages in that school, then a headmaster of the same school. He worked in the government printing house, then supervised the printing press of (the Coptic) *Al-Tawfik Society*, and participated in establishing the ancient "*El-Watan*" press and its newspaper. He worked in the ministry of Public Works and the Khedive conferred on him the title of "*Bey*." He left the government work and spent two years in Alexandria. Thereafter he became the Secretary of the "*Faiyum Railways Company*." He established two schools in Faiyum and started a branch of

*Al-Tawfik Society* there. He was interested in establishing schools wherever he was. He wrote: "*The History of the Coptic Nation*" and some books for teaching the English language. He was elected a member of the "*Community Religious Council*" in 1883 and A.D. 1892.

## **THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

I am not presenting the history of the Coptic Church in this century, but I wish to present some of the characteristics of the church as well as important events which the church witnessed. These can be summarized in the following points:

1. Egypt was subjected to the British occupation, which created a kind of fanaticism between Muslims and Copts; for its own advantage. The Copts always confirmed their patriotism, and also played a vital role in liberating Egypt from the British occupation. Some Muslims and also some Copts misunderstood each other. While those who were wise enough worked together for the good of their country.

For example, the known Copt Wissa Wassef was a member of the administrative committee of "*El-Watan*," the socialist party. Many of the Coptic archons helped Moustafa Kamel in his struggle to create a national movement against the British occupation, but Moustafa Kamel tried to push Egypt to follow the Ottoman Caliphate as a kind of loyalty to the General Islamic union. This resulted in huge problems and discord emerged between Muslims and Copts.

The revolution of 1919 against the British occupation arose by all Egyptians, Muslims and Copts, and from both parties, some suffered exile, imprisonment, and distress. The leader Saad Zagloul, in his speech on 19th September 1923 stated that because of the patriotism of the Copts and their

deep sincerity they did not accept the foreigners' call to protect them, and they deserve respect and honour instead of exile, imprisonment and detainment<sup>1</sup>.

The British military court pronounced a sentence on the 9th of August 1923 against four Copts and three Muslims. William Wadel stated that the eagerness of the Copts in liberating their country was not less than that of the Muslims<sup>2</sup>.

2. The Coptic Church is known for her sincere patriotism and at the same time, she is alien from politics. She is dedicated to spiritual work, and the evangelic goal of creating a true believer and a good citizen. The moderate Muslims often witness to this attitude of the church, even when President Sadat accused H.H. Pope Shenouda of interference in politics, and of planning to set a Coptic state, whose capital would be the city of Assuit, this accusation was baseless, unacceptable and strange for both Muslims and Copts. Sadat said that he made a kind of balance between the extreme Islamic thoughts and the church, meanwhile he himself encouraged the former until his presidency was in danger, then he decided to arrest some of Muslim and Copt leaders.

I do not wish to present details of the events of September 1981 when Sadat detained more than a thousand of the Muslims and Christian leaders, but I wish to explain the position of H.H. Pope Shenouda III and some of the clergy. They attempted to complain to Sadat against the Muslim extremists who planted bombs in Coptic Churches, killing some clergymen, looting and burning Christian stores...etc.

Sadat unjustly accused the church of disloyalty. He put the Pope under house arrest and imprisoned 7 bishops, one khori-Episcopas, 24 priests and more than a hundred laymen. A short time after Sadat was assassinated by Muslim extremists while he was reviewing the armed forces in the military parade of the 6th of October 1981. After his death the Christian-Muslim relationship was gradually restored, diminishing the spirit of hatred Sadat had planted. Pope Shenouda, the Christian clergymen and laity were freed by Hosny Moubarak, Sadat successor, as people all over the world media were continuously following these events.

3. One of the great events of the Coptic Church in the twentieth century was the establishing of Sunday School by Deacon Habib Guirguis. Later it was named the "School of Church Education." Pope Shenouda himself and many bishops and priests were brought up in Sunday School, and it is now an integral part of the Coptic church structure.

4. In the twentieth century the Coptic Church has become an active member of the World Council of Churches and many other ecumenical councils, like the Middle East Council of churches, Council of All Churches of Africa etc. Moreover there exist now many dialogues between the Coptic Church and other foreign Churches.

5. At the end of the sixties a movement of immigration of Egyptians to U.S.A., Canada and Australia started, has grown up and is still alive and strong till today in an unexpected manner. Besides, there is also an immigration movement of Copts to Europe, some African and Arab countries for work. Such migration of the Copts from Egypt added an extra responsibility to the mother Church of Egypt



that has to take care of her children abroad, that they may become witnesses to Orthodoxy.

---

1. *Dr. Nicola Fayad: Al-Khataba (Preaching), 1930, p.242 (in Arabic).*

2. *Publications of St. Menas Miracle-performer society of Alexandria: A page in Coptic History, 1954, p.189 (in Arabic).*



## ***SOME PERSONALITIES FROM THE 20TH CENTURY***

---

### **1. POPE KYRILLOS (CYRIL) V**

Pope Cyril V is the first Coptic patriarch who confronted the "*Maglis Milli*" (Community Religious Council), concerning the bylaws of this council, which were adopted by Tawfik Pasha, before the consecration of Pope Cyril V, while the papal throne was unoccupied.

This Council believed that its authority was above that of the Church. It was not formed of church members, but its delegates were chosen by the government from outside the church. As a result its members thought that they have an authority over the church. Pope Cyril V tried in vain to moderate with them through love, but they considered him not as their spiritual father but as their competitor in authority. They did their best to obtain a decree from the government to exclude the Pope from all church administrative affairs and from the presidency over the "*Maglis Milli*." They were able to win the Bishop of Sanabou to their side and accepted his appointment as an acting Pope and president of the council, but the Pope threatened him with excommunication. The Russian consul intervened between the Pope and his children, the council members. The members of the council however insisted on the appointment of the Bishop of Sanabou as the acting Pope and as their president. They wrote to the government and to

the Khedive informing them of their decision, using unsuitable language against the Pope.

Some bishops and priests met in Alexandria, and declared their loyalty to their Pope, requesting the excommunication of the Bishop of Sanabou and his followers. The Pope proclaimed the excommunication and the causes for its issue.

Some Coptic archons together with the excommunicated bishop wrote to the Prime Ministry asking him for the exile of the Pope and the secretary of the Holy Synod Anba Yuanis the metropolitan of El-Behera. The governmental decree was issued and the Pope was house arrested in El-Baramous Monastery, and Anba Yuanis in Anba Paul Monastery. This decree had the opposite effect on all the Coptic people who heartedly took the side of their pope considering the excommunication of the bishop as a necessary measure. The Council members asked the government its help to reinstate the excommunicated bishop. The Holy synod of the bishops was called by the government to convene in Cairo and discuss this matter. Only three bishops came and they confirmed the excommunication instead of lifting it up.

The Pope's followers requested the Prime Minister for the return of their Pope, but he asked them to incite the Pope to write to the Khedive asking for forgiveness. They replied that the Pope abstained from all earthly glory and honor, and he would never accept this condition. Finally, after meeting with the Khedive and sending many telegrams, the Khedive issued a decree on January 30, 1893, for the return of the Pope and the metropolitan. ASH. Leeder said that Cairo never prepared a greater reception like that one made for the return of the patriarch<sup>2</sup>.

The pope revealed his kind fatherhood by granting openly absolution to the excommunicated bishop in front of the bishops, priests and laity, and to all who followed him. He opened his heart with love towards those who planned for his house arrest, giving a living picture to priesthood and fatherhood.

He met the Calivate who granted him the national medal, the highest honour in Egypt at that time. The Ethiopian emperor gave him a papal crown.

Pope Kyrillos V was known for his interest in studying and seeking for knowledge. Before his ordination, he used to spend most of his time in the monastery in copying books for the libraries of the monasteries. He was then called "John the Copier." When he was ordained pope of Alexandria, he established the theological School in Cairo, and set a special department for church music. In addition, he established... built a High School joined up with the primary Coptic School in Tanta, in the Nile Delta, encouraged bishops to build "Coptic schools" in their dioceses. He also encouraged the "Tawfik Society" to establish schools for girls. In addition, established three schools for monks in Alexandria, Boush and El Mouharaq Monastery, and sent seven monks to Athens to study theology.

He took care of the priests, encouraging them to practise pastoral care, especially visiting the people. He made two pastoral visits to the Sudan, and there he established a Coptic School.

He encouraged printing books and publishing the Theological writings of the Fathers.

## **THE COPTIC CONFERENCE ON MARCH 6TH, 1913**

The conference was held to ask the Egyptian government to grant Christians the same rights as the Muslims, both civil and religious rights. The government asked the Pope not to hold a conference, in order to avoid any troubles that might arise as a result. The Pope acknowledged the impossibility of stopping the conference, he wisely wrote a message to the participants in this conference urging them to be wise and calm. He asked the metropolete of Assuit to be present and take care of it by himself and introduce the opening session.

Pope Cyril V was a patriotic, and a statesman and was greatly honored by the whole country.

1. See the text of the letter in: Youssef Mankarious: (Al-Kawl Al-Yakien) the Assure Words in the Orthodox Copts' matter.
2. A.H. Leeder: Modern Sons of the Pharaohs, P.260.
3. Fr. Yohanna: Hist. of the Coptic Church, 1979, p.589 (in Arabic).

## **2. HABIB GUIRGUIS AND SUNDAY SCHOOL**

Pope Shenouda III himself, many present bishops, priests and deacons were teachers in Sunday School (Church Education School). We all feel that we are indebted to the late Habib Guirguis who was the first person to establish Sunday Schools in Egypt.

He believed that church reform couldn't be based on attacking church leaders nor on criticizing them, but on a serious effort to educate Coptic children and youth, for they will become the active members of the church and some of them will be the future church leaders.

Habib Guirguis was admitted to the Theological School in the day it was established, i.e. on the 29th of November 1893. He became the pioneer preacher and Coptic theologian

in the first quarter of the 20th century. He was appointed a teacher in the Theological School and then became its dean in 1918 until his death in 1951.

He wrote more than 20 books for the students of the Theological School, and many church songs. He established Sunday School in 1918, to compensate for the lack of studying the Christian religion in governmental and private schools. We mention that Markos Bey Smekeh succeeded in obtaining a governmental decree for teaching Christianity to the Copts in the governmental schools in 1908, but because of the lack of teachers and because this subject "religion" was considered an additional one, the decree was not enforced.

The High Committee of Sunday School declared its aim which stressed creating a new general involvement in studying the Bible and practising church life and Christian behavior in a true Christian spirit. Sunday Schools also arranged many trips and programs for retreats in the monasteries.

Sunday Schools spread all over Egypt. In 1935 we had twenty branches in Cairo, eighteen in Lower Egypt, forty-four in Upper Egypt, and three in the Sudan.

H.H. Anba Shenouda was the first bishop to be appointed, for Sunday School, and he still has the same responsibility even after being chosen as Pope of Alexandria.

### **3. POPE KYRILLOS (CYRIL) VI**

Many wrote biographies of this saint, while he was alive and after his departure in the Lord. For he was known as a man of God, a man of prayer and a miracle-performer.

He lived as a hermit in a "Mill" in Old Cairo after leaving El-Baramous Monastery. He used to devote all his time to praying, chanting hymns, and praying the liturgy of the Eucharist every day except on Saturdays. His heart was open by love toward everybody, therefore God granted him the gift of performing miracles. He also attracted many well-educated young men to the monastic life. He enjoyed special friendship with the saints, especially St. Menas, who appeared to him many times, and helped him in his ministry, therefore Pope Cyril established the monastery of St. Menas in Marriott, near Alexandria.

When he was ordained Patriarch, he instructed the priests to pray the liturgy of Eucharist daily. His door was opened to everyone, he was very gentle especially with children and at the same time he was strict and firm. God granted him as enlightened inner sight to know many secret matters, therefore he used to call many persons by their first name even those he wasn't acquainted with.

In his days the church suffered from many troubles for about seven years; he found his comfort in praying and meditating, afterwards he became a close friend to president Gamal-Abdel-Nasser, and the church enjoyed peace at that time.

Pope of Rome presented part of the relics of St. Mark to the Pope of Alexandria. In his time Virgin Mary appeared openly on the domes of the church after her name at Zeitoun, a district of Cairo, this apparition occurred for many years.

He ordained, for the first time, bishops for particular purposes and named them: "general bishop" H.H. Anba She-

nouda for Church Education and Sunday Schools, Anba Samuel for Public and Ecumenical services, Anba Gregorius for Coptic High Studies and Seminaries.

His biography is a sweet aroma which fills every Coptic house in Egypt and abroad, and his prayers are still effective!

#### **4. POPE SHENOUDA III**

H.H. Pope Shenouda III was a Sunday School teacher while he was young. He was known for his readings and studying with an ascetic spirit. During his youth he was a living spiritual leader, known for his pleasant personality and his attractive speeches.

When he was ordained bishop for Church Education and Sunday Schools he set a weekly meeting for preaching, where several thousand of young men and women used to attend. This meeting remained alive after his ordination as Pope of Alexandria, and is well known in Egypt and abroad. His sermons and writings are simple, attractive, spirit filling and gives precise theological knowledge.

He made many pastoral visits throughout Egypt and abroad. He also visited the patriarchs and bishops of the Eastern Churches, the Pope of Rome in Vatican and the heads of the Western Churches. He presented many lectures in the universities of Europe, America and Canada. In May 1980 he was invited to open the meeting of the World Council of Churches, but the bad relation between him and president Sadat prevented him from doing so. The Pope of Rome presented part of the relics of St. Athanasius to him.

He gave special attention to the ministry in Africa. He visited Ethiopia, but now the relation between the two



churches had deteriorated because of the ordination of a new "*Cathlekon*" during the life of the legal one, for political reasons. Pope Shenouda visited Libya, Sudan, Kenya, South Africa etc. and he ordained a bishop (Anba Antonius Markous) for African affairs.

He set modern printing machines in the Anba Reuis building in Cairo and established an audiovisual center.

Since his youth he played an active role in the national movements in Egypt. After his ordination and during his visits abroad, he played an effective role in presenting the true face of Egypt through his meetings with foreign leaders. President Sadat praised him and thanked him many times for his patriotic role and activities. It is ironic that in later years Sadat accused him of betrayal! He "*house arrested*" him in the Monastery of Anba-Bishoy and imprisoned the church leaders (seven bishops, one Khori-Episcopas, twenty-four priests and more than a hundred laity). This evil conduct inflamed the hearts with love towards Pope Shenouda. Some of the moderate Muslims defended the Pope's patriotism.

Sadat appointed a papal committee that consisted of five bishops. Although he had chosen popular bishops yet all the people and the majority of the clergy utterly refused to cooperate with this papal committee. The close relationship between the Copts and their Pope is a symbol of their relation with the Church itself.

In his time St. Mary appeared once openly in the Church of St. Damiette in the district of Shoubra in Cairo, and she still appears till this day.

## **PASTORAL WORK**

✝ Division of the big dioceses and the consecration of bishops, thus opening opportunities for the dedication of pastoral care for every place in need. The number of Metropolitans and Bishops who have been ordained by His Holiness till now is more than 50.

✝ Established Youth Diocese dedicated specially for youth to aid them to develop their spiritual needs.

✝ Established a school for Coptic Music and Hymnology under the name of "Didymius' Institute."

✝ He also established visual and Aural aids in the Papal residency in Cairo, that encouraged all churches to do the same.

✝ He set up a very modern printer which printed the Holy Word throughout the Coptic Metropolitans.

✝ The establishment of various Theological institutes specialised in teaching various religious topics, Biblical Studies and the Coptic language.

✝ The establishment of new Theological colleges at Alexandria, Tanta, Shebin El-Kom, El-Muharaq monastery, Elmenia, El-Balyana and Damanhour.

✝ For the first time, establishment of Theological college under the name of "Pope Shenouda 111" in Sydney - Australia, and other ones in New York and Los Angeles.

† The establishment of a Coptic Diocese in France. Two Bishops were ordained and assigned to serve Paris, Marseilles, Tollon.

† The establishment of a Coptic Diocese in Africa and the ordination of a bishop who was assigned for its service.

† The establishment of a Coptic Church in Vienna, Austria.

† The foundation of seven churches in Germany (Frankfurt, Dusseldorf, Berlin, Hanover, Stuttgart, Hamburg, Munich). At the same time the establishment of a monastery and a Coptic center in Frankrurt.

May our Lord grants him many years for the spiritual edification of the Church of God.

# 6

## *THE COPTIC CHURCH AND WORSHIP*

---

### **A WORSHIPPING CHURCH**

The Coptic Church is known as being a worship-loving church. Her worship is rather incessant, her liturgies are rich with theology and rites, so profound and delightful. A child can participate with a cheerful heart. Her feasts are continuous every-day besides Sundays, the weekly feasts, the monthly and the yearly feasts. Its songs are diversified and enjoyable. With her calm, meek and effective spirit she is capable of reaching deep into the soul and she shakes the heart and emotions in credit of the Kingdom of God. Her joy is mixed with asceticism and her fasting exceeds half of the year.

Worship in the church represents a living part of the ecclesiastical life which reacts together with the enjoyment of the Holy Bible, doctrinal faith, ascetic life and her sacred outlook to man and his entity. All that collaborate to lead to "life in Christ."

This devotional life is not exclusive for the priests and monks, but it is for every member of the church. Everybody participates in worship and performs through organised church services without confusion. They worship collectively not individually, in spirituality and gentleness and not in the rigid deadly letter. This spirit of public worship can be

practised by the believer even in his bedroom, because he practises his personal worship as a member of the community, who thanks, praises and asks in the name of the whole, as all are in the depth of his heart.



## ***THE HOLY BIBLE AND CHURCH WORSHIP***

---

### **THE HOLY BIBLE AND THE ALEXANDRIAN CHURCH**

Since her inception, especially starting from the second century, the Alexandrian Church has been known for her School which concentrated on the study of the Holy Bible and was interested in its allegorical interpretation. This method of interpretation was received by Origen from his teacher, St. Clement, and from his predecessors. Origen had put its principals and bases and explored its aim, to the extent that the allegorical interpretation of the Bible all over the world is owed to him. Origen exaggerated in using this method but he had left many disciples, directly or through his writings, among church leaders, and his influence remained clear even over his opponents.

I do not intend here to enumerate Origen's faults because they have been exposed before, but I wish to elucidate the role of the Holy Bible in the Alexandrian Church and her School, particularly as related to church worship.

1. The School of Alexandria paid attention to science and philosophy, and therefore did not show any hostility towards philosophers, on the contrary, for some of the churchmen were students in the philosophical School "the Museum" and they attracted many of its leaders - the philosophers - to Christianity. Yet at the same time the School of Alexandria did not look to the Holy Bible with a philosophical view for mere satisfaction of the mind, or for the sake of arguments and debates. She looked at the Bible as the experience of meeting with the Word of God and a true enjoyment of the Holy Trinity's work in the life of the community and in the life of each member therein. According to the Alexandrian thought the soul enters - through the spirit of prayer and piety - into the presence of God that He might raise her above the deadly literal meaning, ascends her to His heavenly chamber, and reveals to her His divine mysteries which cannot be expressed in human language. Thus the Holy Bible in its essence is a discovery of the incarnate Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is hidden behind its words, who leads us to experience the communion with the Father through Him, by the Holy Spirit. In other words, studying and meditating on the Holy Bible is a spiritual worship and an enjoyment with the Holy Trinity, as we experience our sonship to the Father and His Fatherhood to us, our steadfastness in the Only Begotten Son and the attainment of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Holy Bible is considered as an encounter with God and an interaction with Him in a spirit of worship and piety, so worship, common or private, is an expression of flowing love from hearts which have encountered God and yearned to enter into new depth in order to stay with Him, in His bosom, forever, enjoying His mysteries and glories. In other words worship is also an enjoyments of the evangelic life,

understanding the Holy Bible and a discovery of the words secrets.

Here we acknowledge church life which is inflamed with love, as one integral life, containing on one hand the spirit of worship, and on the other hand the spirit of studying the Holy Bible. Worship is a practical entrance to the Gospel, and the study of the Bible is a true experience of worshipping. Every worship outside the Bible is fruitless, and every Bible study without the spirit of worship distorts the soul.

Therefore, it is needless to say that church worship - common and private - is correlated to the Bible, not only because it includes excerpts from the scriptures, but also because it carries the spirit of the Bible, every breath of love to God through our worship. Worship is inspired by the spirit of the Bible and at the same time the Bible reveals the spirit of worship and the depth of its mysteries on a heavenly level.

3. All church liturgies, common, family, and private worship include readings from the Old and New Testaments, particularly from the book of Psalms, the Epistles of St. Paul, the Catholic Epistles and from the four Gospels. Such readings are included in the liturgy of catechumens, the liturgy of blessing the water, the celebration of Holy matrimony, blessing the baptismal water, funeral services, prayers for bathing the baby at the eighth day of his birth, prayers for blessing new homes as well as at the daily Canonical Hours. Thus the church offers thanksgiving to her God in every occasion in a spirit of worship through reciting verses of the Holy Bible, and at the same time she urges her children to sit with God's word, enjoy and meditate on it.

4. Church life is not only a life of worship in an evangelic way or a biblical life in a spirit of worship, but it is one, inclusive and integral life, which includes the practical daily life with good behaviour, the ascetic practice and the desire of the heart to witnessing and preaching. In other words, our Bible study is worship, practical behaviour, asceticism and preaching. Truly some members may be gifted in depth with certain talents. For example some may be involved in studying the Bible, others in practising asceticism, and others in preaching etc., yet all members have to live in the one whole spirit in order not to deviate from the aim of the Bible and the spirit of the church.

5. Moreover, the Alexandrian Church recognised that the mystery of the Scriptures is uncovered through three essential and related matters:

a. Study and research: Origen collected the texts and translations of the Bible and arranged them in six columns (Hexapala). If a verse is obscure, the scholar may refer to other texts to elucidate it. Thus Origen from the second century - was ahead of his time.

b. Prayers and pious life: The Alexandrian students were men of prayer and asceticism. They believed in the need of the Divine Revelation to the soul through purity in Christ to understand the Bible.

c. Discipleship: The scholar cannot fully enjoy the biblical spirit through his own individual private studies. In order not to deviate, he needs to be disciple of a spiritual father to attain the delivered biblical thought, besides the need of being disciple of the Early Fathers through their writings.



# ***THE LITURGICAL WORSHIP IN THE COPTIC CHURCH***

---

## **THE WORD "LITURGY"**

The word "Liturgy" in classic Greek means "a public service undertaken on behalf of the people" it comes from:

1. "*Liow*," meaning "People."
2. "*Ergia*," meaning "work."

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, this word means "the service of the altar," or "the priestly service" Heb. 8:6; 9:21.

The church used this term since the apostolic age, to cover all that worship which is officially organized by her, and which is offered by all her members, or on their behalf. In the course of time, this term has come to be particularly applied to the performance of the service of Eucharist, although there are other liturgies as the liturgy of Baptism, liturgy of marriage etc.

## **LITURGICAL WORSHIP AND LITURGICAL LIFE**

Liturgy does not mean some hours spent by believers - clergymen and laity - in participating in the Eucharistic liturgy, performing on vesper or matin or baptism or marriage celebrations etc., but it is in its essence the true communion with Christ. This liturgical life is not lived only when a believer participates in common worship whatever it is, but it

dwells within his heart even when he is alone in his room. In other words "liturgy" is a life which the church practises, through which she acknowledges her nature, realizes her message and attains her own existence which is life and growth in Jesus Christ.

In fact, we use the word "liturgy" for common worship, because the believer participates in this worship with the members of the community. This membership is alive and active and it represents a part of his entity. He is a member even when he is alone speaking with God in his own room. The holy community is in the heart of the real believer, and the believer is within the heart of the church community. In other words, when a believer prays in his room, he realizes that all the church is within his heart, praying in her name, calling God: "Our Father" and not my Father who art in heaven." At the same time, when the community prays it endows its members, present and absent with love.

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COPTIC LITUR- GIES**

1. The Coptic liturgies are known to be not monopolized by clergymen. They are the liturgies of all the church, laymen and clergymen. The people participate in the hymns, and prayers. Therefore clergymen should pray in the language of the people, clearly and with a pleasant tone, as the people take their turn in participating. Here the "people" means all the congregation: men, women and children. The Coptic church does not exclude children during the liturgy, and this is one of the resources of our church in Egypt, for even the child feels his positive membership and acknowledges his right in participating in church liturgies. The beautiful rites and heavenly hymns encourage children in worship without feeling bored , inspite of the lengthy services.

2. The Coptic liturgies not only emphasize church unity, clergy and laity, young and old, men and women, but also aim at revealing that the heavenly life is near and realizable to us! All the Coptic liturgies have eschatological (heavenly) attitude. In the liturgies the church participates in the hymns of the heavenly creatures, its thoughts are attracted to acknowledge the hidden mysteries of heaven. For example, the liturgy of marriage attracts our thoughts to the heavenly marriage of our souls to Christ, and also to the crowns of the saints.

3. The Coptic liturgies are correlated to the church dogmas and doctrines. Liturgies' rites and texts instruct even children in simple ways about Church faith, her concepts and dogmas concerning: God; our relation with Him; our relation with the heavenly hosts and saints; our view of sanctity, of the world and our bodies, our struggles against the devil and his agent etc. Liturgies represent a school to the people, opening its doors to the children through its simplicity, and to the theologians through its depth.

Coptic liturgies clarify church dogmas without the need of any theological discussions, and at the same time gives genuine theological concepts that believers experience during their worship.

4. Coptic liturgies are correlated to the ascetic church life. Asceticism has its effect on our liturgies, as it appears in the long duration of the services and practicing kneeling during the services. Liturgies soothe and delight the ascetic person. For example, in the service of the Holy Week and Good Friday, although the believers fast for long periods and abstain from many kinds of food, they feel true consolation,

which they rarely attain in other occasions during the year. The daily Eucharistic liturgies in Lent season grant the believers spiritual delight of particular character.

5. Coptic liturgies are biblical. Every liturgy declares the word of God and the experience of the evangelic life. They include readings from the Holy Bible, the Old and New Testaments, especially the book of Psalms, Epistles of St. Paul, the Catholic Epistles, and the Gospels. They also present prayers and hymns quoted from the Bible, carrying evangelic thoughts. Thus we can say that liturgies are totally presented in the spirit of the Bible.

6. Coptic liturgies touch the believers' daily life and also their family life, for they are the "dynamic energy" which moves their lives. There is no separation between common worship and actual life. In other words, believers practise the common worship as a part of their lives as a whole.

To explain the correlation between the liturgical life of common worship and the daily life for Copts, we here give some examples:

a. The priest and the laity acknowledge the liturgy of Eucharist as a meeting at the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as an entrance to Golgotha, so that they all might sit under the Cross' shadow (Cant. 2:3). The priest puts his hand on the "Lamb" (Holy Bread) and prays for his family, his spiritual children and for all the people. He prays for the repentance of those who stray away and for the solution to church problems and family disputes, and for those who are in trouble that God may intervene through His Divine grace. He also prays for those who are travelling, for the sick and for those who departed in the Lord etc.

The Coptic people used to ask the priest to remember them and their problems on the altar of the Lord and they themselves participate with him in asking God. Thus, Copts find their comfort in the liturgy of the Eucharist, as they find the precious Blood of Jesus Christ as the propitiation of their sins (1 John 4:10), and a source of their inner peace.

b. Through the various liturgies believers acknowledge the motherhood of the church and the fatherhood of the priest as a figure and shadow of God's Fatherhood. Therefore, Copts flee to the church as their own refuge in the important and trifle matters, in sadness and in their happiness, because of their trust in her and their love for her. For Example, when God grants a family a baby, the church prays a special "liturgy" for washing the babe on the eighth day of his birth. The priest, deacons, the family and their friends participate in giving thanks and praise to God, asking Him to act in the baby that he might grow in the grace of God as a saintly member of the church. When a person succeeds in any work usually he asks for giving thanks to God by praying a special doxology through or after the Eucharistic liturgy. When a person falls ill he asks for praying the liturgy of the unction. When a person dies the church prays the funeral service, and on the third day prays a common prayer at his house to declare God's consolation through the resurrection of Christ on the third day, and in every memory the priest mentions the name of the dead person in Eucharistic liturgy (the diptych).

Thus, the church does not interfere in the lives of her children but through love, participates in all their affairs, that they might feel her motherhood and her sharing in their feelings.

## ***THE COPTIC FEASTS***

---

### **FEASTS AND WORSHIP**

Moses' Law arranged seven major feasts (lev. 23), which had their rites and sanctity, as a living part of the common worship. These feasts are: the Sabbath or Saturday of every week, the first day of every month, the Seventh Year, the Year of Jubilee, the Passover (Pasch), the feast of the weeks (Pentecost), the feast of Tabernacles (feast of Harvest). After the Babylonian exile two feasts were added, i.e., the feast of Purim and the feast of Dedication. The aim of these feasts was to revive the spirit of joy and gladness in the believers' lives and to consecrate certain days for the common worship in a holy convocation (assembly) (Exod 12:16; Lev. 23); and to remember God's promises and actions with His people to renew the covenant with Him on both common and personal levels. The feasts were a way leading to enjoy Christ, the continuous "Feast" and the Source of eternal joy.

When the Word of God was incarnate and became man, He submitted to the Law and attended and celebrated the feasts. However, He diverted the attention from the symbol to reality, and from the outward appearances to the inner depths (John 2, 5, 6, 7, 12); to grant the joy of the feast through practising the secret communion with God and receiving His redeeming deeds.

Almost all the days are feasts to the Coptic Church. Although she is known for bearing the cross, she is eager to

have her children live, in the midst of sufferings in spiritual gladness. She is capable, by the Lord's help, to raise them above tribulations. In other words, the Coptic Church is continuously suffering and joyful at the same time, her feasts are uninterrupted, and her hymns with a variety of melodies are unceasing.

## **A CHURCH OF JOY**

One of the main characteristics of the Coptic Church is "joy," even in her ascetic life. St. John Cassian described the Egyptian monks who spread from Alexandria to the southern borders of Thabied (Aswan) saying that the voice of praise came out perpetually from the monasteries and caves, as if the whole land of Egypt became a delightful paradise. He called the Egyptian monks heavenly terrestrials or terrestrial angels.

St. Jerome<sup>1</sup> informs us about an abbot called Apollo who was always smiling. He attracted many to the ascetic life as a source of inward joy and heartfelt satisfaction in our Lord Jesus. He often used to say: "Why do we struggle with an unpleasant face?! Aren't we the heirs of the eternal life?! Leave the unpleasant and the grieved faces to pagans, and weeping to the evil-doers. But it befits the righteous and the saints to be joyful and pleasant since they enjoy the spiritual gifts."

This attitude is reflected upon church worship, her arts and all her aspects of life, so that it seems that the church life is a continuous unceasing feast. Pope Athanasius the Apostolic tells us in a paschal letter that "Christ" is our feast. Although there are perpetual feasts the believer discovers that

his feast is in his innermost, i.e., in the dwelling of Christ the life-giving Lord in him.

The church relates and joins the feasts to the ascetic life. The believers practise fasting, sometimes for almost two months (Great Lent) in preparation for the feast, in order to realize that their joy is based on their communion with God and not on the matter of eating, drinking and new clothes.

The Coptic feasts have deep and sweet hymns, and splendid rites which inflame the spirit. Their aim is to offer the living heavenly and evangelic thought and to expose the Holy Trinity and Their redeeming work in the life of the church, in a way that is simple enough to be experienced by children, and deep enough to quench the thirst of theologians.

## ***FEASTS OF THE COPTIC CHURCH***

### **1. THE SEVEN MAJOR FEASTS OF OUR LORD**

**a. The Annunciation** (Baramhat 29, c. April 7): In it we recall the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and the attainment which the men of God had longed for across the ages, namely the coming of the Word of God incarnated in the Virgin's womb (Matt. 13:17).

**b. The Nativity of Christ** (Christmas) on Kayhk 29, c. January 7: It is preceded by a fast of 43 days. Its aim is to confirm the divine love, when God sent His Only - begotten Son incarnate. Thus, He restored to humanity her honor, and sanctified our daily life, offering His life as a Sacrifice on our behalf.



**c. The Epiphany or the Baptism of Christ** on Tobah 11, c. January 19: It is connected with Christmas and the circumcision feasts. For on Christmas, the Word of God took what is ours (our humanity) and in the "circumcision" He subjected Himself to the Law as He became one of us, but in the Epiphany He offered us what is His own. By His incarnation He became a true man while He still being the Only-begotten Son of God, and by baptism we became children of God in Him while we are human being.

In this feast, the liturgy of blessing the water is conducted, and the priest blesses the people by the water on their foreheads and hands to commemorate baptism.

**d. Palm Sunday:** It is the Sunday which precedes Easter. It has its characteristic joyful hymns (the Shannon - Hosanna (Matt. 21:9), and its delightful rite. The church commemorates the entrance of our Lord Jesus into our inward Jerusalem to establish His Kingdom in us and gather all in Him. Therefore a delightful procession is conducted during the "Matin." It starts from inside the sanctuary around the altar to indicate the procession of the redeemed believers, starts with God's plan for Christ's self-oblation. The procession moves towards the nave of the church where it stands before the icons of St. Mary, the Archangels, St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, the martyrs, the ascetics etc.. and before the church doors and the baptismal basin, praising God who embraces all together in His Son Jesus Christ. The procession ends by re-entering the sanctuary, for the men of God of the Old and New testaments meet with the heavenly hosts in heaven (sanctuary) forever.

At the end of the liturgy of Eucharist, a general funeral service is held over water, which is sprinkled on behalf of

anyone who may die during the Holy week, since the regular funeral prayers are not conducted during this week. By this rite, the church stresses on her pre-occupation with the passion and crucifixion of Christ only. She concentrates on the marvelous events of this unique week with its special glorious readings and rites which concern our salvation.

**e. Easter** (The Christian Pasch or Passover): It is preceded by Great Lent (55 days) and is considered by the Coptic Church as the "Great Feast." Its delight continues for fifty days until the Pentecost. Easter is also essentially celebrated on every Sunday by participating in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. For the church wishes that all believers may enjoy the new risen life in Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:4).

**f. The Ascension:** It is celebrated on the fortieth day after Easter and it falls on a Thursday. In this feast we recall Him who raises and lifts us up to sit with Him in heaven (Eph. 2:6).

**g. Pentecost:** It represents the birthday of the Christian Church. When the Only-begotten Son paid the price for her salvation, He ascended to heaven to prepare a place for her. He sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in her, offering her existence, guidance, sanctification and adornment as the Heavenly Bride.

In this feast, the church chants hymns, being joyful with the resurrection of Christ, His ascension and the dwelling of His Holy Spirit in her, thus she connects the three feasts in one whole unity.

On this day, the church conducts three sets of prayers, called "Kneeling," during which incense and prayers are offered on behalf of the sick, the travellers, the winds , and it gives special attention to the dormant, as a sign of her enjoying the communion and unity with Christ that challenges even death.

### **THE SEVEN MINOR FEASTS OF OUR LORD.**

**a. The Circumcision of our Lord:** It is celebrated on the eighth day after Christmas (Tobah 6, c. 14 January), by which we remember that the Word of God who gave us the Law, He Himself was subjected to this Law, fulfilling it, to grant us the power to fulfil the Law in a spiritual manner. Thus we enjoy the circumcision of spirit and that of heart (Col. 2:11), instead of the literal circumcision of the flesh.

**b. The Entrance of our Lord into the Temple** (Amshir 8, c. February 15): We remember that the Word of God, became man and does not want us to be careless about our lives, but to set our goals early since childhood. Thus we have to work and fulfil our goals regardless of people related to us, inspite of our love and obedience to them (Luke 2:24).

**c. The Escape of the Holy family to Egypt** (Bashans 24, c. June 1): The Coptic Church is distinguished among all nations with this unique divine work, by the coming of our Lord to Egypt among the Gentiles.

**d. The First Miracle of our Lord Jesus at Cana** (Tobah 13, c. January 12): Our Lord changed the water into wine, as His first miracle, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, confirming His eagerness for our attaining the heavenly wedding, and granting us the wine of His exceeding love.

**e. The Transfiguration of Christ** (Musra 13; c. August 19): The unity of the two testaments was manifested in this feast, for Moses and Elijah assembled together with Peter, James and John. The Glory of our Lord was revealed to satisfy every soul who rises up with Him to the mountain of Tabor to enjoy the brightness of His Glory.

**f. Maundy Thursday:** This is the Thursday of the Holy week. In it we commemorate the establishment of the Sacrament of Eucharist by our Lord Jesus, when He offered His Body and Blood as the living and effective Sacrifice, capable of sanctifying our hearts, granting us the victorious and eternal life.

This is the only day of the Holy Week in which Sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered, and the rite of washing the feet is practised in commemoration of what Christ did for His disciples.

On this day also an unusual procession takes place, starting from the south of the church nave, during which a hymn of rebuking Jude the betrayal is chanted as a warning to us not to fall like him.

**g. Thomas's Sunday:** This is the Sunday that follows Easter; In it we bless those who believe without seeing so that all might live in faith through the internal touch of the Savior's wounds (John 20:29).

### **3. THE MONTHLY FEASTS**

The believers joyfully celebrate the commemoration of the Annunciation, Nativity and Resurrection of Christ on the

29th of every Coptic month, the commemoration of St. Mary on the 21st and the feast of Archangel Michael on the 12th.

#### **4. THE WEEKLY FEAST**

Every Sunday stands as a true Sabbath (rest), in which we find our rest in the resurrection of Christ. There is no abstinence from food on Sundays after the celebration of the Eucharist, even during Great Lent.

#### **5. FEASTS OF THE SAINTS**

There is almost a daily feast, so that the believers may live in perpetual joy and in communion with the saints. In addition there are other special fasts and occasions:

**a. The Feasts of St. Mary:** The Coptic Church venerates St. Mary as the "Theotokos," i.e., the Mother of God, whom the Divine Grace chose to bear the Word of God in her womb by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Since she is considered to be the exemplary member in the church, and the interceding mother on behalf of her spiritual children, she is exalted above heavenly and earthly creatures. Therefore, the church does not cease glorifying (blessing) her, and celebrating her feasts in order that we imitate her and ask her intercessions on our behalf. Her main feasts are:

The annunciation of her birth (Misra 7, c. August 13);

her Nativity (Paschans 1, c. May 9);

her Presentation into the Temple (Kyahk 3, c. December 12);

her Dormant (Tobah 21, c. January 29);

the Assumption of her body (Paoni 21, c. June 28);

her apparition over the Church of Zeitoon (Baramhat 24, c. April 2);

and the apparition of her body to the Apostles (Mesra 16, c. August 22).

**b. The Apostles' Feast** (Abib 5, c. July 12): This is the feast of martyrdom of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. It is preceded by a fasting period which starts on the day following the Pentecost. In this feast, the liturgy of blessing the water takes place, in which the priest washes the feet of his people (men and children) commemorating what the Lord did for His disciples. Thus, the priest remembers that he is a servant who washes the feet of the people of God and not a man of authority.

**c. The Nayrouz Feast** (1st of Tout, c. September 11): The word "Nayrouz" is Persian, meaning "the beginning of the year." The Egyptian calendar goes back to 4240 B.C. Copts restored the calendar with the beginning of Diocletian's reign in A.D 284, to commemorate the millions of Coptic martyrs. His reign is considered a golden era in which the church offered true witnesses to Christ, when the souls of martyrs departed to paradise and kept shining as living stars therein.

This feast, with its joyful hymns, continues until the feast of the Cross (Tout 17, c. 27 September). Thus the church announces her joy and gladness with the martyrs through bearing the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the sufferings and martyrdom were turned into a source of joy.

**d. The Two Feasts of the Cross:** The first feast is on Tout 17, (c. September 27). It commemorates the dedication of the Church of the Holy Cross which was built by Queen

Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine. The second feast, is on Barmahat 10 (c. March 19) and commemorates the discovery of the Holy Cross on the hands of the same empress in A.D 326.

During these two feasts the church conducts a procession similar to that of Palm-Sunday and uses the same tone in chanting (Shannon-Hosanna), to announce that the cause of her joy with the Cross is the openness of the hearts (the inner Jerusalem) to receive the Savior as the King who reigns within us.

---

I. Fr. T. Malaty: Dict. of the Church Fathers and Saints, Vol. 1, 1986, p.113 (in Arabic).



# ***THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF RITE***

---

## **THE RITE OF HEAVEN**

God is Spirit, and His heavenly Creatures are spirits without bodies. Nevertheless, the book of Revelation tells us about a rite of heaven; for it has specific hymns (Rev. 4:8) and certain worship (Rev. 4:10); there we find the 24 incorporeal priests with golden crowns on their heads and hold golden censers (Rev. 4:4). St. John also describes the heavenly Jerusalem, its gates, foundation, walls and temple etc.. (Rev. 21). Therefore, it is not surprising that the Alexandrian Church established her rites since her conception.

## **A RITUAL CHURCH**

The holy Scriptures emphasise that our God is "not the author of confusion" 1 Cor. 14:33, hence He establishes His heavens with splendid spiritual rites. The church of the Old Testament carried out a rite which was "the copy and shadow of the heavenly things" Heb. 8:5. The word of God dedicated some books of the Old Testament to declare in detail and exactitude the rites of priesthood, sacrifices, the structure of tabernacle and its tools, and rites of worship. For God wants "all things to be done decently and in order 1 Cor. 14:40.

It is not in vain that the Lord - in the New Testament - when He was about to feed the multitude, said to His



disciples: "Make them sit down in groups of fifty" Luke 9:14. He rather emphasised the necessity of order to grant His heavenly gifts. The Lord did not take a hostile stand towards the Jewish rite, but He subjected Himself to the Law with its rites; He was circumcised and entered the Temple to transfer the Jews to the spiritual rite with its heavenly concept. However, He criticised the literality and the formality of rite. The disciples also followed their Lord's footsteps and attended the daily temple worship (Acts 3:46), besides their meeting together to break the bread without attacking the Jewish rite. They sought its completion through announcing the mystery of the cross and the sacrifice of Christ. When they were dismissed from the temple and from the Jewish synagogues as individuals and groups, the church did not live without rite or order. On the contrary, the apostles emphasised the necessity of "order" and "decency" to the Church of God (1 Cor. 14:40, 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6), declaring that orders and rites were handed out orally (1 Cor. 11:34; Tit 1:5; 2 John 12:14).

## **THE AIM OF THE COPTIC RITES AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The Coptic rite is not an aim in itself, that the Church practises it literally without understanding. It is rather the Church's language, uttered by the holy congregation as a whole, and by every member, that they may enjoy the pledge of heaven through the rites. Therefore, St. Clement of Alexandria states that the church is the icon of heaven.

1. Any rite in which the believer does not practise his communion with God the Father, in His Son by the Holy Spirit and has not the experience of the joyful evangelic life as a heavenly one, is strange to the Coptic Church. For example, the rite of the sacrament of holy matrimony in its

prayers concentrates on the heavenly crown and the spiritual marriage between God and His saints. This can be understood if the couple practise this sacrament spiritually and comprehend that this marriage is an image of the greatest mystery: the Union of Christ with His Church (Eph. 5:32).

2. The rite has its educational role, since the Coptic Church presents all the Christian dogmas, the concepts of faith, and the spiritual thoughts in very simple style. The child understands it, the theologian is satisfied with it, the priest who is burdened with pastoral work finds his comfort in it, and the spiritual ascetic finds it very nourishing to his soul. For example by making the sign of the cross children acknowledge the Trinitarian dogma and the divine incarnation, and through venerating icons they understand the extension of the church as the body of Christ.

3. The Coptic rite is characterised by harmony and oneness of spirit. Thus the church building with its splendid rite is in accord with the liturgical rites so that believers live under the guidance of the Spirit of God in a joyful pious life.

4. In the Coptic rite, the body shares with the soul in worshipping God, whether in congregational, familial or private worship. A sign of Church belief in unity of the human being as a whole without ignoring the role of the body in the spiritual life. In other words the church emphasises the sanctity of the soul and the body together through the Holy Spirit of God.

The Coptic rite which contains hymns, standing piously for praying, stretching hands, kneeling, offering incense etc. does not present restricted bodily movements, but it represents a support of the body for the alert soul. In a

similar way, every evil bodily action is capable of destroying the soul and hindering her union with God.

The rite is the language of man as a whole, which uses all man's capabilities to express his innermost which common language can't realize. Rite is an expression which comes out of the body interacting with the depths of the inner soul.

5. In the Coptic rite not only the whole body participates in worshipping God, but also the creation shares in glorifying the Creator. In other words, the believer, realizing the sanctity of the creation, appears before God offering incense, wood (icons), bread, wine etc. to God, declaring that all creation glorifies God. This concept is in accordance with the words of the "Psalmody": [Praise the Lord from the earth... fire, hail, snow, clouds etc. (Ps. 148)]. Thus the inanimate creatures are not evil, nor do they hinder worship, but are good tools, which the believer can use them to express the sanctity of all creatures.

6. We may state that rite is an integral part of Church life. It touches our worship, our faith, our spirituality and our asceticism, if it is practised spiritually and with understanding under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If it is practised as a duty or as a routine work, performed literally without understanding, it becomes an obstacle to the evangelic spiritual life. In other words the rite is not mere order, an outer organisation, or sets of laws which rule church life, but it is in its essence a living spirit we have received throughout the ages. The rite has its body, i.e., the visible order, and has also its spirit, i.e., the innermost thought. Whoever accepts the body of the rite without its spirit accepts a corpse, a burden, which should be buried. If we accept the body with the spirit

we enjoy a life which has its effect on the congregation and on every individual.

---

1. *The author: The Rite between Spirituality and Formalities, 1980 (in Arabic).*



# ***THE FASTING ORDER IN THE COPTIC CHURCH***

---

## **A CHURCH OF ASCETICISM**

God, who created all the trees in the Garden of Eden for the sake of man, His beloved; ordered him not to eat from just one specific tree. This was not to deprive man, or to impose His authority, but rather to make man worthy of His love through fasting and obeying His commandment; "man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord..." Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4.

The Lord, Himself, the Word Incarnate, fasted before undergoing trial and undertaking His ministry on our behalf. We therefore fast with Him to attain victory and blessings at work, and to be able to proceed in the spirit and not according to the flesh (Rom. 8:1). The Lord fasted for forty days (Matt. 4:2) to transfigure in the midst of Moses and Elijah who also fasted for forty days (Exod. 40:28; 1 Kings 19:8). In this way He declared that fasting is not deprivation, neither is it a restraint upon the body; but it is rather a sublimation with our Lord on Mount Tabor which enables us to enjoy His Glory made manifest in us.

The Coptic Church (as well as the Ethiopian Church) is an ascetic church that believes in the power of fasting in the life of the believers. Fasting is not considered a physical exercise, but rather it is an offering of inward love offered by the heart as well as the body. Consequently, the Church requests believers to fast for over six months a year. Strangely enough, the Coptic Church desires - of its own free will - to spend its whole life fasting, while most churches in the world

increasingly tend to reduce the fasting periods from one generation to the next. In fact, during confession many of the Coptic youth request to increase the days of fasting... very few indeed complain of the many fasting periods.

## **THE CONCEPT OF FASTING**

1. The church requires us to fast and abstain from food for a period of time to experience hunger. The Lord Himself experienced hunger (Matt. 4:2) though He is the source of all satisfaction, physical and spiritual. The apostles experienced hunger as they fasted (Acts 10:1; 2 Cor. 11:27). Moreover, we should not indulge in delicacies after abstinence, but rather we should observe eating certain non fat foods<sup>1</sup>:

*"I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth"* Dan. 10:3.

*"Take you also unto your wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and spelt"* Ez. 4:9.

*"My knees are weak through fasting; and my flesh fails of fatness"* Ps. 109:24.

In spite of that, fasting is not merely abstinence from food, drink, or delicacies. It is essentially an expression of our love to God who has given His Only-Begotten Son to die for us. If the Lord Jesus delivered Himself for my sake (Ephes. 3:20), then in turn I wish to die all day for His sake (Rom. 8:38). Thus fasting and abstinence from food is closely connected with abstinence from all that is evil or has a semblance of evil. It is moreover connected with continuous spiritual growth, thereby achieving an offering of fasting that is holy in the eyes of God.

That is what Pope Athanasius elaborated powerfully in his first letter: [When we fast, we should consecrate the fast (Joel 2:15)... It is required that not only with the body should we fast, but also with the soul. Now the soul is humbled when it doesn' t follow wicked thoughts... And as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, being the heavenly Bread, is the food of the saints..., so is the devil the food of the impure, and of those who do nothing which is of the light, but work the deeds of darkness... For not only does such a fast obtain pardon for souls, but being holy, it prepares the saints, and raises them above the earth].

2. God created our "good" bodies and souls to function together under His guidance and to carry out his will. Now if our souls succumb to the wicked desires of the flesh in disobedience, we become carnal (Rom. 7:14). Through fasting we beseech God to subjugate our bodies by the Holy Spirit so that we might live in the spirit and not according to the flesh (Rom. 8:12). It is true that St. Paul preached the Gospel to many, but he warned against the flesh which he mastered by fasting as he feared to be a castaway. (1 Cor. 9:27).

3. While fasting, we pray to be liberated from our "ego." Thus we fast and abstain from "selfishness" as much as we abstain from food. We practise loving God through loving our brothers and all humanity by His grace. Hence St. Paul says: "Though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, it forfeit me nothing" 1 Cor. 13:3. Therefore fasting should be associated with the witness to God's love through giving alms and striving for the salvation of souls. In the early church, many catechumens were baptized on Easter eve or the Christian Passover as a result of the great activity of

church preaching during Lent - besides the rest of the year - doing so in a state of continuous prayer, fasting and practical testimony. Particularly that people were more prepared, while fasting, to receive the word of God and become members in the body of our Lord Jesus.

Until today, Lent is considered one of the richest periods of whole hearted devotion demonstrated by practical offerings to the poor and the needy. Believers undertake this in obedience to the Scripture: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?... Is it not to deal by bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house?!" Is. 58:3-7.

In the first centuries of Christianity, praying and fasting (the direct love of God) were integrated with alms-giving (our love to God interpreted by our love to our neighbours). This is explained in the book "The Shepherd" of Hermes, urging believers to offer their savings resulting from fasting to widows and orphans<sup>2</sup>, Origen<sup>3</sup> blesses those who fast and feed the poor, and St. Augustine<sup>4</sup> has written a whole book on fasting, as he feels that a person, who fasts without offering his savings to the poor, has in fact practised "greed" rather than fasting.

4. The days of fasting are days of repentance and contrition. At the same time, they are periods of joy and cheer as believers experience victory and power in their innermost self. Fasting does not imply fatigue, restraint, or irritation, but rather it inspires joy and inward gladness with the Lord reigning within the heart... This is the experience of the Coptic Church particularly during the Holy Week. At that time believers practise asceticism more than at any other



time of fasting. The signs of real spiritual joy and consolation filling the heart are so clearly evident then.

This experience has been recorded by Pope Athanasius of Alexandria. He says: [Let us not fulfil these days like those that mourn, but by enjoying spiritual food, let us try to silence our fleshly lusts. For by these means we shall have strength to overcome our adversaries, like blessed Judith (13:8), when having first exercised herself in fasting and prayers, she overcame the enemies, and killed Olophernes<sup>5</sup>].

Fasting is not a situation which may be used as a pretext for anger. It is rather an opportunity to demonstrate a loving heart and power over the spirit of anger, selfishness, and all egocentricity.

## **FASTING AND CHURCH ORDER<sup>6</sup>**

While many Copts (as well as Ethiopians) spend most of their days fasting of their own free will, and while they do so by the motherly help and love of the Church (through the Church Order), many westerners avoid the cross of fasting and put forward the following excuses:

1. Fasting is an individual worship to be practised privately (in secret) (Matt. 6:17,18). The answer to this is that the same commandment applies to prayer and giving alms (Matt. 6:3,6). Besides, prayer and alms giving are practised in all the churches of the world on a communal basis. In the Old Testament people observed communal worship in the form of prayer, hymns and Bible readings as well as fasting (Zech. 8:19; Est. 4:3. 16; Ezra. 8:21; 2 Chorn. 20:3; Joel 3:5). In the New Testament the apostles fasted together (Act 13:2,3). Hence why should believers avoid communal fasting under the pretext of private observance?!

The secret of the Early Church being strong was its unified faith as well as communal participation even in fasting. History itself is a witness that ever since the apostolic age, both Eastern and Western churches fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays<sup>7</sup> besides the Great Lent<sup>8</sup>. To answer to the concept of fasting privately in order to avoid boastfulness, we find the apostle revealing that he fasted. He announces "with fasting," and he practised it with those who were on the boat (Acts 27:21).

2. Why are the days set for fasting specifically designated? If they are not indicated or organised by the Church, believers may be deprived of fasting all their lives. This is just what has happened in most Western Churches. In the Old Testament there were designated fasting days (Zech. 8:9) side by side with communal fasting or personal ones practised in periods of hardship.

3. Some object to fasting designated by the Church by quoting the words: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink..." Col 2:16, and "What God has cleansed, that call you common" Act 10:11-15, and also the words: "...some shall depart from the faith.. forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God has created to be received with thanksgiving..." 1 Tim. 4:1-3. This can be explained as follows:

a. The Apostle didn't say, "Let no man therefore judge you in fasting..." but he said, ..."In meat or in drink." Thus what is intended here is the abstention from certain forbidden food designated by the Law of Moses. As when St. Peter saw a great sheet cover with all kinds of food and abstained at first (Acts 10:11-15). Therefore the Apostle meant here to fight the idea of reverting to Judaism.

b. Concerning those who forbid specific food such as the Manichaeans and the Donatists, who also have forbidden marriage as unclean and eating meat as defiling...those were excommunicated. During fasting we do not forbid certain food (as unclean) but we voluntarily subjugate and control the body (1 Cor. 9:27).

It is noteworthy to underline that the first man was vegetarian (Gen. 1:29), and man continued to avoid eating meat until the period of Noah's ark (Gen. 9:3). At that time his spiritual standard dropped. This explains why believers eat vegetarian food when they wish to create a suitable atmosphere for spiritual development. The same behavior was observed by Daniel and the three young men at the palace, and also by Ezekiel.

c. "Church Order" is essential to communal life, as it is indicated in 2 John. Besides, the church is known for its flexibility; believers can be allowed to increase, decrease or even stop fasting by their spiritual fathers, during confession, and according to their spiritual, physical, or health condition.

## **PERIODS OF FASTING IN THE COPTIC CHURCH**

**First: The Weekly fast:** Just as the church practises worship weekly, it also practises general fasting weekly. This has its origin in the Jewish Church. Jews were accustomed to fast on Mondays and Thursdays, as on these two days Moses went up to receive the commandments and descended the mountain carrying the two stone tablets. That is why when Christ spoke about the Pharisee, He said he boasted about fasting every week (Luke 18:12). Since the apostolic age, the Church has been aware of the value of fasting and designated

Wednesdays and Fridays as days for fasting. This is done in memory of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion.

**Second: The Great Lent** or "*Tessaracoste* (forty days fasting)." This is set to achieve a dual purpose: first, to be prepared to experience the joyful resurrection of the crucified Lord. Secondly, to prepare catechumens through teaching and guidance to practise worship together with practical repentance, so that they might receive the sacrament of baptism on Easter eve.

It is necessary to stop and reflect upon these two objectives. Although we celebrate the resurrection weekly on every Sunday, and practise the "resurrected life" every day through continuous renewal and unceasing repentance, yet we are in need of the fasting period of forty days (Great Lent) besides the Holy Week in order to become ready for the joy of the resurrection and the power it gives. Within this period we practise "mortification" in the Lord, that His resurrection may be transfigured in us, and to be able to say with the Apostle Paul: "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" Rom. 8:17.

With regards to the preparation of the catechumens within this period, fasting is necessary for the performance of this task, and gives an increasingly deep significance. It implies an open loving heart towards human race. The whole church fasts, so that God may attract new children to Him, and prepare them for the blessings of His Fatherhood... Thus fasting is a sign of our faith in God's power manifested in our ministry and preaching. On the other hand, fasting - particularly the Great Lent - should have the aim of witnessing to Jesus Christ and of unceasing prayer for the sanctification of mankind.

At every Lent, a believer used to remember how the Church fasted on his behalf and strived to gain him as a holy vessel and as an altar to the Lord. Similarly, it is his turn now to repay this love by working for the salvation of others.

Actually the observance of "Great Lent" dates back to the age of the apostles:

a. In the writings of St. Irenaeus - in the second century - mention is made of believers who fasted for a day, besides others who fasted for two days before Easter, as well as others who fasted for longer periods. There is reference to some who counted forty hours in a day<sup>9</sup>. This does not mean that St. Irenaeus negates fasting during Lent or the Holy Week, but he indicates the complete abstention from food which precedes the Easter Liturgy of Eucharist. For while some are satisfied to fast on Holy Saturday (and that is the only time when the Coptic Church fasts on a Saturday in the form of complete abstention), others abstain for two successive days: Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Concerning the calculation of forty hours in a day, this probably refers to a custom practised in the second century, and which some Copts follow, wherein fasting starts on Good Friday and continues until sunrise on Easter Sunday - i.e., until the celebration of the Easter Liturgy. This is equivalent to forty hours.

b. In the middle of the third century, there is strong evidence that fasting extended for six days (from Holy Monday to Holy Sunday). Some scholars comment on this as a clear indication of the distinction made between fasting during the six paschal (Holy) days as a whole and fasting on Good Friday and Holy Saturday which has specific signifi-

cance<sup>10</sup>. Actually, what occurred in the third century may be considered as complementary to what is mentioned by St. Irenaeus. This saint mentions complete long abstention preceding the Easter Liturgy, whereas what is mentioned regarding the middle of the third century refers to fasting during the Holy Week as a whole and which also has specific significance, especially that it is still observed by our Church with greater asceticism than the rest of Lent period.

c. In A.D 325, the Council of Nicene mentioned Lent as a settled matter recognised by the Universal Church, and not as an innovation in the church or in some churches.

d. In the middle of the fourth century, St. Athanasius was greatly concerned with writing the "Paschal Letters," even in his exile. The Popes of Alexandria have followed this custom at least ever since Pope Dionysius of Alexandria. These were written on the occasion of the Epiphany, not only to designate Easter time but also to designate the beginning of Lent immediately followed by the Holy Week and by Easter day.

It is noteworthy that in the letters that have come down to us, St. Athanasius integrated Lent with the Holy Week, although he stressed the clear distinction between them.

The Coptic Church fasts for fifty five days (forty day [Lent]; eight days [Holy Week] and seven days instead of the seven Saturdays which are not observed with complete abstention.

**Third: Other Periods of Fasting:** Besides the weekly fasting and Lent followed by the Holy Week, Copts observe the following periods of fasting:

**1- Fasting before Christmas:** Its aim is spiritual preparation to receive the birth of Christ. It lasts for forty days plus three days in memory of the general fast observed in the reign of Al Moiz when El-Muqattam mountain was moved.

**2- The Fast of the Apostles:** This begins on the day following Pentecost and continues until the feast of the martyrs, SS. Peter and Paul, on Abib the fifth (twelfth of July). The aim of this fasting period is to fill the soul with fervour and zeal to preach the Word with an apostolic thought.

**3- The Fast of Ninevah:** This lasts for three days. It starts on the Monday preceding the one before Lent. It probably refers to Jonah's fast, while he was inside the whale's belly.

**4- The Fast of the Holy Virgin:** This takes place fifteen days before the celebration of the Holy Virgin Mary feast. (It lasts from the seventh to the twenty second of August (16th of Misra)).

**5- Fasting on the eve (Paramoun) of Christmas and on the eve of the Epiphany...** this fast is observed immediately before these feasts, it is taken with great asceticism. If this occurs on a Saturday or Sunday, then fasting starts on Friday to allow complete abstention until sunset.

## **Notes on Periods of Fasting observed by the Copts:**

1- Fasting is not observed on Wednesdays and Fridays occurring in the "Pentecostal Period," i.e., the fifty days starts from Easter to Pentecost.

2- The sick and travellers may reduce the periods set for fasting by absolution during confession. As for those who observe asceticism, they may fast all their lives and follow no restrictions. Upon consecration, a bishop fasts for a complete year.

---

1. *H.H. Pope Shenouda III: The Spirituality of Fasting, Cairo, Egypt, 1984 (in Arabic).*

2. *The Shepherd of Hermans 3:7.*

3. *In Lev. hom 10:2.*

4. *Ser. 208 "Fathers of the Church, vol. 38."*

5. *Paschal Ep. 4:2.*

6. *H.H. Pope Shenouda III: Lectures in the Comparative Theology, Vol. 3 (in Arabic).*

7. *Didache 8:1.*

8. *Dict. of Christian Antiq. 2:972, Hip of Rome, Canon 20; Council of Nicea, Canon 5.*

9. *J.G. Davies: A Dict. of Liturgy and Worship, SCM 1978, P. 212.*

10. *Ibid 213.*





# ***CHURCH READINGS IN THE COPTIC CHURCH***

---

Man's words proclaim his inner life, characteristics, personality, abilities and his gifts. Likewise church readings uncover her nature, thoughts, aims, and abilities.

## **CHURCH READINGS IN THE EARLY AGES**

Jews used to pray daily liturgies besides the rites of the morning and evening sacrifices, especially on Saturdays and on feasts. The synagogue set certain readings especially for Saturdays<sup>1</sup>.

We can summarise the contents of the daily Jewish liturgy in the days of Jesus Christ in the following points<sup>2</sup>:

1. The president of the synagogue chooses one of the people to read the "*Shema*," i.e., the Jewish Creed<sup>3</sup> which contains Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41, and the 18 blessings (On Saturday there are only 7 blessings).

2. A reading from the *Pentateuch* (five books of Moses) in Hebrew and in Aramaic.

3. A reading from the Prophets or other books.

4. If there was a suitable person or persons to preach, he (or they) did so (Acts 13:15).

‡ The Christians who had Jewish origin participated in these Jewish liturgies till the year A.D 60 (Acts 20:16).

‡ The Christian Church inherited from the synagogue the readings from the Scriptures that were suitable to the Christian mind.

‡ In the second century, St. Justin<sup>4</sup> stated that the church admitted readings from the Gospels and the apostolic writings.

‡ In the second century there were certain church readings especially for feasts of Christian Pasch and Pentecost<sup>5</sup>. Afterward other readings were set as those of the feasts of martyrs and of Sundays. [Many of the church Fathers mentioned the use of the two testaments in the church readings<sup>6</sup>.]

‡ Before the Council of Nicea, the church had one "Lectionary" or more<sup>7</sup>.

## **THE FEATURES OF THE READINGS IN THE COPTIC CHURCH**

**First:** Church readings can be divided into two kinds, each one revealing a side of the church nature:

1. Readings that present a general line throughout the year, starts with El-Nayrouz (the beginning of the Coptic year) and continue till the end of the year in a certain theological and spiritual manner. These readings throughout the whole year uncover the church curriculum and her spiritual ladder, and at the same time represent the church catholicity (*universalism*) and her unity.

2. Everyday readings, according to the feasts of the saints and other circumstances. These readings show the distinctive nature of a day and the other. According to us, this represents the distinction between church members, and the variety of their gifts. This distinction and variety complement the catholicity of the church and her unity.

We can call the first kind of readings: "The general line of church readings" while the other is called: "The special readings."

**Second:** Church readings are considered as a part of church worship, these readings are recited with special tones (in Coptic) to declare the purpose of the choice of the church from these readings. Through church readings, worshipers offer to God hymns of love. In other words, church readings are prayers, through them we hear God's voice and talk to Him secretly. These readings are a dialogue of love between God and His people, therefore there is no church worship without biblical readings. Church readings are used not only through the daily Eucharistic liturgy but also in evening (*Vesper*), and morning (*Matin*) offerings, also through different liturgies such as the funeral services. Even in the canonical hours, every time we pray, the Psalms are mixed with certain readings from the New Testament.

**Third:** Church readings in the Eucharistic liturgy are not set by distributing the chapters of the two Testaments throughout the year, but the church chooses - by the guidance of the Holy Spirit - certain chapters to present an integral spiritual and theological curriculum. This curriculum is in accordance with church occasions, hymns and rites

throughout the year, aiming at the edification of the holy community.

**Fourth:** Besides the readings from the two testaments which are in accordance with the church hymns, there are other readings from the traditional and patristic writings, such as:

1. The "Synixarum": It contains the biographies of saints and God's actions with the church throughout the ages.

2. The "Difnar": It contains doxologies to God who acted in the life of the saint whose feasts we celebrate. This book is no longer used in most of our churches.

3. Patristic sermons, like those of St. John Chrysostom. Today most of our churches suffice with a sermon preached by one of the clergymen.

## **CHURCH READINGS BOOKS**

There are many "Lectionaries" that contain selected chapters from the Holy Bible, used in the Eucharistic liturgy, vespers and matins:

1. *General Lectionary: contains readings for Sundays and ordinary days throughout the year. It is divided according to the Coptic months.*

2. *Lectionary for the Great Lent.*

3. *Lectionary for the Holy Week (Paschal Week).*

4. *Lectionary for the Pentecostal period (the period between Easter and Pentecost).*

## THE GENERAL LINE FOR THE GENERAL CHURCH READINGS

Besides everyday readings (special church readings of the Days), the general church readings through the Coptic year present an integral church curriculum as an evangelic, ascetic, theological and eschatological (heavenly) one and at the same time it does not ignore our practical everyday life on earth.

*The general church readings are for the followings periods:*

**1. From El-Nayrouz feast (the beginning of the Coptic Year) to the feast of the Cross (1:17 Tout):** The readings of this period concentrate on joy, chanting hymns and the constant renewal; the first verse that is read in the eve of El-Nayrouz is: "Sing to the Lord a new song." Truly, repentance is the way to the kingdom of God, but when repentance is mixed with hope, it is practised through perpetual inner joy.

The analogy between El-Nayrouz (Feast of Martyrs) and the feast of the Cross. Using a joyful (*Farayhi*) tone throughout this period confirms the joyful life of the suffering church, for she joyfully bears the cross together with her Heavenly Groom.

**2. The preparation for Christmas (Nativity of Christ in Keyahk 29):** The church fasts for 43 days before Christmas, and presents readings which concentrate on "God's friendship with man" realized by the divine incarnation.

**3. The correlation between the feasts of Christmas, Circumcision and Epiphany (The Baptism of Jesus Christ):** The readings of these feasts announce that our Friend became like us, submitted Himself to the Law and was circumcised. He also entered with us into the Jordan River, was baptized to lift us up to the spiritual circumcision, changing our friendship to Him unto the "Adoption to God", that we might become "members of the household of God" Eph. 2:19.

In other words, the "divine friendship" (Christmas) can be realized through two integral actions: descent of the Word of God unto us (His circumcision like us), and lifting us up to Him by His Holy Spirit (our spiritual circumcision or our baptism). He became like us, subjected Himself to the Law which He issued, that we might become like Him, children of His Holy Father!

**4. "Jonah's Pasch":** Our adoption to God is realized through "passing over" (Pasch), for we have to die with Christ, be buried with Him (as if we were in the belly of the great fish), that we might reign with Him and enjoy the new life [the word "Pasch" means "Passover"].

The readings of the fasting and of the "Pasch" of Jonah represent a call to believers that they might read the books of the Old Testament in a new concept, through the events of the Christian Pasch, i.e., the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

**5. The readings of Great Lent,** on Sundays and ordinary days in Lent. These readings, from the Old and New Testaments, have their particular features, for they urge us to

accept the true and practical communion with Christ, our Pasch, who was slain for our sake.

**6. The readings of the Holy Week**, i.e., the readings of the period from Saturday of Lazarus till Easter. These readings are considered the center of all church readings, for through them the church follows all the events of salvation hour by hour, to declare the mystery of the redeeming divine love from the Old and New Testaments, so that believers might live in these events with all their hearts and senses and lastly enjoy the delight of Christ's resurrection.

**7. The Pentecostal Period**, with its readings and joyful (*Farayhi*) hymns reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, which in its essence is the enjoyment of communion with the Risen Christ, who is in heavens.

**8. The Feast of the Apostles (5th of Abib - 12 July)**: It is the feast of preaching and ministering unceasingly, and the feast of the acceptance of the apostolic life.

**9. The Feast of St. Mary (16 Misra - 22 August)**: It declares the glories that a believer might attain by his unity with the Glorious Christ, revealed - in a unique way - in St. Mary as the excellent member among the believers. It also assures the communion of saints.

**10. The preparation for El-Nayrouz**: In the last two weeks of the Coptic year, church readings attract our sight and mind towards the events of the end of the world and Christ's last advent. Church readings prepare the believers to sing: "Yes; Come O Lord Jesus."

In brief, the frame of the general curriculum of the church is:

1. It starts with the spiritual joy in the Lord together with the desire of the continual renewal, as a base for our spiritual life (Feast of El-Nayrouz till the feast of the Cross c. 11 September up to c. 27 September).

2. This joy is based on God's Friendship and love towards men (Christmas or the Feast of the Nativity of Christ - 7 January).

3. God's love and friendship were realized through His participating in our nature, that we may also participate in Jesus' sonship by the spirit of adoption (Feasts of Circumcision and Epiphany - 19 January).

4. This sonship is realised by passing over from bondage through the Pasch, the centre of the Old Testament (Jonah's Pasch).

5. The Old Pasch is a symbol of our True Pasch, the Crucified and Risen Christ (The Great Lent).

6. We have to accept the practical communion with our Pasch by participating in His crucifixion so that we might attain the delight and power of His resurrection (The Holy Week).

7. We have to accept the eschatological (heavenly) thought, that we might not miss the inner kingdom (The Pentecostal period).



8. As we attain communion with God we must witness to Him by preaching (The Feast of the Apostles).

9. Our communion with God leads us to the communion with our brothers and unites us with His saints (The Feast of St. Mary).

10 Our experience of the communion with God and with our brothers inflames our desire for the Lord's last advent, to enjoy the heavenly and eternal communion in the perfect glories (The end of the year).

Through the above mentioned summary we remark that the Coptic Church presents through the general readings an integral thought about God's love and His redeeming work together with our responsibility for the spiritual struggling, meditation on the heavenly glories accompanied by accepting sufferings joyfully, attaining the mysteries of the word of God together with preaching and witnessing, and attaining the communion with God and His son by His Holy Spirit through our communion altogether in Him.

---

1. J.G. Davies: *A dict. of Liturgy and Worship*, SCM 1978, p. 211.

2. W.K. Lowther Clarke: *Liturgy & Worship*, SPCK 4943, p. 76,77.

3. *Every Jew had to recite the creed twice a day.*

4. *Apology 1:67.*

5. Dom Gregory Dix: *The Shape of Liturgy*, 1975, p. 39.

6. *St. Clem. Alex. PG 8:237F; Origen: Homilies, passim; Tertullian: De Prescript 36; Cyprian: Ep. 38,39.*

7. Dix, p.39,370.



***PRIVATE WORSHIP***  
***IN***  
***THE COPTIC CHURCH***

---

**ONE WORSHIPPING LIFE**

In his daily life, conduct and worship, the believer bears an integral indivisible life, either life "in Christ" or "out of Christ." When he enjoys his life "In Christ," his fellowship in public worship is complimented by practising his unseen private worshipping; as both represent one devotional life. In other words, sharing the church liturgies with the congregation, a believer fortifies his spiritual life when he goes into his private room and shuts the doors of his senses. Thus when he is among the group physically, his heart, mind and soul are at liberty in heavens meeting and conversing intimately with God as though the universe embraces none but them both. And when he enters into his private room, closes the outer door and pours forth in front of God in a true spiritual worship he holds the whole world in his heart; I mean the whole human race - praying for them and seeking their prayers on his behalf. While he is in his room he feels he is inside the church that unites a host of spiritual militants with the victorious, including the heavenly hosts.

In the light of this concept we cannot draw a dividing line that separates between church life and private worshipping life, because the church is every believer holding firmly together with his brethren in the One Head.

That is why in the present time, due to housing problems in Egypt, when a believer does not find a private room to pray in solitude, he stands or bows in prayer in the presence of the family members. He does not abstain from praying because he does not have a private locked room. His room is already inside him if he chooses to shut out his senses.

### **PRIVATE OR INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP?**

Individuality is non-existent in our Church's dictionary. The spirit of individuality and isolation has been eliminated in the human loving Christ, that we might live in the spirit of collective love even if we were in our private rooms. This I have clarified frequently while talking about monasticism and monarchism. Hence monasticism is not an inner isolation from the community, or a practice of individual life, but it is a unity with God, the Lover-of-mankind.

### **PRIVATE WORSHIP**

In the Coptic church, the believer practises many private forms of worships of which we mention:

1. **The Canonical Hours** (the Agbia prayers): The early church took after the Jewish Church the system of dividing the days into hours of prayers. Many of the Copts pray Matins and Compline, some pray Midnight. When they have the chance they pray other prayers.

We need to notice the following in the Canonical Hours prayers:

a. Every prayer is called "song of praise," as though the church is calling on her children to lead a life of joy if possible all the hours of their life, day and night.

b. In every hour the church offers us the memory of a certain phase of God's redeeming work. The "Matin" song of praise reminds us of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and our daily resurrection to begin a new life in Him. The Terce (praise of the third hour) reminds us of the coming upon the church of the Holy Spirit of God, the Giver of perpetual renewal and holiness. In the Text we remember the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, while in the None (ninth hour) we remember the death in the flesh of our Lord and the acceptance of the right hand thief, in Paradise. In the Vespers (sunset) we remember the removing of our Lord's Body from the cross, giving thanks for concluding the day, and asking Him that we might spend the night in peace. In Compline we remember the burial of the Body of our Lord watching for the end of our sojourn on earth... yet in the three midnight prayers we await for the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

c. The hourly songs of praise begins with giving thanks to God after the Lord's prayer, then submitting our repentance (Psalms 50 [51]), followed by praise with Psalms.

2. Besides the prayers or the praises of the Canonical Hours the believer practises his **private talk with God**; one time praising, another time thanking and a third time contending and a fourth time asking and pleading. It is worthy of the believer to be open hearted. He would not focus in his prayers upon his personal needs but ask for all if possible: for his beloved as well as his antagonists, for his acquaintances as well as for strangers, for believers as well as non-believers.

3. It is worthy of a believer also to practise "**kneeling**" (*Metanias*), as a sign of contrition and repentance. The

believer trains himself to practise "kneeling" for the salvation of others.

4. Preoccupation with God through the day, that is "**prayer of calling Jesus' name**", which is called the "arrow prayer," in which the believer cries out from moment to moment with a short prayer calling the name of our Lord Jesus Christ as an arrow to strike with, the snares of our enemy Satan. This action, simple as it is, has its own effectiveness in the life and worship of the believer.

5. Praises, glorification and beatification: some believers practise church hymns daily or on feasts as a private worship in their bedrooms. Here we need to mention that some Copts prefer setting up a **special corner for prayer**. If this is not easy to do we find that many icons decorate their homes as a sign of their longing for holy life in God and fellowship with the saints.

## ***THE COPTIC CHURCH AND DOGMAS***

---

### **ALEXANDRIA AND CHRISTIAN DOGMAS<sup>1</sup>**

Dogmas, to the Coptic Orthodox Church, are not merely theological concepts concerning God, man, church, eternal life, heavenly creatures, demon etc., to be discussed among clergymen, scholars and laymen, but are, in essence, daily experiences each member of the church has to live. In other words, dogmas representing our faith in God through various aspects have one message, i.e. our communion with God the Father in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, by His Holy Spirit. Thus, we conceive of our redemption, and our membership of the church, a deep understanding of the Holy Bible, an acceptance of the Kingdom of God within our souls, a communion with the heavenly creatures and the experience of eternal life.

### **DOGMAS AND INTEGRAL CHURCH LIFE**

The Christian Church is not merely a school involved in researches and teaching dogmas, but an institution which worships God and serves mankind. It works for the transformation and the renewal of this world, and hopefully awaits the world to come. Truly, the Christian Church would not be the church as we know it without Christian dogmas<sup>2</sup>.

Dogmas interpret our whole philosophy of the church through repeated practise of our faith through the holy tradition (the holy Scriptures, worship, behavior and preaching). All these elements represent different aspects of the one inseparable church life.

If we look at the relationship between the dogmas and the holy Scripture, we observe that they are not only based on the Scripture but that any dogmas which has no base in it is invalid. Dogmas in fact are mirrors of the holy Scripture. They explain the holy Scriptures and attract men to enjoy its spirit.

Similarly, we can say that dogmas are the way in which believers are guided to worship God in truth and in spirit. True worship reveals our dogmas in simplicity.

Dogmas correlate to our ascetic attitude. The early Alexandrian theologians and clergymen were true ascetics, and as a result asceticism still strongly affects our theology. This is not by denying the needs of our bodies, as some scholars charge, but by insisting on the soteriological aspect: The early Coptic ascetics were involved in enjoying the redeeming deeds of the Holy Trinity, i.e. in enjoying the sanctification of the soul, mind, body, gifts etc.. through communion with the Father in His Son through the Holy Spirit.

Early Egyptian asceticism was biblical. It did not hate the body, its senses and capacities nor did it deny the human free will, or despise earthly life and all its properties. Coptic asceticism in its essence was not an isolation from men, but rather enjoying unity with God. This attitude affected our theology and dogmas, through concentration on the

"deification," ie. the return of man to the original image of God by restoring his soul, mind, body etc., in preparation for Paradise.

Concerning the relationship between dogmas and behaviour or practical faith, we have to distinguish between only believing (without practising) and a living belief, for as St. James says: "even demons believe" Jam. 2:19.

Concerning the relationship between dogmas or theology as a whole and practical religious life, we can quote Alan Richardson: "Religious people very often feel that theology leaves a cold dead abstraction in the place of what was once a warm and living faith. Theology, like any other study can become dry and academic.. The fact is that religion without theology is as unthinkable and incomplete as theology is without religion: the two are as complementary to one another as theory and practice<sup>4</sup>.

The close relationship between dogmas and preaching was well exercised through the ordination of the majority of the early deans of the School of Alexandria as Popes or Bishops of this See. Those men were well educated in theology, and dogmas and were highly capable of preaching and practising pastoral care.

In conclusion, the true theologian is not merely a man who is involved in discussing or teaching dogmas, but also one who accepts the dogmas of the church of which he is a member. Therefore Origen calls him "a man of the church<sup>5</sup>." He is not only a spokesman of the church but he practises its life.



Dogmas are what is believed, taught, confessed and practised.

## **DOGMAS AND KNOWLEDGE**

One of the very important characteristics of the church of Alexandria was her broad-mindedness and openness of heart towards philosophers. While leaders of the church in other countries looked at philosophy as an enemy of faith (like St. Justin and Tertullian), our Fathers embraced philosophers with love, treated them as children in need of the church to help them grow through faith into manhood. Thus the Alexandrians saw faith not as opposite to the mind and knowledge, but as a satisfaction of mind and an elevation of thoughts through which one could enjoy Divine knowledge. This knowledge was thus superior to philosophical knowledge. God grants faith to men who are His rational creatures, and He would not destroy the minds which He created.

During the second century, St. Clement of Alexandria, a theologian of great piety, wide reading and classical scholarship, believed that the spiritual believer was a Gnostic, giving the word "gnosis" (knowledge) a Christian meaning, instead of the common meaning-of that time which signified "heresy." He says: "Gnosis is the principle and author of every action conforming to the Logos<sup>6</sup>," the grace of gnosis comes from the Father through the Son<sup>7</sup>.

Faith, in our concept, embraces all human nature, it signifies not only our souls and hearts but also our minds and thoughts.

## **THE "DOGMA" BASED ON "TRUTH" AND "LOVE"**

Dogmas, as we have seen, are the interpretation of our experience of God, in the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ. This experience throughout the ages does not alter, for Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:18). The disciples and apostles (and bishops afterwards) did not sit around a table and agree to teach new dogmas, but rather they preached their Christian experience. As St. John says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" 1 John 1:3. Thus all Christian dogmas resulted from Church's experience of the Crucified and Risen Christ, "Truth and "Love" at the same time. We receive these dogmas as the unchangeable truth that we must holdfast, with "love."

The Alexandrian Popes (bishops) as theologians and pastors at the same time looked to dogmas as an expression of evangelic truth integrated with love. They were very zealous in defending the Orthodox faith and dogmas against any heresy, not only in Egypt but in all Christendom, offering their lives as sacrifices on behalf of the church. They were very firm and strict concerning the faith they had once received (2 Tim. 12,14), and some historians accuse them of violence, but in fact they were truly loving and kind men. St. Cyril wrote to Nestorius telling him that he would never find a person who loved him like Cyril, but never would this love be at the expense of his faith. He hated heresy and error but loved the soul of the heretic and desired his salvation.

## **DOGMA AND THEOLOGICAL TERMS**

The Alexandrian Fathers used theological terms to explain the divine truths and their deep meanings, and to defend the Orthodox faith against heresies, but they were not enslaved to the terms themselves. St. Athanasius who devoted his life

to defending Christ's Godhead stated that disputes merely about words must not be suffered to divide those who think alike<sup>8</sup>.

## **DOGMA AND RENEWAL**

The Coptic Orthodox Church is well known as a conservative church, especially in dogmas and doctrines. At the same time, it progresses not by embracing new doctrines or new "articles of faith," but by explaining the same faith "once given to the saints"(Jude 3) in a contemporary language<sup>9</sup>.

---

1. Fr. T. Malaty: *Alexandria & Christian Dogmas*, Ottawa, 1986.

2. See Jaroslaw Pelikan: *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, 1973, p1.

3. *Terms Physis & Hypostasis in the Early Church*, p. 19.

4. *Creeds in the Making*, SCM, 1979, p. 8.

5. *In Levit 1:1; In. Jos. 9:8*.

6. *Strom 6:69:2*.

7. *Ibid 5:71:5*.

8. *St. Athanasius: Tome of the people of Antioch*. Fr. R. Malaty: *The Terms Physis and Hypostasis in the Early Church*, 1986, p. 4.

9. For more details see our booklet: *Alexandria Christian Dogmas* (reference 1 above).



## ***OUR BELIEF IN GOD<sup>1</sup>***

---

### **GOD IS LOVE**

"God is love" 1 John 4:8. He is neither an idea that we believe in, nor a Supreme Being isolated from mankind in His heaven far away from our world, but He is the Lover of mankind, He granted us His divine knowledge to enjoy His love and to touch His Fatherhood. He would like to be very near to mankind, to unite them to Himself, to live within their souls, and grants us participation in His Glory.

In other words, God reveals Himself to us, not to involve us in theoretical discussions, nor to practise His authority upon us, but to attract us to Himself as children to their true Father in whom they find the essence of life, satisfaction, immortality and eternal glorification.

### **REVELATION OF GOD**

God created man in His image, as the most perfect of His creations on earth. God did not plan to leave man in Paradise alone, but to embrace him as His beloved, to meet him (Gen. 18:17), and to reveal Himself, His nature, His mysteries and His will to him.

God spoke to mankind through nature (Rom. 1:20). As they refused to hear the voice of the natural law, He presented His written Law through Moses and sent His prophets to them (Heb. 1:1,2). At last, the Incarnate Son of God came to enlighten their inner life and to set His

Kingdom within them. He came to reveal the mystery of God, the Lover and Savior of men. His revelation has its effect on our nature and eternal future.

## **MYSTERY OF GOD**

"Mystery" in Christianity does not mean that a believer takes obscure dogmas without understanding them, or that these dogmas are unacceptable to his mind. Our minds cannot conceive this naturally without God's grace and revelation. Mystery does not oppose man's thinking but is supreme and inconceivable without God's help.

God created us as rational beings. He reveals Himself and His deeds to us, not to abolish our minds but to elevate them so that all our human nature can accept Him and acknowledges His mysteries.

## **MONOTHEISM AND TRINITARIAN FAITH**

Our faith in its essence is a call to enjoy the experience of the One God, Lover of mankind. The Old and the New Testaments confirm the belief in the One God, but the Old Testament deals with this matter in its passive aspect, for its aim was to keep the believers away from idols and from practising the abominations of nations that accompanied paganism (2 Kings 21:2; Chorn. 28:3).

The New Testament witnesses to the One God in a positive aspect, for it does not only declare the oneness of God but it also deepens our faith in God by revealing the "Trinitarian" faith. In fact this faith does not oppose "Monotheism," but emphasizes it by revealing some mysteries of the One God and giving interpretation to these mysteries.

## **THE TRINITARIAN DOGMA AND THE BIBLE**

The Holy Trinity was referred to at Jesus' baptism (Joh. 1:27-33). Besides our baptism is fulfilled in the name of the Holy Trinity (Matt. 28:19). St. Paul benediction enumerates the Trinity in 2 Cor. 13:14.

In the Old Testament we find the Trisagion (holy, holy, holy) of Isaiah's Vision (6:3); and the name of God is mentioned in plural "Elohim," even in the Deuteronomy 6:4 "unity" passage [see Gen. 1:26, 11:7].



### **Is it necessary to believe in the Holy Trinity?**

1. The "Trinitarian" faith solves many problems which was caused by the absolute "monotheistic" faith. For example, we say that God is love and His love is eternal; does this mean that there was another being whom God loved eternally? We can not say that He loves Himself eternally; this means He is selfish (God forbids!). We cannot say that He eternally loved by power and not by action, and after the creation of the heavenly and earthly beings His love became in action; this means that creation was necessary for God to realise His love and changes it from power to action.

What we say concerning love might be repeated in regards to other divine characteristics like peace-making, mercy etc..

Truly if we accept the Holy Trinity as three Hypostaseis in one divine essence, this problem will be easily solved. This faith in the One God of three Hypostasies declares the act of love, unity and peace in God as an eternal action of the Holy

Trinity. The Father loved the Son and there was no time when the Father did not love the Son. Love as a divine character was eternally in power and in action, for "Love" is God Himself who loved eternally, and was not in need of the creation to declare His characteristics. God's love to us is an extension of His work and eternal loving nature. Then the Trinitarian faith reveals God as a dynamic, personal and communal Being and not a solid being.

2. Someone may say that the "Trinitarian" faith may incline to "polytheism." We reply that the Son is the Word of the Father; many religions believe that the words of God are eternal. the Word of God is not "outside" God, but is one with Him, as *brightness that shines from the light. The Father was not without His Word, as light is never without brightness. Thus our belief in the Son does not mean polytheism.*

The Holy Spirit is the "Life," and the Father is the "Being." This "Being" is not separated from "Life..."

It is important to believe in God who is "the rational, Being" one essence, eternally simple, for the three are not separated, nor has one existed before the others. They are like the fire which has flame, light and heat at the same time.

3. St. Clement of Alexandria states that all expressions concerning God are used because of our weakness and disability. In other words, we must not understand "One" here as a number among other numbers, but it means an unspeakable unity. "Monotheism" cannot be tasted nor understood as "Numbering," for it makes God as a solid Being subject to numbering. St. Clement says: [God is One, and beyond one, and above the Monad itself].

Let us not understand the Oneness of God in a material manner.

4. We should not understand the expression "the Son" in a materialistic way as if the Son had an essence other than that of the Father, but He is the Brightness who never separates from the "Light."

Can God not bring forth a Son? For we cannot accept God as a solid, being unable to bring forth! Every energetic essence has to bring forth something. Fire brings forth light and radiates heat, the radio element brings forth energy, and the human mind brings forth wise thoughts. God can never be a solid Being, but eternally He brings forth the Son, for He is the "Light" who brings forth "the Light." Truly a light that brings forth no light is darkness.

Bringing forth the Son eternally reveals the nature of God as the Loving Being, who in His infinite love brings forth the Son offering to Him His own divine essence being One with Him.

5. St. Athanasius clarifies that the "Son" is called "the Word of God," to confirm the oneness of the essence, that no one may think in two essences.

6. The unity of the Holy Trinity as a unity of love, of continuous movement, has an effect on our lives, for we imitate the Holy Trinity through our unity together in the Holy Trinity.

7. The "Trinitarian" faith has its effect on our daily life and on our eternal future. For through it we acknowledge



the fatherhood of God, enjoy the divine friendship of Jesus our Savior, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the door of hope in the eternal glories will always be opened before us.

8. The Holy Trinity declares the concept of "perfection," i.e., the perfection of the unity of the Holy Trinity and not the theoretical and the solid perfection which has no movement of love.

### **THE HOLY TRINITY AND HUMAN MIND**

Our Trinitarian faith does not oppose the human mind as some- one may think, for if it is called a "Mystery" this is because of our need for a divine revelation to accept it. Even "monotheism" has many mysteries that the mind cannot understand by itself. For example, all religious men say that God fills heaven and earth and He in infinite, at the same time there is a divine throne. Is this divine throne limited? How does it look like in heaven? How can God occupy the whole world and at the same time He is present in every room and in every house of God, not partially for He is undivided, but He is entirely present?

The human soul may be used as an example to explain the Trinitarian faith. Every soul is "Existent," rational and alive. Although man has one soul and its being is distinguished from its mind and its life, the three are inseparable.

Fire has three self-properties that look like the hypostasis, for it has flame, the light that is begotten of the flame, and the heat that proceeds from it.

It was very important to reveal the mystery of the Holy Trinity so that our salvation can be realized. The Father,

Lover of men, sent His Word incarnate to bear our sins and pay our debts, and sent His Holy Spirit which raises us to His Glory.

Our Trinitarian faith uncovers the real divine love, for God does not seek our destruction, or have authority over us as some existentialists say, He is "Love," that longs for our adoption so that we might be united with Him and share in His eternal Glories.

---

Fr. T. Malaty: The Coptic Orthodox Church and Dogma (God), Ottawa 1986.



## ***MAN & REDEMPTION<sup>1</sup>***

---

### **MAN IN GOD'S SIGHT**

Our faith in God is correlated to our life, for we acknowledge Him as the Lover of mankind who reveals Himself to His beloved creatures, likewise we can't understand ourselves as human beings, our salvation and our eternal destiny apart from our relationship with God and outside our concept of Him.

Man - in God's view - is not just one out of billions of creatures, but God deals with him as His own image, beloved, and His own close friend. He founded all the world for his sake, and gave him authority even over the space. Therefore, when man was totally ruined - his spirit and body - the Word of God was incarnated to raise him up and to renew his nature. Through Incarnation, God revealed two things:

1. God's honorable sight of man, for the Word of God Himself became man and dwelt among us.
2. He granted man freedom which sin had destroyed.

### **MAN'S FREEDOM**

According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, the image of God in which man was created (Gen. 1:26) was his own free will, however, he spoiled it by his disobedience to God, thus he became incapable of interacting with God's love, freely.

## **THE HUMAN NATURE**

When we speak about "man and his redemption" or about the human nature and its renewal, we refer to man's soul, mind and body, for Christ came as a perfect Man to renew "man" in his wholeness. Therefore, the Alexandria Fathers argued against the Gnostics who rejected the body and looked at it as an enemy. The Alexandrians were also interested in revealing the sanctification of mind: looking to science and philosophy as if it were not in enmity towards the mind.

## **GOD'S ROLE IN MAN'S SALVATION**

After his fall, man became in need to enjoy the risen life, and at the same time he was in need for One who can redeem him by realising God's justice. These two requirements can't be fulfilled except through the "Incarnation and the Resurrection." The Word of God descended to us and became our Saviour, to realise the following advantages to us:

- 1. To declare the Creator's goodness. He created man and He is able to renew his nature.*
- 2. To join us with Himself (John 17:23).*
- 3. To accomplish God's sentence of death (2 Cor. 5:14) and to condemn sin (Rom. 8:3).*
- 4. To undergo death by His victory over death and His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:21).*
- 5. To conquer Satan, our enemy (1 John 3:1).*
- 6. To raise us up to heaven (Eph. 2:6).*
- 7. To renew our nature in Him, and grant us participation in His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).*
- 8. To realise universality of the Church, by joining the Gentiles together with the Jews through faith in one Body.*
- 9. To grant us the true knowledge (Matt. 11:27), for Jesus alone knows the Father.*

## MAN'S ROLE IN SALVATION

Grace is the centre of the Alexandria theology, for God "first loved us" (1 John 4:19), foreknew us (Rom. 8:29), chose us, predestined us, called us, justified us and glorified us. He wills, decides and acts for our salvation, but we never enjoy this free salvation unwillingly. God wills that all men might be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4), for He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turns from his way and lives (Ezek. 33:11). He offered His Son as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Nevertheless, God asked us to choose the way we desire (Deut. 30:15,19), and to declare this choice through practical faith. Thus the good deeds that we practise by the divine grace are necessary and essential.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III, in his book " Salvation in the Orthodox Concept" presents many proofs of the importance of "good deeds" to our salvation:

*1. Evil work leads to eternal condemnation (Gal. 5:19,21; Eph. 5:5,6).*

*2. Judgment will be based upon our deeds (Matt. 16:27; John 5:28, 29).*

*3. Works are the fruit of true faith (Luke 3:8, James 2:14).*

*4. Through good deeds we witness to our faith (James 2:18; Matt. 7:16, 17).*

*5. Through our good deeds we witness to be children of God (1 John 2:29; 3:9, 10).*

*6. Works make faith perfect (James 2:22; 1:27). We have to distinguish between many kinds of good works as mentioned in the Holy Bible:*

*1. The works of man's own righteousness, when man trusts in his own power, his salvation is ruined.*

*2. The works of the Law, like circumcision, preserving the Sabbath in a solid way etc. If these works are performed literally they ruin the spiritual life.*

*3 Good works which are the fruits of faith: The believer leans on the Lord's breast and asks for the work of His divine grace under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; these works are necessary to our salvation.*

---

I. Fr. T. Malaty: The Coptic Orthodox Church and Dogmas; Man & Redemption.



## ***THE CHURCH***

---

### **NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

The Church occupies the heart of the Bible, for she is the object of the redemption which the Bible proclaims. God purchased her at the cost of Christ's Blood (Acts 20:28).

Understanding the Church means understanding the relationship between God and man, manifested in, the divine plan of salvation, God's Fatherhood, the kingdom of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the means of grace, the lessons from the history of mankind, the destiny of men ... etc. It is through the church that God makes known His redeeming wisdom even to the heavenly hosts (Eph. 3:10).

The fathers of Alexandria adopted the spiritual concepts of the Church and did not consider it a political or a human organisation, for many reasons:

- a. Throughout the past twenty centuries, the Church of Alexandria was isolated from politics and had no civil authority.
- b. The Alexandrians' view of knowledge (gnosis) as a divine gift constantly granted by the Father through His Son, attracted the clergymen to practising contemplation, studying the Holy Bible and worshipping without being involved in church administration.

c. Even before the appearance of the monastic movement, the Egyptian clergymen and laity practised the ascetic life. Their minds and hearts were more often lifted up to the heavenly kingdom than to church administration.

**1. COVENANT WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD:** In the Old Testament, believers looked at the community as a whole, as the people of God and the children of Abraham who enjoyed a covenant with God (Gen. 17). In the New Testament Christ offered a new covenant giving His Blood and Body, and presenting them as food to His people thus capable of granting them eternal life (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25).

The Church of the New Testament inherited the promises that were given through the Old Testament, but in a new and deep concept. Therefore the church is ancient and is new at the same time. We, the members of the Church enjoy the ancient prophecies through the new life which we practise in Jesus Christ who never ages.

**2. THE MOTHER OF BELIEVERS:** The Church is virgin because of her purity (2 Cor. 11:2), and at the same time she is a mother who brings forth children of God unceasingly. Her children are a fruitful witness to Christ.

**3. THE BODY OF CHRIST:** The Church is the Body of Christ that grows towards perfection; her children enjoy communion in the Body and Blood of the Lord.

**4. A new creation in Christ:** The believer receives the rebirth in baptism, and he becomes a new creation in Christ



(2 Cor. 5:17), he dies with Christ and also rises with Him (Eph. 2).

The work of the Holy Spirit is the continuous sanctification of the believers so that they might become in the likeness of Christ, the Head.

**5. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST:** The Church waits for her Christ who will come to perform His eternal spiritual marriage with her (Rev. 19:7). Christ called Himself the Bridegroom (Matt. 9:14,15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35; Matt. 25:1-3). Through this concept we acknowledge that the Lord who is the Judge, is coming not to judge us but to grant her to be close to Him, to unite with Him and to enjoy His glories. As the Groom, He is jealous (Exod. 20:5; 34:24; Deut 4: 25; 5:9; 6:51), for He cannot be in communion with sin. Every sin we commit is a crime not only against His law but rather against His love, for by sin we break the heart of our Heavenly Groom. This concept also means that our unity with God is eternal and indissoluble.

**6. THE DWELLING PLACE OF CHRIST,** that grows as the holy temple of God (Eph. 2:21 etc.), a spiritual temple, and a sanctuary in which the Holy Trinity dwell.

**7. THE CHURCH IS THE HOUSE OF FAITH,** the house that preserves the deposit of faith without deviation.

**8. THE CHURCH IS THE HOUSE OF SALVATION,** like the house of Rahab (Jos. 2). There is no salvation outside it.

**9. THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE:** The Church reveals the kingdom of God on earth, as the pure kingdom of love, her goal is that every soul may enjoy eternal life.. Whoever belongs to the church but has no love, is truly outside the church, for he does not know God (1 John 3:14, 16; 4:7,8). This love unites us all in God who is Love, and unites the earthly creatures with the heavenly hosts, men with angels, the militant members with those who are victorious.

**10. THE ICON OF HEAVEN:** The Heavenly One descended to our land, made of us His heavenly Church. Thus we live on earth with a heavenly heart and high thought, participating with the heavenly creatures in their hymns, joy and peace.

**11. EVER-YOUTHFUL CHURCH:** The Church never ages (spiritually) nor weakens, for she is united with her Groom who never ages. The Groom grants her His Holy Spirit which renews her unceasingly, therefore her youth is renewed like the eagle's (Ps. 103:5). "Even though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" 2 Cor. 4:16.

**12. THE FIRST-BORN CHURCH:** Her Groom, the First-Born One, grants all her members the glory of becoming first-born in Him.

### **THE CHURCH CHARACTERISTICS:**

1. The Alexandrian Fathers spoke about Church democracy.

It is the peoples' right to choose their shepherds, and it is the duty of the clergyman to show his loving fatherhood and not his authority.

Every member of the church - man, woman or a child - has his own role in the church, as we shall explain when we speak about "the Church of the People."

2. Spirituality is the common feature of all aspects of church life and activities.

3. The Alexandrian Fathers- like St. Cyril The Great- state that "Unity," based on the "One faith" without deviation is a characteristic of the church.

---

*1. Fr. T. Malaty: Coptic Orthodox Church and Dogmas - "The Church," 1987.*



## ***THE HEAVENLY CREATURES***

---

### **THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE WESTERN THEOLOGY**

When Calvin spoke about "angels," he said, "It is also our duty cheerfully to remain in ignorance of what is not for our advantage to know"; and Barth began his discussion of angels with so much hesitation. The western theologians are inclined to avoid talking about the heavenly creatures, looking to modern man even though he has no objection to the existence of angels theologically or logically but he does not like to describe them on psychological bases, looking to this speech as a kind of myth and imagination. As for the Coptic Church, we find that the heavenly creatures have had their own strong print on the writings of the Fathers of Alexandria, especially Origen, as well as on her hymns, feasts, icons, church buildings etc.

Concerning the patristic writings, there was a clear line of thought as regards to the heavenly creatures in the early church, especially the writings of the School of Alexandrian which adopted the biblical thoughts. For the Holy Bible refers to them throughout all its books, from Genesis to the Revelation. These references throughout the two testaments is not meaningless or without aim.

As to Church hymns, believers who receive the pledge of the heavenly life waiting for being in the likeness of angels chant hymns with the angels, blessing them, requesting their

prayers, setting feasts in their names, especially the Archangel Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, the four Living creatures, the twenty-four incorporeal priests etc.

The Coptic Church was interested in icons of the heavenly creatures, either portraying them alone, or in the icons presenting events of the life of Christ, or in the icons of saints as they appear holding crowns on top of the saints' heads. These indicate the accessibility of heaven to the believers, and that believers struggle to attain resemblance to angels.

Angels are highly considered, when we speak about the Church as an icon of heaven. In the "Doxology of Morning" we sing: "Hail to the church, the house of the angels." The Church as defined by an ancient Coptic homily is "a place of consolation, a place of meetings of angels and a place of the Cherubim and the Seraphim<sup>2</sup>."

## **THE CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS**

St. Paul the Apostle speaks about the angels as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation " Heb. 1:14. This does not mean that they are less in rank or glory than believers, but means that they love them and serve them for their salvation. What is their ministry to the believers?

1. The suffering church finds a kind of heavenly joy through her feeling that she is accompanied by angels, her heart is involved in the eternal glory and the communion with the heavenly creatures. Therefore Origen says: "do not waver at the solitude of the desert; it is during your sojourn in the tents that you will receive the manna from heaven and eat the bread of angels<sup>3</sup>."

2. Stephen the Deacon, and Paul the Apostle spoke about the active role of angels in receiving the Law (Acts 7:35; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2-3). Origen states that angels are friends of the Groom who prepare the Church - people of God - during the time of her espousal to meet the Groom personally. He says "When I was preparing myself for my marriage with the Son of the King and the First-Born of every creature, the holy angels followed me and ministered to me, bringing me to Law as a wedding present<sup>4</sup>." [These are the angels who are called the guardians of children and who always see the face of the Father in heaven<sup>5</sup>].

St. Clement of Alexandria refers to Daniel (10:13-21) when he says: "The presiding powers of the angels have been distributed according to the nations and the cities<sup>6</sup>."

3. The coming of the Groom, our Lord Jesus Christ, does not stop the work of the angels nor their acting love on behalf of the Kingdom of Christ within us. The New Testament declares the appearance of angels throughout the life of Christ on earth from the announcement of His incarnation till His Ascension. Origen states: "When the angels saw the Prince of the heavenly host touring the places of earth, followed the way He had opened, following their Lord and obeyed the Will of Him who put those who believe in Him under their guardianship. The angels are in the service of your salvation... They say among themselves, "If He has put on mortal flesh, how can we remain doing nothing? Come, angels, let us all descend from heaven ." That is why there was a multitude of the heavenly host praising and glorifying God when Christ was born. Everything is filled with angels<sup>7</sup>].

St. Athanasius states that angels who descended from heaven to announce the coming of Christ, ascended to heaven on His ascension to announce to the heavenly creatures that they might open their doors to the King of Glory<sup>8</sup>.

4. Origen clarifies the communion of the Church with the heavenly creatures, for he says: [If the angel of the Lord encompass those who fear God and brings them deliverance (Ps. 33:8), it would seem that when a number of people duly meet together for the glory of Christ, each will have his own angel, encompassing him, since they all fear the Lord. Each angel will be with the man he has been commissioned to guard and to direct. Thus when the saints assemble, there exist two churches one of men and the other of angels<sup>9</sup>].

St. Clement of Alexandria sees that angels have their own role in helping clergymen in the ministry of the children of God<sup>10</sup>, and Origen speaks of their role in the ministry of the church sacraments and in the repentance of souls<sup>11</sup>, and in helping believers in their prayers.

St. Clement speaks about angels' assistance to souls in their spiritual progress<sup>12</sup>, and Origen speaks about their grief over man's fall in sin<sup>13</sup>.

5. Origen correlates between angels and our entrance to paradise, especially the martyrs. He comments on the Apostle's words that we became a spectacle to angels and men (1 Cor. 4:9), saying that angels look to the martyrs in wonder, and that they rejoice with us in heaven<sup>14</sup>.



## ***THE SAINTS***

---

### **THE SAINTS AND THE BOND OF LOVE**

The Saints are dear brothers who have struggled like us and have departed to Paradise. They are not dead, but are sleeping, as our Lord said (John 11:11), and as St. Paul called them (1 Thess. 4:13).

Our early fathers spoke clearly and in detail about our relationship with Saints. The Saints in Paradise are the triumphant members of the same one church in which we are militant members. We, the triumphant and militants, are members of the Church, which is the one Body of Jesus Christ. The triumphant become invisible members because of the death of their bodies, and then militants are the visible ones. This is man's point of view, but in God's sight, we are all a visible holy family.

They departed from earth, but did not leave the church; their love toward their brothers did not cease by their departure and dwelling in Paradise. The death of their bodies does not sever the bond of mutual love between them and us; on the contrary it increases in depth and strength. Their prayers for the salvation of all the world never cease. They pray for us, and we venerate them as they are our holy and dear friends.



## **ICONS OF SAINTS**

We venerate the icons of saints and put them on the iconstasis (icon-stand). Church walls and doors are hung with icons, also our homes etc., as a sign of our communion with them in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Coptic Icons have their own characteristics as we have mentioned in the book : "Church, House of God."

## **THE INTERCESSIONS OF SAINTS (THEIR PRAYERS FOR US )<sup>15</sup>**

We all - the triumphant and militants - as one Body, have love that never fails (1 Cor. 13:8), for our interaction is unceasing. Those who preceded us pray for us, and we through love - pray for those who departed, and God in His Fatherhood appreciates this mutual love.

Our belief in intercession is biblical, as it appears from the following points:

1. Saints who departed are still alive, for it is said, "When he called the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob for He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all are alive in Him" Luke 20:37,38; Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:26. Moses and Elijah appeared on Jesus' transfiguration (Luke 9:28-33), and many bodies of the saints were raised on Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 27:52,53).

2. God disclosed many secrets which concern the future of His men in both the Old and the New Testaments (Acts 20:22, 23, 29, 30; 2 Pet. 1:14), no wonder that He reveals our conditions to the saints who are in Paradise. Their knowledge about us is a gift from God to them. Therefore Abraham knew that Moses and other prophets had come

(Luke 16; 29-31), and those who are in heaven rejoice for the repentance of a sinner (Luke 15:7-10).

3. The believers who departed have a kind of privilege before God, therefore the Lord blessed Isaac for the sake of Abraham his father (Gen. 26:5), and He was gracious to Israel and had compassion on them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (2 kings 13:23). He did not tear down the kingdom in the days of Solomon for the sake of his father David (1 kings 11:11-13). God raised a dead man when his corpse touched the bones of Elisha the prophet, revealing the great position of this prophet in God's sight (2 Kings 13:20,21).

4. We, the militants ask for the intercessions of the saints, as Jacob did when he asked for the intercessions of his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac (Gen. 32:9). Moses asked for the intercession of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod. 32:13)... For God honors those who honor Him (1 Sam. 2:30). He attributes Himself to them (Gen. 26:24; 28:13), and hears their supplications... Therefore the rich man appealed to Abraham (Luke 16:27,28).

Origen says: "It is not against truth, that we ask saints and seek for their intercessions.. but that they might help us." St. Athanasius says: "O lady and queen, the mother of God (Theotokos) intercede for us."

---

1. Carl F.H. Henry: *Basic Christian Doctrine*, Michigan 1980, p63, f; J. Calvin: *Institutes*, I, XIV, 3; K. Barth: *Die Kirchlische Dogmatik*, III, 3 < Sec. 51.

2. Fr. Malaty: *Church, House of God*, 1982, P. 332.

3. In Num. hom 17:3.

4. *Comm. in Cant.*, 1.

5. *Ibid.*2.

6. *Stromata* 6:17 (Sec. 7:2).

7. In Ez., hom 1:7.

8. *Exp. in Ps.* 23.

9. *Fr. Malaty: Church, House of God, P. 332.*
  10. *Stromata 7:1.*
  11. *Sel. Ps. 37.*
  12. *Strom. 7:2.*
  13. *In Luc. hom 35.*
  14. *Exhort.to Martyrdom 18.*
  15. *H.E. Pope Shenouda III: Lectures in the Dogmatic theology (in Arabic).*
- H.G. Gregorious (Fr. Bakhoun El-Maharaqy) The Intercessions of the Departed ones for those who are alive (El-Kiraza 1965, 1966).*



# ***THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE***

---

## **SACRAMENTS AND CHURCH LIFE**

I am delighted to write here about church sacraments, for in fact practising church sacraments gives us enjoyment through the exceeding love of God and the free divine grace. Such are the practical gospels in the actual church life, that through them believers discover the mystery of the Gospel.

In brief I can say that the sacraments grant us the following blessings:

**1. Practical divine grace:** If teaching the divine grace is the heart and centre of the Gospel, we attain this grace through the sacraments, as it is written in the Holy Bible:

In the sacrament of Baptism, we attain the rebirth, not of our own merit nor by a human hand but by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-5; Tit. 3:5). We also receive God's adoption (Gal. 3:26, 27), attain the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and sanctification (Eph. 5:25-26).

Through "Chrism" (*Mayroun*) we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who teaches us, guides us and sanctifies us, so that we may attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Acts 8:17; 19:5,6).

Through penance and confession, the Holy Spirit grants us the remission of sins (Matt. 16:19).

In the Eucharist, the church is lifted up as if to heaven so that she meets her heavenly Saviour, participates with the heavenly host in their hymns, and partakes of the Body and the Blood of the Lord to be united with Him, established in Him and to live forever with Him (John 2:35,55; Matt. 26:27,28; 1 Cor. 10:17).

Through the Sacrament of holy unction the sick who accepts to be united with Christ in His sufferings attains the remission of sins (by repentance) and the healing of his body (James 4:14; Mark 6:13).

Through the Sacrament of marriage the couple are united together, and the Holy spirit sets their home as the holy church of God...

Through the Sacrament of priesthood, Jesus Christ, the Unique Chief-Priest acts in those whom the Holy Spirit grants the grace of priesthood (Matt. 28:19-20; Eph. 4:11; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:16).

These exceeding divine acts are the free grace of God offered to believers through His Church.

**2. The free divine actions for human sanctification:**  
These actions are called "Sacraments," for they are divine and they surpass the human mind. The believer acknowledges the Holy Trinity acting to his advantage, so that he may become son of God sanctified by the precious Blood. He participates with the heavenly creatures in their supreme life, and enjoy God's action in his conjugal life, and the divine providence in his sickness etc. These sacraments

have an evangelic spirit, I mean they do not ignore the human side.

In more details, I say that God grants man special honor because of His love to him. Thus God acts by him and through him and does not ignore him. For example, no heavenly or earthy creatures has the power to grant a human being to be a child of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism, according to the merits of the Cross, but it is performed by the priest. God appreciates giving man this honour, but the Sacrament is effectively God's work and not the priest's.

Someone may ask: Why does not God grant His gifts to the believer directly and not through the priest? we reply that when God the Son became man, He honoured all mankind by acting through them, calling them, sanctifying them and granting them the grace of priesthood.

When God the Son was incarnate for our salvation, He took a true Body from Virgin Mary who had a positive role... We considered this as an honour to mankind. Likewise, God asks men to have a positive role, so that He may reveal Himself through men.

**3. Proclaiming the nature of the church:** Someone may misuse the sacraments, as sources of authority and not for serving others. This in turn may cause anger and protest against church authority. The Coptic Church however deals with the believers in a motherly way through these sacraments. The Holy Trinity grants gifts to the believer through His Church that has the image of Christ, and carry His likeness.

For example, the believer who receives rebirth in baptism, looks to the church as his mother who begot him by the Holy Spirit as a son of God. This gift of adoption unites him spiritually with other members so that he will not feel isolation nor live in individualism. In his conjugal life, a husband meets his wife as one with him through the loving church, looking at his relation with her as an image of the relation of Christ and the Church.

Practising the sacraments in spirit and truth without misusing authority proclaims the motherhood of the church, her unity, her spiritual existence and her message concerning the salvation of every soul, far away from the spirit of administration and human organisation.

**4. Proclaiming our concept to the whole creation:** God the Word who surpassed all materials; became a true Man; who ate, drank, worked and sanctified our view, not only on the body that He took, but even on our daily life and the materials we use. We find no defilement in food, or look at the creation in enmity or as an element of darkness.

Using materials in sacraments, like water in Baptism, oil in the Holy Unction, bread and wine in the Eucharist, metal crown in baptism and marriage celebration, priests' vestments etc. grant us an honourable view on materials, for we see God's hand that sanctifies everything for our salvation.

## **OUR CONCEPT OF CHURCH SACRAMENTS**

Sacraments are vital and essential to the believers; they are the means of practising the evangelic thoughts, besides receiving the grace of God and the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ, so that all believers might be lifted up to the bosom of the Father.

Here, I wish to explain in brief our concepts of every sacrament:

1. In the Coptic rite of Baptism there are two essential lines; denying Satan and the acceptance of God's work. In other words, in baptism the believer is transferred from being belonged to Satan through subjection to his works, to receiving God's adoption, and being His. He denies the kingdom of the devil to receive within himself that of Christ, turning towards the east, where the sun of Righteousness shines, instead of the west, which is a symbol of darkness.

In this rite, the church deposits the newly baptized into the hands of a godparent giving him firm commandments, to be responsible of, and do his best to present the evangelic church life to the newly baptized.

The Coptic church insists that baptism is performed by immersion, except in necessary cases such as illness; whereas the baptized person is buried with Christ and also risen with Him to enjoy the new risen life (Rom. 6:4-6).

2. In the rite of Chrism, the body is anointed with holy oil thirty-six times, as a symbol of the sanctification of the soul and body together, so that man in his wholeness, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. All members of the body-even those which are inferior-are anointed with the holy Chrism, for there is no defiled or shameful member of the body.

Putting on new white clothes (and also a crown in ancient), refers to enjoying the pledge of the crowned, pure and heavenly life.

3. In the rite of penance and confession, the priest and the confessor feel that they are together under the guidance of



the Holy Spirit, which convicts men of sins, and forgives sins in order to obtain a communion with the Holy Trinity.

The believer does not feel ashamed of discovering his own weakness, in the presence of his spiritual father who takes care of his salvation, and who feels as if he was partaker with his sons of their weaknesses.

4. In the Eucharist, the church is lifted up to heaven, through the One unrepeatable Sacrifice, the life giving and ever present One.

In this sacrament, the church prays for her children, for the whole world, for the salvation of mankind, and for their life on earth etc. For she appeals to God's heart that is tender with love, and His ears that hear her petitions.

5. In the Holy Unction, the petition for spiritual blessings are correlated to the temporal ones, so that the sick person may obtain remission of sins and healing of the soul and body.

6. In the sacrament of marriage, the rite is concentrated on revealing the heavenly crown, that the hearts of all who are present may be lifted up to the heavenly marriage, and that the couple acknowledge that their conjugal life is a shadow of the church in heaven.

7. In the sacrament of priesthood, the person obtains this grace to wash the feet of God's people, not by himself, for he is unworthy of this ministry, but by Christ the Servant of mankind on behalf of their salvation. The priest receives "fatherhood" not by his own merit, but by the act of God's Fatherhood in him. He says with St. John: "My children" 1

John 2:1, and with Paul the Apostle, "in Christ Jesus I have begotten you" 1 Cor. 4:15.

Hence the sacraments, in their rites seek for man's salvation and his receiving Gods adoption, lift him up to the heavenly life to the bread of angels, that he may obtain participation in the eternal glories. Sacraments are the fulfilment of Gospel blessings.



## ***CHURCH TRADITION<sup>1</sup>***

---

For a long time, some western writers looked to "tradition" as a blind obedience to the past, and stickfast to a passive solid deposit. In their point of view, tradition is a precise catalogue of a set of ancient doctrines, canons and rites, or it is a museum for antiquity. Therefore, the traditional church, in their view, seems to be a solid obscurant and retrograded one, attached to what is old, simply for its antiquity.

### **THE MEANING OF "TRADITION"**

The word "tradition," in Greek, as it is mentioned in the New Testament, is "Paradosis," which does not mean "imitation," but "delivering a thing and receiving it, ie., delivering a deposit of faith and receiving it along the generations (Jude 3).

### **THE SUBJECT OF CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

1. The message of Faith in the Holy Trinity and Gods redeeming deeds.
2. The deeds and words of Christ.
3. The books of the Old Testament.
4. The spiritual and ethical teachings of Jesus Christ.
5. The curriculum of worship, its concept and order.

### **TRADITION IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE**

In the apostolic age, tradition was the only source of Christian faith, doctrines and worship. Its role in the Church

life of that period may be summarised in the following points:

1. The Early Church received from Christ and the apostles a new understanding of the Old Testament, which the Jews did not acknowledge. She received the Old Testament with a new concept.

2. Through tradition, Christians accepted the books of the New Testament as the inspired word of God, before they were canonised by the Church.

3. Tradition was the source of the Apostles' teaching (1 John 1:1; John 19:35, Luke 1:2; Acts 1:21,22). The Apostle Paul considered what he received from the Church through tradition as if received from the Lord Himself (Gal. 1:7; 1 Cor. 11:23).

4. By tradition, the church practised the active new life in Christ.

## **TRADITION AND THE HOLY SCRIPTURES**

The Holy Scriptures in fact are a part of the Church tradition. The tradition in its essence is declaring the word of God by various methods. For tradition concentrated on the apostolic teaching. The appearance of the books of the New Testament did not cancel the tradition, but these books command us to preserve the tradition (2 John 12; 3 John 13:14; 1 Cor. 11:34; Titus 1:5; 2 Thes. 3:16; John 21:25; 2 Cor. 11:23).

## **TRADITION IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE**

In the apostolic age, tradition was the only source of Christian faith, doctrines and worship. Its role in the Church

life of that period may be summarised in the following points:

\* Origen says: "By tradition, I knew the four Gospels, and that they are true ones."

\* Church Tradition preserve the unity of understanding the Holy Scriptures throughout ages, so that no believer interprets them according to his own will. Origen states: "The true disciple of Jesus is He who enters the house, that is to say, the Church. He enters it thinking as the Church does, and living as she does; this is how he understands the word. The key of the Scriptures must be received from the tradition of the Church, as from the Lord Himself<sup>2</sup>."

## **THE JEWISH TRADITION AND CHRISTIANITY**

Christ rejected the literal Jewish tradition, which opposed the word of God (Matt. 15:3; Mark 7:13; Col 2:8). The early Church used to participate in the ministry of the Jewish temple with its hymns and Psalms. The Church accepted what was living and in accordance with the word of God. From the Jewish tradition St. Jude knew the dispute between Michael and the devil (Jude 9), and the prophecy of Enoch (Jude 14,15), and the apostle Paul knew the names of those who opposed Moses (2 Tim. 3:8), etc.

## **THE PRESERVATION OF CHURCH TRADITION**

Church tradition in faith, worship, behavior and practical life was delivered to us through the decisions of the Ecumenical and local councils, the patristic writings and also through the practical life of laymen who played a vital role in delivering the spirit of the new life to us throughout generations.

## **CHURCH TRADITION AND THE PRESENT LIFE**

\* Tradition does not mean "rigidity," but giving attention to the past as a basis for the present, and to the present as a basis for the future. Tradition is the mystery of church growth and vitality and not of rigidity.

\* We have to understand tradition in its spiritual depth and theological basis and not in holding fast its literalness without understanding.

\* When the Church of Alexandria preached to Ethiopia, she offered her the living Church tradition, but did not oblige the Ethiopians to accept the Coptic traditions in their details. We have to distinguish between tradition as a general Church thought and the traditions which concern the local churches. For example, Ethiopia accepted the tradition of using liturgies in her worship but did not use the same texts in their literalness. She accepted the spirit and the general frame of the liturgies. Ethiopia also accepted tradition of venerating icons but she used her own art and not the Coptic one. Thus the Coptic church offered Ethiopia the essence of her tradition but not its details. Therefore if we preach to a foreign country, we have to present the Orthodox Church Tradition without obliging them to accept a certain local thought. This is what happens today as the Coptic church preaches to Africa, and Kenya for example.

## **THE CHURCH TRADITION AND PERSONAL LIFE**

Some believes that preserving the Church tradition means cancelling the personality of every member of the Church in his relationship with God, his understanding the Holy Bible and in practising worship. The Orthodox Church believes in the moderate way without any exaggeration, for she holds fast the church tradition that organises the church life,

clarifies the principal concepts of worship and reveals the spirit of the Holy Bible without cancelling the personal relationship of every member of the church with his Saviour. Besides his personal understanding of the Bible, and his enjoying freedom.

For example, in any society, social organisation and family relationships or bonds furnish the personality of every member within the spirit of the community, but do not ignore his personality.

The Church of Europe in the middle ages used church orders and canons as rigid laws and got the believer's personal rights. While today the majority of the Western Christians believe in the individual freedom in understanding the Bible according to one's will, and to acknowledge Christianity individually. The Orthodox church in fact follows midway, i.e., sanctifies the church thoughts as a community and at the same time appreciates the personal life of every member of the Church.

---

*1. Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty: Tradition and Orthodoxy, 1979.*



# 8

## ***THE COPTIC CHURCH AS A CHURCH OF PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>***

---

### **THE RÔLE OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE CHURCH**

#### **THE PEOPLE (*LAOUS*)**

The word "people" was used in the Old Testament in its wide and inclusive meaning to embrace all the congregation of believers, i.e. the priests, levities, and people, as they were called "people of God," to differentiate them from the Gentile people. It was also used in its limited meaning to refer to laymen alone, without the priests and levities.

In the early church of Alexandria, the Greek word "*LAOUS*" was used sometimes in its inclusive sense meaning the Church of God, including clergymen, monks and laymen, and in other times in the limited sense meaning the laymen alone.

I would like to emphasise the fact that, the Alexandrian Fathers, who lived with an evangelic and ecclesiastic mind loved and honoured priesthood, experienced monasticism with its angelic attitude, and at the same time they looked upon laymen as the living church which is ministered by the clergymen and for whom the monks, nuns and virgins pray



without differentiation between church classes. The laity are the living church; every member, man , woman, elder, youth or child, rich or poor etc. has a vital and effective role in worship, in practising the sanctified life and in witnessing to Christ.

## **LAITY AND PRIESTHOOD**

The main cause of the vitality of the Coptic Church till today, is the true understanding of the relationship between the clergymen and laity. Priesthood in the mind of every Copt, even the child is spiritual fatherhood. The clergyman is not an employee who performs certain duties in an institution but rather he is a true father who never retires from his duties at any age, besides that his fatherhood can't be destroyed even by death. Through this fatherhood the believer tastes the Unique Fatherhood of God and motherhood of the Church, thus he is attached to God and His church, not out of fear, but through adoption and love.

Through fatherhood, the clergyman acknowledges all the believers as his own family, sharing with them all their affairs. For example, when a child is born, the priest along with the deacons and the members of the household offer prayers of thanksgiving and praise to God (Prayer of Washing the Babe). Then the priest baptises the child in a marvellous joyful atmosphere. If he falls ill, the prayers of the sacrament of Unction will be held. When he is in trouble, the oblations of the Eucharist are offered on his behalf. In the event of death the whole congregation shares in the funeral service and consoles the family by participation in the prayers of the "*Third*" etc.

Through this ecclesiastical concept we can elucidate the following points:

1. Priesthood, in the eyes of the Coptic Church, is fatherhood, love and service and not an authority<sup>2</sup>. The spiritual clergyman does not indulge in the administrative affairs of the church, but rather gives himself up to his children in the Lord. Thus, he never enters into confrontations with the members of the board of deacons but lives with them as their father. They honour him and seek his advice in everything.

2. The clergyman, in his earnest love for his people, feels as one among them who needs their prayers in as much as they need his prayers on their behalf. He gains from their experience, even from the young children, and lives interacting with all without hightiness or boastfulness.

3. The Church of Alexandria emphasised the right of all the congregation to choose their clergyman.

4. Because of the importance of his role as a spiritual leader, church laws are more strict and firm in disciplining the clergyman as compared to the layman.

5. In order to preserve his fatherhood in purity and without blemish, it behoves the clergyman to refrain from politics. Thus he can practise his fatherhood with a pure spiritual mind.

## **THE POSITIVE ROLE OF THE LAITY**

The church carried two clear models since the early apostolic era; the model of clergyman and that of the people. However, she had lived as an integral and intermingled church that does not know any negativity in the life of any of her members. Truly, the bishop had his own work, so did the

priest and the deacon. The laity had also a positive role in worship and in witnessing to the Crucified One.

1. In our study of the sacrament of Eucharist, we notice that the laity do not just attend worship but participate in it and have their own role. The liturgy is not worship carried out by the priest on behalf of the people; it is rather the role of the whole church, clergymen and congregation, for the sanctification of the whole world. If the people just attend without participating in giving thanks, praising, asking and crying to God, the liturgy will lose its true function. Thus either the people would be ignorant of their place, and give up their right of practising in the holy communion, or the clergy would have deprived the people from that right, and thus spoiled the life of the living church.

2. The people have the right of positive participation not only in worship but also in preaching and witnessing to the joyful Gospel of Christ. In the book of Acts we notice that the people who were scattered, and left Jerusalem because of the tribulations, went preaching the world and witnessing to the truth (Acts 8:4).

3. The School of Alexandria care - by constant encouragement - for utilising the people's energies for the sake of the kingdom of God. St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen spoke about the "lay-priesthood" or the "common priesthood." Origen states: "Do you not know that priesthood has been given to you, that is to say, to the whole church of God, and to the believers? Hear what Peter says to the believers: "A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, an acquired people" 1 Pet. 2:9. You, then, have the priesthood since you are a priestly race, and so you ought to offer to God a sacrifice of praise, a sacrifice of prayers, a

sacrifice of mercy, a sacrifice of purity, a sacrifice of sanctity<sup>3</sup>." The Alexandrian Fathers who lived as churchmen, and loved priests as fathers used to encourage all people to work in Jesus Christ our Lord.

---

1. Fr. T. Malaty, *The Universal Love (in Arabic)*, 1985

2. *In Is. hom. 6 PG 12:239.*

3. *In Levit. hom 9:1.*



## ***THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH***

### **THE COPTIC CHURCH AND THE FEMINIST THEOLOGY**

Some consider that the increasing attitude of "Feminist Theology" is one of the important characteristics of the contemporary theology. Some western theologians adopt this view, and those who belong to the "Black Theology" look upon it enthusiastically. They call for equalisation between women and men in ordinations (Priesthood), in taking the church leadership, and for not using the masculine genders for God etc... This attitude has no place in the Coptic Church in Egypt, Why?

**First:** The Egyptian Church cared for women since its inception. Men and women were admitted to the theological School of Alexandria, to the extent that Origen in the second century castrated himself so that there would be no chance of stumbling! This indicated that many women went to him seeking for studies, or in order to record his sermons. Today

we find that women and young ladies are admitted to the theological schools across the whole country in Egypt more than men. Some women are teaching in these schools.

The Coptic Church's high esteem for women is clear, as she continuously honours St. Mary. The church upholds her higher than all the heavenly hosts, even the Cherubim and the Seraphim who carry the divine Throne. The church venerates many women saints, like the martyrs, Mother Dolagy, St. Rephka, St. Damiana etc.. All ranks of the church, i.e. the pope, bishops, priests, deacons and laity, ask for their prayers.

**Second:** The ascetic attitude has its effect on the Egyptian Church. In as much as the believers' heart is inflamed with love, often he does not desire to be ordained nor to be involved in the social and administrative aspects but rather seeks to practise self-denial. Therefore, in Egypt, we notice the increasing desire towards monasticism and virginity, the desire which the two sexes can fulfill equally, without any discrimination.

I think that the "*Feminist Theology*" appeared in the west as a natural consequence to the struggle for power and authority; and in the "*Black Theology*" as a sign of revolution against injustice and the desire for freedom. The black man feels that he wants to be freed from the yoke of the white man, as it happens in South Africa. This feeling created an exaggerated tendency against every order, looking at it as a kind of bondage. Therefore they consider the exclusion of women from priesthood as a western order and a white man's culture from which they want to get rid of. This is their opinion [*as some of the African Theologians expressed during their conference in Cairo, 1985*]. In the Coptic

Church, priesthood is looked upon as a sacrifice of love and fatherhood, and not as means of power and authority, therefore there is no room for such struggle in the church.

**Thirdly:** The Orthodox Church respects the natural order God has put, ie. the difference between the sexes, for God created man and woman to complement each other. Truly in Jesus Christ there is no man and woman (Gal. 3:28), for each of them is a member of the one Body, having the same faith. Both are children of God through adoption, and await the same eternal glory. However, man keeps his role as a man while woman keeps her role as a woman. Bishop Kallistos says: "It is one of the chief glories of human nature that men and women, although equal, are not interchangeable<sup>1</sup>."

The Fathers of the Church, bearing the biblical spirit, emphasised the equality of men and women but at the same time stressed on the distinction between them.

Some of those who defend the "Feminist Theology", try to relate the ordination of women to giving freedom to slaves, saying that the church which had an effective role in freeing slaves during the eighteenth century has an obligation to carry out the same role in defending women's right to be ordained. The answer to this is that the distinction between masters and slaves was not founded by divine order or by nature. St. Basil says: "No man is a slave by nature<sup>2</sup>." While the distinction between male and female is part of the order of nature.

Bishop Kallistos says that in the days of Jesus Christ there were pagan priestesses, and in spite of that, the Lord did not appoint a woman as an apostle. He asks: "Are we assert that the incarnate Word and Wisdom of God was

mistaken, and that we at the end of the twentieth century understand the truth better than He did?<sup>3</sup>." Our Lord did not lack the opportunity of a woman to be ordained apostle, since St. Mary was the supreme example, not just of female sanctity but of human sanctity as a whole, because she had surpassed all.

**Fourth:** Nowadays we notice that women have their lively and positive role in the Coptic Church . We mention here some examples:

1. There are some abbesses who have leading roles. They attract many young women to the ascetic life. I am not exaggerating when I say that they play an important role in the life of the Coptic families and that their convents have become centres of spiritual sources for the people.

2. Wives of the priests in Egypt have an important role in church ministry. In Syria a priest is called "Khor" and his wife "Khouria." The Greeks call the priest "presbyteros" or "Pappas" and his wife "presbytra" or "pappadia." The Russians call the priest "batushka"(little father) and his wife "matushka" (little mother). These titles of the priest's wife in the Orthodox churches have a special significance indicating her duty or her right of acting in the church.

3. The increasing number of virgins who devote their lives for various services in the church is an interesting phenomenon in the contemporary Coptic Church.

4. His holiness Pope Shenouda III ordained (set) deaconesses in the feast of the Pentecost of 1971.

5. Most of the social activities of the Coptic churches, eg. in kindergartens, houses for elders and orphans etc... are looked after by ladies and young women.

6. Ladies and young women have an active role in teaching Sunday-schools' children.

**Fifth:** We would emphasise with Louis Bouyer<sup>4</sup> the fact that the exclusion of women from priesthood in the Old and New Testaments, and the church tradition does not minimise their capabilities or their having an effective role in the church. Everyone ought to understand the "mystery of woman," to recognise her essential role and not only request that she performs certain jobs.

"The Woman" symbolises "the church", that is growing "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" Eph. 4:13. Her role is vital and internal. She is capable of giving birth to, and breeding children, to offer them to God as a bride to the heavenly Bridegroom. Through love, women witness to Christ's Church.

"Man" symbolises "Christ" who sacrificed His life on the Cross. Therefore, it suits him to attain priesthood not as a matter of honour, but to offer himself as a daily sacrifice and to die for the sake of the children of God. In the Coptic Church whoever accepts priesthood is admitted to the martyrs' hosts bowing his neck with love, forbearing death every day joyfully.

Finally, we can say that the equality of men and women is affirmed not by seeking for ordination of women - for ordination is not an administrative position for attaining honour but for suffering daily death that does not concord



with the feminist nature - but by declaring the "*mystery of woman*" which is inherited in her own identity, that is capable of revealing the church's unique beauty of her femininity. Louis Bouyer states that equality of women and men will not be realised by masculinizing women but by discovering the dignity of their femininity.

---

1. T. Hopko: *Women and the Priesthood*, 1983, p.29.

2. *On the Holy Spirit* 20:51.

3. T. Hopko, p.16.

4. *Woman in the Church*, 1984, ch.1.

## ***THE CHILD IN THE COPTIC CHURCH***

---

The source of the Coptic Church's strength since her inception in the first century until now, is her care for children who should realise their membership in the church and play a vital and effective role in her performance. This being so, inspite of the harsh circumstances under which she has lived to the extent that one of the historians said that her existence seems to be one of the seven wonders of the world.

Truly, the material and technical potentialities of the Western Churches have a great influence on caring for children, manifested in publishing books and magazines that suit every age. Besides the invention of up to date equipment and games for religious teachings, along with special educational studies for children, teenagers and youth. Churches in the East might not be able to match up to these domains, but a

child may find his pleasure and place in these churches, especially the Coptic, for the following reasons:

1. Church faith is manifested in the effective role of the child, and its importance in his rebirth through baptism, without setting a certain age for its performance. In baptism the babe who may be a few days old, accepts the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to make him a child of God who would dwell in him through Chrism, having all the privilege of membership of the church.

We may be asked: why are children baptized while they are unable to understand the meaning of faith? Our answer is that, besides that Christ invited the children to come to him: "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" Matt. 19:14, and besides the testimony of the book of Act, that whoever are baptized came with their household including children (Acts 16:15,33), we say that, children's baptism is a true announcement of their membership of the church. This membership is based not merely on the acceptance of faith intellectually but rather on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the person, regardless of his or her age. How many children by their simple faith have surpassed adults?!

The Coptic children partake in the Eucharist at an early age, and thus they feel that the church is their mother who feeds them with the Body and Blood of the Lord, who esteems their salvation, and takes care of them.

Moreover, since children receive Baptism, Chrism and Eucharist based on their parents' faith, this emphasizes the church's acknowledgment of the family's role in the lives of their children. The Christian family is considered as a church-

house, a holy church responsible for bringing up children according to an evangelic mind and a life of faith, not only through teaching the commandments and doctrines, but also through practising the living Bible. The child can't understand the fatherhood of God without enjoying the fatherly love and the motherly compassion in the family. Generally speaking, most societies call for the mother to revert to looking after her children since she gives them what society can't, inspite of all that it offers. Missing what the mother gives, the child may lack things that strengthen his personality. The Coptic Church proclaims this concept by putting children in the hands of the parents during baptism, to receive from them the living church spirit.

2. Church's care for children becomes very clear through her understanding of priesthood. In the Coptic Church, the clergyman is not an employee who performs his work until he reaches the age of retirement, nor is he a mere preacher, teacher or a researcher of theology, but first of all he is a father. Every member of the church, i.e. the children, youth, adults and the aged, enjoy his compassionate fatherhood, that time can't take away. This fatherhood grants security and satisfaction to children, through it God's fatherhood and Church's motherhood are apprehended.

The main reason for the tendency of modern youth towards atheism is the church's lack of fatherhood and the indulgence of the clergy in any administrative, organisational or even preaching work (giving sermons) without offering a spirit of compassionate fatherhood in the Lord. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the church to have this spirit towards children as well as towards adults.

3. Children partake of the liturgies of the Coptic Church, especially of the liturgy of Eucharist (*the Mass*). They are not isolated in a special place outside the nave. However, this attaches the child to church worship, so that they may feel that the church appreciates their membership. Thus, the church is not a mere organisation but a family which embraces all members in love at the holiest moments of worship.

4. The Coptic Church is characterised by her sweet hymns and joyful rites which attract children's hearts, in a way, that worship would not be boring.

5. For many centuries, it has been a Coptic custom that small schools (*Katateeb*) be attached to the church buildings in cities and villages. When the Copts were given a choice between closing their churches or their schools, they preferred maintaining the latter so that children would not lose their faith. Nowadays, this system does not exist anymore, due to circumstances outside the domain of the church. However, the church gives great attention to the church teachings (through Sunday Schools) as a principal work. In this context it is worthy to note that late Pope Cyril (Kyrillos) VI ordained a bishop for this purpose, who is now Pope Shenouda III.

6. The High regard and honour which the church gives to children are undeniable. As she cares for celebrating feasts of many children and youth martyrs and saints. As evident example, the church celebrates the feast of the martyrdom of Bethlehem's children, St. Kyriakos the child and his mother, St. Dolagy and her children, St. Rephka and her children, St. Abnoub etc. The church asks for their prayers on our behalf and many churches are named after them. Even among the

fathers of the wilderness we find the child Zacharia who excelled many of the elders.

Church history tells us about sucklings who cannot speak, and when their mothers stood in front of rulers or judges to be put on trial for the sake of Lord, their lips were opened miraculously to rebuke rulers or judges, giving witness to the divinity of Christ and to His redeeming work. Those babes take forefront ranks in the Heavenly Kingdom.

In conclusion, church life is transfigured in her children and youth to practise their rights of being church members, by the grace of God, which does not depend on certain age or mere human experiences and capabilities.



***THE COPTIC CHURCH  
AND  
THE ECUMENICAL LIFE***

---

**THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT  
IN THE EARLY COPTIC CHURCH**

**ECUMENICAL LIFE**

The "Ecumenical movement" has priority in most church's organisation, for even though the purpose of church unity differs from one church to another, I think that every church deeply desires the Church unity on an ecumenical level. For the early Alexandrian Church, "Ecumenism" was not a church organisation, nor a plan in the mind of the church leaders, who aimed at realising the leadership of the Egyptian Church in theological studies and ascetic life, but was a natural thought and a daily life the church enjoyed. The Church of Egypt has always been a bride of Christ, she never looks for temporal glory by admitting other churches to her or by seeking for unity to attain authority. She sincerely longed to serve every soul through love, desiring the salvation of everybody, regardless of his nationality. Through love, the Coptic Church was involved in serving the whole world, and was beloved by many Christians all over the world.

The ecumenical thought appeared in the Church of Alexandria, as a result of the following:

### **FIRST: PREACHING**

The early Copts, clergymen, monks, deans of the School of Alexandria or laymen, were known for their inflamed desire to witness to Christ. In the Roman army there were Coptic officers and soldiers who witnessed to Christ among their pagan colleges, in Egypt or abroad, and many gave up their lives as a price to this witnessing. Some Coptic merchants and sailors played the same role through their trips. This attitude is clarified by the transmission of Coptic culture and arts to many countries of Europe!

A Theaban legion arrived in Switzerland in 285, led by St. Mauritius of Garagos, in Upper-Egypt, who was martyred in Switzerland for refusing to offer sacrifices to the idols. His statue stands today in one of the public squares of the city of St. Moritz. All the legion had been martyred with him for the same reason. His sister Warina followed him to Switzerland where she also suffered martyrdom. His three friends: a legionary Felix, his sister Regula and Exuperantius hid themselves, and ultimately reached the lake of Zurich, where they baptized converts, until the ruler heard about them and they were beheadless saints, (with heads in hands are the subject of the shield of the city of Zurich).

A parallel story has been recounted about the town of Solothurn, with some variation. Its hero is St. Victor (Boctor), whose relics were transferred to Geneva in the fifth century.

A Coptic missionary reached as far as the British Isles, a long time before the advent of St. Augustine of Canterbury (597).

In Africa, Ethiopia accepted Christianity through Alexandrian preaching; so did the Sudan and Nubia. Recent archaeological excavations in Nubia reveal the close relation between the Copts and Nubians in all aspects of life, religion, culture, arts etc.

## **SECOND : EDUCATION**

The Alexandrian religious thought was spread all over the world, through establishing the School of Alexandria by St. Mark. In the second century it was well-known in all Christendom, by the serious efforts of its deans: Athenagores, Pantaenus, Clement, Origen and others who attracted leaders from the East and West to be trained by the Coptic theologians.

Moreover, the deans of the School used to make trips abroad guided by their ecumenical spirit. St. Clement visited Italy and Greece, and during the persecution he escaped to Palestine and Syria to teach there . Origen visited Rome during the pontificate of Zephyrinus and transferred the Alexandrian theological thought to it. He also visited Arabia several times by the invitation of its governor. Mamaea, the emperor's mother summoned Origen to come to Antioch. He visited Greece and also established his school in Palestine. Pantaenus had preaching and educational activities in India and in Asia.

## **THIRD: ECUMENICAL COUNCILS**

Studying the three Ecumenical Councils (Nicea in 325, Constantinople in 381 and Ephesus in 431) reveals the real



role of the Church of Alexandria in defending the Christian faith on an ecumenical level. It was sufficient to refer to the name of her leaders like SS. Athanasius and Cyril to confirm the Orthodoxy of any dogma and its theological verification.

#### **FOURTH: SPREADING THE MONASTIC THOUGHT**

In our book: "*The Coptic Orthodox Church as an Ascetic Church*," we see the leading role of the Coptic Church in spreading the monastic life in all its forms (monashism, cenobitic and communal systems), all over Christendom, through the following methods<sup>2</sup>:

1. Publishing the biographies of some pioneers in asceticism, like "*Vita Antonii*" written by St. Athanasius.

2. The Eastern and Western pilgrims who visited Egypt and settled among its monks, like SS. Jerome, John Cassian, Melania the Elder etc..

3. Many leaders in the ascetic life outside Egypt started their monastic life under the guidance of Egyptian pioneers, like St. Eugin.

4. The transfer of the Egyptian monastic orders abroad by translating their regulation and adopting them as Benedict the father of the Western monasticism did.

---

1. See; Atiya: *Hist. of Eastern Christianity*, p. 54. Murad Kamel: *Coptic Egypt*, p.78ff. Samir F. Girgis: *The significant contribution of the Copts to the early evangelization is Switzerland*, Zurich 1984.

2. Fr. T. Y. Malaty: *The Coptic orthodox Church.....*, 1986, p.78- 82.



## ***THE COPTIC CHURCH ABROAD***

---

One of the important phenomena of the modern Egyptian society in general, and the Copts in particular, since the mid sixties, is the exodus of large numbers for immigration abroad. The Egyptian government realised the importance of these Egyptians, their talents and capabilities, and established a new ministry to strengthen the relation between them and their homeland. With respect to the Copts, who represent the great majority of the Egyptian immigrants, H.H. Pope Kyrillos (Cyril) VI dedicated a lot of effort to shepherd them. H.H. Pope Shenouds III is taking care of them and dealing with their affairs in person. He spends much effort to support them spiritually, in ordaining priests for every church they establish, realising the missionary role of these churches and their witnessing to the Orthodox faith and thought outside Egypt.

I do not wish to enumerate the Coptic churches abroad. But inspite of the many churches established in U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Europe, Arab countries and Africa, there is still a great need to establish more new churches to take care of the Copts outside Egypt. The capacity of the present church buildings, and the number of clergymen in these countries is considered to be much lower than the need of the people, because of the unexpected immigration movement which is still continuing.

It is divine providence that allowed me to serve in Los Angeles in 1970, N.Y. in 1972, in Melbourne (Australia) in 1975, and in Ottawa (Canada) in 1986. I would like to write about "the Church Abroad" in a separate book dealing with her needs. Now, I limit myself to a simple exposition, not for enumerating what has been offered by the Church abroad and her activities, but to study her needs with a futuristic view.

May the Holy Spirit grant every heart of our brothers and children abroad to act for the edification of the deep living temple, so that new generations would grow up, bearing the same Orthodox spirit. Having an inflamed heart, capable of witnessing to the Orthodox faith through true evangelic church thoughts.

### **THE AIM OF OUR CHURCH ABROAD**

It pleases us, since we are at the beginning of our immigration era, to study and benefit from the experience of the other churches which preceded us in this domain, particularly the Orthodox churches, such as the Russian, Greek, American, and Syrian churches in North America and in Australia. We ought to benefit not only from their good aspects but also from the weak points to which they were exposed.

Moreover, it is necessary to hold study sessions between clergymen, Sundays school teachers, and laymen and particularly the youth, to review the role of the Coptic Church abroad, and to avoid any deviation or ignorance of any aspect at the expense of others.

We may limit the principal role of the church to witnessing to her Bridegroom through her living Orthodox faith,

her pious evangelic life, and her bearing the Cross joyfully. Thus, she will be the message of Christ read by all men, and a practical gospel that witnesses to the truth.

Taking this aim into consideration we may stress on the following points:

1. It is not the intention of our churches to race for building magnificent cathedrals - for the West namely has numerous invaluable cathedrals - but, her concern is to care for the souls, the living stones with which the Temple of the Lord is built. Every soul, of an elder or a child, is exceedingly valuable in the eyes of the mother church. Alas, it is so easy to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars or even millions on the church building and its attachments, while the need now is for the intellectual serious edification, especially of the youth and children.

2. We are desperately in need for a translation movement of all our Coptic Christian heritage into the European languages, in a modern style and suitable printing. Studies including exposition and analysis are all required. Writing of suitable literature, geared to our youth and children, with an Orthodox thought, is also necessary. Thus, they will not feel torn and tormented between their practical life and the traditions they hear about. In other words, let us present our traditions not as valuable monumental pieces of antiques but as a living experience which can be tasted and enjoyed.

3. Handling the differences in culture, thoughts and schools in the lands of immigrations, for it is important to emphasise these differences in cultures as being sources of enrichment, rather than of destruction, torment and tormenting. A Copt living in a western country extracts from the

West what is constructive, and at the same time practises the spirituality of the East without contradiction or struggle.

4. Studying the problems that face the youth, particularly what some of the Copts consider as a kind of obscenity such as dating and mixed parties for dancing etc... These matters must be studied wisely. We see some children, due to unwisely pressure by their parents say: "we are not Egyptians," and thus what the parents did was inciting the children's hatred toward the Egyptian traditions. It is important to emphasise the personality of our youth and children to understand in advance that they are Christians who have to practise their Christianity, wherever they are with a spirit of self-denial and purity in complete freedom.

5. The need for studying the situation of the foreign spouse. Practicing worship in a language subsequently incomprehensible to these non-Egyptian wives would turn them against the church, and they would not bring up their children in the church bosom. However, some of the non-Egyptian wives witness to the Orthodox life through their deep love for the church.

6. A struggle between the Copts arose in some places regarding the language of worship which I would like to discuss now in detail. I would rather clarify the following points:

a. Any youth may feel lost due to his inability to participate in the church worship and might be lost for good, he (or she) with his (or her) offspring. Therefore, the church must take care of every youth and child, that he may become an established member of the church.

b. Any youth cannot participate in worship practised in a language unknown to him.

c. It is good to teach our children the Coptic and Arabic languages, but this should be during separate sessions and not at the expense of their participation in worship "in mind and spirit."

d. If any of the elders feels uncomfortable when praying in English (or in any other foreign language), one should remember that this is one of the prices of immigration which he has chosen willingly. I do not think that one should insist on enjoying worship practises in a language known to him at the expense of his children's salvation. Therefore, it behoves us who used to pray in Arabic to accept praying in English joyfully for the sake of our children.

e. We have to attain a broad futuristic view. Perhaps the present generation accepts under pressure to participate in worship in our language, but it will be impossible to expect that, from the next generation. Therefore, it is the church's duty to look to the future and accelerates her steps to win the present generation of youth and children.

7. I would like to conclude my presentation about the "Church Abroad" by exposing the necessity for witnessing to the integral church life. For some churches cared more about practising the rituals without taking care of preaching the living word of God. The Bible is the centre of our Orthodoxy, and the word of God should be before our eyes unceasingly.



## ***THE COPTIC CULTURE***

---

The Pharaohs are known for their exceeding religious attitudes, and their longing for the life to come, although they did not know the reality of this life. At the same time, they were interested in science, and they did many scientific marvels which the modern science could not unfold their mysteries till now. Thus, the Egyptians believed in the religious life and in the development and progress in all aspects of knowledge and science. This belief had its effect on the Christian School of Alexandria, which was encyclopedic in its teachings, and presented the whole series of profound sciences beside studying the Holy Scriptures.

The Copts accepted the Christian faith that sanctifies all that is human and develops it, therefore they were genius in music, iconology, architecture, textiles, literature, astronomy etc., and their culture and arts had their effect all over the world. This subject needs to be more elaborated in another book.

Already, I have written in more details about the Coptic architecture and icons in my book "Church, the House of God".

### **ART AND WORSHIP<sup>1</sup>**

Worship in its essence is the expression of man's response to God's infinite love. Man feels that mere words are unable to express this response, therefore he uses his gifted arts in worship.

Art has been correlated with religion from the beginning of history, so that there had been a strong belief that arts such as, painting engraving, music, singing, dancing etc., have come into existence as a result of religious beliefs.

In Early Christian times, Copts were involved in the religious life, so that many thousands preferred to live in the wilderness longing for the angelic life. To those who remained in the cities and countries, the Christian faith penetrated into their daily life, even in their eating, drinking, literature and arts. There is evidence that Christian symbols and images were inscribed on their rings, painted on their walls, doors, cups, plates, chairs etc. As an example, at the Coptic Museum in Cairo, there is a Coptic ivory comb from the fifth century. On one side, Lazarus appears in the shape of an Egyptian mummy, while Christ bearing a cross instead of a wand, appears on the other side. Beside it, there is another representation, of the "healing of the blind man". Also on the other side of the comb, there is a mounted Coptic Saint enclosed irrationally within a wreath, supported by angels.

## **SANCTIFYING ARTS**

It is man's desire to offer his life and devote all his culture to express his deep and unspeakable love to God. At the same time, it is God's beneficence that He longs to sanctify man's being, life and culture as a sign of God's high sight to man and his life. God loves man as a whole, He accepts his soul as His dwelling place and does not despise his body and human culture, for these both can be sanctified by the Holy Spirit to act spiritually as instruments of righteousness, for the edification of God's Church on behalf of the heavenly kingdom.



## *THE COPTIC MUSIC*

---

Music and drawing are the most ancient languages of worship which have led man towards the heavenly atmosphere, and helped him in his fellowship with God. Copts inherited a very ancient musical tradition from their ancestors the Pharaohs.

Dr. Raghav Meftah, a Copt of some wealth, who devoted his life and fortune to recording and analysing the Coptic Music, says: [Scientific research has proved that the music of the Coptic Church is the most ancient ecclesiastical music which exists, and it constitutes the oldest school of music which the world now possesses. The Coptic Church owes the preservation of this monumental and priceless heritage of her ecclesiastical music to her conservative nature which she has inherited from ancient times<sup>1</sup>.]

Dr. Drioton, the Egyptologist, writes: "The key to the mystery of Pharaohic music will be found then in a good edition of Coptic ecclesiastical music in use in our days." The English musicologist, Ernest Newlandsmith of Oxford and London universities, who spent winters in Egypt (1927 - 1936), invited by Dr. Meftah, especially noted our hymns, says:

[Coptic music is a great music and may be called one of the seven wonders of the world, and, indeed, if a Caruso filled with the spirit of God, were trying to sing some of the Coptic themes in the form of a great oratorio, it would be enough to re-ignite Christendom (spiritually).]

[This music, which has been handed down from untold centuries within the Coptic Church, should be a bridge between East and West, and would place a new idiom at the disposal of the Western musicians. It is a loft, noble and great art, especially in the element of the infinite which is lacking today."]

[Western music has its origin in ancient Egypt<sup>2</sup>].

### **ITS THEMES**

1. During Good Friday (1971) a western pastor in the city of Queens, N.Y., was astonished at how can the Copts practice their worship on that day from seven o'clock in the morning to sunset and return back at eleven o'clock P.M. to continue until morning. When he attended the service, he knew how our worship on that day with its pathetic hymns comforts the soul. In Egypt the majority of children participate in this service all the day joyfully. Truly our pathetic hymns of the Holy Week, Good Friday and funerals, are the most ancient and the most sublime part of our music. Dr. Meftah says, [No other music however classical can be compared with the pathetic music of the Coptic Church, nor with the tremendous power it has on the human soul and the passions which it awakens in it.]

2. The ancient music of the Copts remained entirely vocal until the introduction of the cymbal and the triangle in the Middle Ages.

3. In the Coptic Liturgy the people are not just mere listeners, but they participate in it. Because it is the whole church's divine service. This attitude gives a chance to the people to use music and chant hymns. The priest conducts

the choir of deacons and the people play a vital role in response, in contrast to the Greek and Roman traditions.

4. Some Coptic tones bear the names of ancient towns like: Singari, a town in the north of Delta known in the time of Ramses 11: Adribe from Atribis, a town which formerly existed in Upper Egypt.

5. Dr. Meftah presented a new trend with his choir at the Institute of Coptic studies in Cairo in which he chanted some pathetic hymns in the inner sanctuary of the Great Temple of Hours at Edfu in the (palace) place reserved for the high priest. The singing was distinctively heard even in the open courtyard which was reserved for the people. The voice was distributed with equal intensity or degree of tone throughout the whole temple. He says, [Indeed, this was a miracle of voice distribution which deserve serious study.]

Moreover, in the Coptic Church we find a kind of harmony between the Coptic music, the architecture of the church, and the church rites etc. This has been realized by the guidance of the Holy Spirit which sanctifies our human culture for the sake of our spiritual edification.

---

1. Ragheb Moftah: *The music of the Coptic Church*

2. London "Morning Post" 22nd April, 1931

3. Atiya: *Hist. of Eastern Christianity, Indiana 1968, p.139*

4. Murad Kamel: *Coptic Egypt. p.64.*



# *CONTENTS*

## **Blessed Is Egypt, My People**

### **1. The Coptic Church As An Apostolic Church**

Who Are The Copts?

The Holy Family In Egypt

The See Of St. Mark

The Coptic Church And The Apostolic Thought.

### **2. The Coptic Church Before The Council Of Chalcedon**

Copts Under The Roman Persecution

The School Of Alexandria

The Coptic Church And The Ecumenical Councils

The Coptic Church And The Monastic Movement.

### **3. The Coptic Church And The Council Of Chalcedon**

The Council Of Chalcedon And The Church Of Alexandria Events That Preceded The Council Of Chalcedon

The Minutes Of The Council Of Chalcedon

Could The Tome Of Leo Realise A Reconciliation?

### **4. The Coptic Church And The Byzantine Rule**

An Alien Royal Patriarch

The Church Of Alexandria In The Era Of Justinian I

The Church Of Alexandria After Justinian Era

Some Men Of That Time.

## **5. The Coptic Church From The Seventh To The Twentieth Centuries**

The Seventh To The Tenth Century

Coptic Personalities In The Four Centuries (7-10)

The Fatimid Era

Coptic Personalities During The Fatimid Era

Ages Of Crusades

Coptic Personalities During The Ayybid And Mamluks Era

The Turkish Era

Coptic Personalities During The Ottoman Era

The French Expedition - Coptic Personalities From The Era Of The French Expedition

The 19th Century

Coptic Personalities In The 19th Century

The 20th Century

Some Personalities From The 20th Century.

## **6. The Coptic Church And Worship**

A Worshipping Church

The Holy Bible And Church Worship

The Liturgical Worship In The Coptic Church

The Coptic Feasts

The Coptic Church And The Spirituality Of Rite

The Fasting Order In The Coptic Church

Church Readings In The Coptic Church

Private Worship In The Coptic Church.

## **7. The Coptic Church And Dogmas**

Alexandria And Christian Dogmas

Our Belief In God

Man And Redemption

The Church

The Heavenly Creatures

The Saints  
The Sacramental Life  
Church Tradition.

## **8. The Coptic Church As A Church Of People**

The Ecclesiastical Role Of The People  
The Role Of Women In The Church  
The Child In The Coptic Church.

## **9. The Coptic Church And The Ecumenical Life**

The Ecumenical Movement In The Early Coptic Church  
The Coptic Church Abroad.

## **10. The Coptic Culture**

The Coptic Culture - The Coptic Music.



