

**SAINT CYRIL
OF ALEXANDRIA**
PILLAR OF FAITH



Society of Coptic Church Studies
Coptic Church Review
Volume 19, Numbers 1 & 2
Spring / Summer 1998

SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

PILLAR OF FAITH

*Society of Coptic Church Studies
Coptic Church Review: Volume 19, Numbers 1 & 2
Spring and Summer 1998
<http://home.ptd.net/~yanney/>*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Bishop Wissa
(Al-Balyana, Egypt)

Bishop Antonious Markos
(Coptic Church, African Affairs)

Bishop Isaac
(Quesna, Egypt)

Bishop Dioscorus
(Coptic Church, Egypt)

Fr. Tadros Malaty
(Alexandria, Egypt)

Professor Fayek Ishak
(Ontario, Canada)

William El-Meiry, Ph.D.
(N.J., U.S.A.)

Girgis A. Ibrahim, Ph.D.
(Florida, U.S.A.)

Esmat Gabriel, Ed.D.
(PA., U.S.A.)

EDITOR
Rodolph Yanney, M.D.

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Ralph Yanney

© *Copyright 1998*
by Coptic Church Review
E. Brunswick, NJ

Subscription and Business Address:
Society of Coptic Church Studies
P.O. Box 714, E. Brunswick, NJ 08816

Editorial Address:
Coptic Church Review
P.O. Box 1113, Lebanon, PA 17042
email: yanney@postoffice.ptd.net

Subscription Price (1 Year)
U.S.A. \$10.00
Canada \$12.00 (U.S. dollars)
Overseas \$13.00

Articles are indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*; book reviews are indexed in *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*. Both indexes are published by the American Theological Library Association, Chicago, available online through BRS Information Technologies (Latham, New York) and DIALOG Information Services (Palo Alto, California).

Abstracts of articles appear in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, Myerstown, PA 17067.

COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

A Quarterly of Contemporary Patristic Studies
ISSN 0273-3269

Volume 19
Numbers 1 & 2Spring 1998

Acknowledgment

Scripture quotations in this volume, unless otherwise noted, are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973 and used by permission of the division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches.

CONTENTS

<i>Pagans and Christians in Fifth-Century Egypt</i>	4
Maged S. A. Mikhail	
<i>Life and Work of Saint Cyril of Alexandria</i>	17
Rodolph Yanney	
<i>St. Cyril of Alexandria: Biblical Expositor</i>	30
Robert Wilken	
<i>A Synopsis of St. Cyril's Christological Doctrine*</i>	42
John Anthony McGuckin	
<i>Saint Cyril and the Popular Piety of the Copts</i>	52
Otto Meindardus	

*The article of Father McGuckin is taken from his book '*On the Unity of Christ*' (pages 32-47), and is used by permission of the publisher. Copyright © is held by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, and it is unlawful to reprint.

PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS IN FIFTH-CENTURY EGYPT

*Maged S. A. Mikhail**

This will be a relatively brief and admittedly collage-like paper which aims to provide an introduction to the Christians and pagans of fifth-century Egypt, and thus to the world of St. Cyril of Alexandria (412-444). It will survey some of the major issues and characteristics relating to the two groups, striving to illustrate the two camps and the interaction, conflict, and synthesis that took place between them. In attempting to focus on such a vast topic, the paper will not discuss any of the doctrinal debates of the time nor the state of the Jewish community in Egypt.

The Christians

Egypt always had a special rank within the Roman world. From a political standpoint, it was regarded as a separate administrative unit on which the emperors kept very close watch.¹ Egypt's value stemmed from its function as the breadbasket of the Empire. Demand for Egyptian grain was first attested in the Old Testament story of Joseph.² It was later exported to Rome, and then Constantinople. Finally during the Islamic period, it was shipped to Medina and Nubia (the exports to Nubia were part of a long lasting treaty).

By the early fifth century, Egypt was a predominantly Christian country. Coinciding with St. Cyril of Alexandria's tenure, the number of Christians in Egypt

* Maged S. A. Mikhail, MA. Graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Areas of study and interest: Coptic history, Late Antiquity, and Early Islam.

** I wish to thank Dr. Rodolph Yanney who first suggested this paper, Dr. Tim Vivian for his helpful comments and suggestions, and Ms. Reagan Wicks for her help in revising this paper. I would also like to thank the *St. Shenouda the Archmandrite Coptic Society* (Los Angeles, CA) for its continued support.

1 Florence Friedman, *Beyond the Pharaohs: Egypt and the Copts in the Second to Seventh Centuries AD* (Providence, 1989), 30.

2 Especially Gen. 41:57, "Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world."

most likely surpassed the 80% mark;³ in this respect, Egypt is exceptional. Throughout the Roman Empire in the fifth century, we find rates of conversion which vary dramatically. For example, we might contrast the city of Edessa, which was a Christian stronghold from the third century, with the city of Gaza, which by the end of the fourth century was home to a handful of Christians surrounded by a large, aggressive, pagan population. Indeed, if Egypt was on one end of the conversion spectrum, Gaza was on the other. In contrast to the two Christian churches of Gaza the pagans could boast eight major temples—one of which, the Marneion, was second in importance only to the Serapium of Alexandria.⁴

Egypt was also exceptional in that Christianity spread from its major cities to the rural villages at a surprisingly early date. Although the evidence is “admittedly tenuous,” it seems that a significant portion of the countryside had already been Christianized by the end of the third century.⁵ However, the preeminence of Christianity in Egypt at such an early date (certainly by the second half of the fourth century) did not overshadow the strong pagan presence in the country. Within St. Cyril’s own tenure the festival of Adonis was still celebrated in Alexandria, the cult of Isis practiced, and sacrifices offered to Ammon and Alexander the Great.⁶

-
- 3 By AD 428 Bagnall estimates the percentage of Christians in Egypt to be around 88.4%. See his two articles: “Religious Conversion and Onomastic Change,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 19 (1982), 105-24; and “Conversion and Onomastics: A Reply,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 69 (1987), 243-50. The “Reply” is to the objections raised by Ewa Wipszycka in “La valeur de l’onomastique pour l’histoire de la christianisation de l’Égypte. A propos d’une Étude de R. S. Bagnall,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 62 (1986), 173-81.
 - 4 Mark the Deacon. *The Life of Porphyry Bishop of Gaza*, trans. G.F. Hill (Oxford, 1913). Christians at the end of the fourth century are said to be “few and easily to be numbered” (par. 11). For the temples of Gaza see par. 64. In addition to the major temples were a number of minor temples and shrines.
 - 5 A.H.M. Jones, “The Social Background of the Struggle Between Paganism and Christianity,” in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford, 1964), 18-19. Also A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* 284-602. 2 vol. (Johns Hopkins Univ. press, 1964, reprint 1992), 941. (hereafter, Jones *LRE*)
 - 6 Johannes Geffcken, *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism* (Holland, 1978), 237-8.

The Clergy and the Church

At the head of all clergy was the Bishop of Alexandria, whose authority extended to the Pentapolis (Cyrenaica).⁷ Unlike other patriarchs, the *papas*⁸ of Alexandria made it a tradition to personally ordain every bishop within his see.⁹ Conversely, by the fifth century the patriarchs of the other sees would ordain only the metropolitans, who in turn ordained the bishops under their jurisdictions. Bishops of the Church during this time—and until about the sixth century—were chosen from among the laymen (although from the mid-fourth century the election of monks to this office was on the increase).¹⁰ Also contrary to the Roman preference, eastern bishops, like the lower clergy, were allowed to marry and beget children. This appears to have been the norm until the reign of Justinian.¹¹

A diocese was usually, but not always, drawn to coincide with the boundaries of the civic nomes.¹² In the Alexandrian see were all the ranks of clergy and church staff found elsewhere in the empire (bishops, priests, deacons, exorcists, doorkeepers, etc.) with the exception of the order of the deaconess. This order has never existed in Egypt, or Rome, for that matter.¹³ Another order worthy of mention was the attendants to the sick, or the *parabalani*; the members of this all-male rank of

7 Jones *LRE*, 884: “The authority of the bishop of Alexandria over Egypt and Pentapolis was in fact despotic.”

8 The title of “Pope,” which is still retained today as one of the titles of the Archbishop of Alexandria, was first applied to the eleventh bishop of Alexandria, Heraclius, and was not exclusively used in the West to address the bishop of Rome until much later (ca. 8th c.). In the Coptic sources the title was not restricted to the archbishop; it appears as a title of reverence in the ninth-century *Life of John Kame* and it as a name of an individual in at least one legal text. R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton Univ. press, 1993), 284, mentions that the title was used for presbyters. He also states that “the term ‘archbishop’ is not found until the second half of the fifth century and ‘patriarch’ not until the sixth,” 285.

9 Jones *LRE*, 893.

10 *Ibid.*, 916.

11 *Ibid.*, 929.

12 Thus, in hagiographic/Christian literature it is possible to translate the Coptic *tosh/thosh* as “nome,” “district,” or “diocese.” For the relationship between the boundaries of civil and ecclesiastical authority see Jones *LRE*, 874-79, esp. 878-9.

13 The order of the deaconess, which was/is not regarded as a clerical rank within the Orthodox church, first appeared in the third century text of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (see translation by R. Hugh Connolly, Oxford Univ. Press, 1929). It is here that we find an order of the deaconess. The biblical allusions have to be interpreted as describing “servants.” Furthermore, there is no evidence for the existence of this order in Egypt or Rome. Recently, within the tenure of H. H. Pope Shenouda III, the Coptic Orthodox Church has initiated the order. Rather than a “renewal” of the order, as is often claimed, the Coptic Church has implemented it for the first time. For the absence of the order in Egypt see Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, *The School of Alexandria; Book One, Before Origen* (N.J. preparatory edition 1994), 271. Also, Jean LaPorte, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity* (NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), ch. iv, esp. p.111. For a discussion of the order in Asia Minor sees Susanna Elm’s *Virgins of God: The making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), ch. 5.

nurses were often unruly, participating in the chaos that sporadically took place in Alexandria. They were known to have formed part of the mob that killed the philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria in 415.¹⁴

Since the fourth century, the clergy and the church in general relied on three sources of income: the land they owned and rented out; the offerings received from parishioners;¹⁵ and the endowments of the government and the rich.¹⁶ These sources, as well as the extraordinary productivity of the Egyptian monasteries,¹⁷ left the see of Alexandria financially secure.¹⁸ Nevertheless, as would be expected, there existed a dramatic difference between the income of a large urban church and its priest, and their counterparts in the countryside.

In addition to their duties within the church, bishops, who were paid an annual stipend, had other social and civic responsibilities. They, or their steward (*oikonomos*), were in charge of distributing the grain subsidies (the *annonae*) allocated for the support of virgins, widows and the clergy.¹⁹ (Usually the grain was distributed in the form of bread loaves, *artoi*.)²⁰ Another function was to preside over episcopal courts. In 318 Constantine granted civic power to episcopal courts, which in fact were in some respects superior to civic courts.²¹ These courts gained popularity because they were efficient, corruption-free, and did not invoke the

14 See the fascinating book by Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, trans. F. Lyra (Harvard Univ. Press, 1995). The death of this philosopher was at the hands of a Christian mob convinced that she was the cause of the turmoil between the archbishop, Cyril, and the Alexandrian prefect, Orestes. (They also believed that she practiced black magic.) Since she was a female pagan philosopher, many consider her murder by a Christian mob to be a significant marker; some delineate the end of antiquity by her death. Some see it as the beginning of anti-feminist sentiments. Still others view her as a casualty of the battle between science and religion. (See the first chapter of Dzielska who examines all these interpretations.)

15 Offering regular tithes to the church does not seem to have taken place prior to the sixth century. See Jones *LRM*, 894-5.

16 Out of this combined income, the church would pay the clergy, its expenses, and supply the needs of the poor. See Jones, *LRE* 932.

17 See Jones, *LRE* 931. Also Bagnall, Egypt in Late Antiquity, 300-1. In contrast, the *Life of Porphyry Bishop of Gaza* states that the monasteries of Egypt were "very poor," par. 9.

18 Jones, *LRE* 905. For the fourth and fifth centuries, see Michael J. Hollerich, "The Alexandrian Bishops and the Grain Trade: Ecclesiastical Commerce in Late Roman Egypt," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 25.2 (1982), 187-207. For the wealth of the see in the sixth century (which would only reflect the finances of the Chalcedonian Church) see the "Life of John the Almsgiver" in *Three Byzantine Saints*, translated by Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes (New York, 1948, rep. 1996), 220, 229, 240.

19 Originally the clerical subsidy and the city annonea were probably two separate rations. See Hollerich, 192.

20 *Ibid.*, 192.

21 John C. Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3:2 (1995), 146-7.

severe physical punishments often issued by civil courts.²² During the early period of the existence of these courts, if either party in a lawsuit desired a change of venue from a civic to an episcopal court, the change was automatic. This policy must have irritated the pagan and Jewish populations, who at best felt out of place in an episcopal environment. Later, by the end of the fourth century and the first quarter of the fifth, the jurisdiction of the episcopal courts was restricted to cases in which both parties agreed to be heard by a bishop.²³ Surely such a civic responsibility consumed a great deal of time and attention from a bishop.²⁴

Monasticism

Monasticism flourished in this era and took over Egypt at a fascinating rate. Many individuals joined monasteries and convents; it was out of their ranks that the spiritual leaders of Egypt grew. Certain monks even had political clout. Although most monks lived in the desert (mainly in monasteries), others stayed near the cities where they were often a nuisance to the government and a source of support and power for the patriarch.²⁵ These “city monks” at times posed such a problem in Egypt—especially in Alexandria—that an imperial edict had to be drawn up ordering them to return to the desert.²⁶

With monasticism came a new element in society, that of the “holy man.” The monk became an unofficial patron to the average individual. It was from this holy man that one sought guidance, protection, and found authority. By the fifth century, the Coptic holy man was an institution found all over Egypt. To the local population (and depending on the popularity of the particular monk, even the whole country), the holy man became a spiritual leader, arbiter of disputes, doctor (in the form of healer), father, judge, and refuge. One of the best examples of such an individual was St. Shenoute of Atripe (d. 466).²⁷ Since the turn of this century his function as a

22 Ibid., 151-2, 161-3. The superiority of an episcopal court is manifested in that its decisions were not subject to review or reversal by civic courts.

23 Ibid., 147-9.

24 The bishop as judge is illustrated by the life of the sixth/seventh century Melkite Pope of Alexandria, John the Almsgiver (d. 619). See “Life of John the Almsgiver,” 212, 228, 233.

25 Jones *LRE*, 932.

26 Pierre Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Harvard: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990), 63. *Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 3,1. For an English translation of the Codex see Clyde Pharr et al., *The Theodosian Code, and Novels, and the Sirmundian Constitutions* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952).

27 St. Shenoute regulated liturgical practice for the nearby villages; see Dwight W. Young, *Coptic Manuscripts from the White Monastery* (Germany: Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1993), 59. He fed the populace during famines and negotiated for their release when captured; see David N. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute* (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 50-1, 68. And it was he who spoke up on behalf of the peasants against oppressive landlords; see the translation of the sermon titled “If a fox should bark” in John W.B. Barns, “Shenoute as a Historical Source,” *Actes du Xe congres international de papyrologues: Varsovie-cracovie 3-9 septembre 1961*, (1964), 151-59.

holy man was described by J. Leipoldt in his groundbreaking *Schenute von Atripe*, and again by J. Geffcken in the 1920's, based primarily on Leipoldt's account.²⁸

It was also under Shenoute's leadership that a major, albeit seldom mentioned, monastic shift took place in Upper Egypt. The cenobitic system of monasticism in Upper Egypt (and the world in general) was established by St. Pachomius (d. 346). His monasteries thrived and dramatically increased in number and size during his lifetime and thereafter. However, by the beginning of the fifth century, the center of monasticism shifted from the Pachomian to the Shenoutian monasteries. The White Monastery itself, the chief monastery of St. Shenoute, was originally a temple dedicated to the goddess Triphis (the Triphieion).²⁹ But like other pagan monuments of the time, it was converted into a Christian church.³⁰ It was there that the charismatic preacher and strong-minded ascetic attracted thousands of monks and nuns to his vocation. The Shenoutian system was based along roughly the same lines as its Pachomian counterparts; however, there were a number of major differences. For the first time in monastic circles, initiates were asked to take a vow upon entering the monastic order. The ascetic regimen was stricter than the Pachomian norm. Finally, rather than operating as a federation, as did the Pachomian monasteries, the Shenoutian monasteries were hierarchical.

To sum up, the Church of fifth-century Egypt was highly structured, adhered to by the majority of the population, had a strong monastic presence (both physically and ideologically), and exercised a great deal of power.

Paganism

"Paganism" is a misleading term. It serves as a blanket that covers a great variety of cults, religions, and philosophies (and for the Christians of the fifth century, also heresies), many of which contradicted one another. However, to simplify matters, it is possible to classify the "pagans" as polytheist, or at best henotheists.³¹ The word "pagan" itself—Gr. *hellene*, Lat. *paganus*—was not a derogatory term as such; it was the pagans themselves who coined the term and persisted to use it quite favorably.³² It could also mean "peasant." As mentioned above, early

28 See Geffcken, 238-9. First published in 1920, the English translation is based on the 1929 German edition.

29 Zbigniew Borkowski, "Local Cults and Resistance to Christianity," *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 20 (1990), 29-30.

30 Geffcken, 228, states that the conversion of temples into churches was not very common. However, whether the Serapium and the Mithraium in Alexandria, the Triphieion in Upper Egypt, the Mameion in Gaza, or the temple of Theandrites at Zoara, examples of this type of conversion are not hard to come by.

31 Cf. Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 5. Henotheism is a belief in one god, which does not exclude the existence of other gods.

32 Chuvin, 7-9. Cf. G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 10. Bagnall, 252, states, "The use of 'Hellene' for pagan is itself an invention of pagan polemic against the Christians, an attempt to claim classical culture exclusively for pagan use."

Christianity in many regions was restricted to Greek speaking cities. Thus, the countryside, where the peasants lived, remained pagan, hence the association. The peasant population seems to have been difficult to convert.³³ On the other end of the social spectrum, the aristocracy was also resistant to conversion.³⁴ This was especially true in Rome where the aristocracy, which formed most of the Senate, clung to the old religion. Egypt was no exception; in fact, this was the case all over the Roman Empire.³⁵ In addition to the aristocracy, paganism often thrived among intellectuals, historians, philosophers, and poets.³⁶

Pockets of paganism survived in fifth-century Egypt, most notably on the island of Philae.³⁷ Many late antique Egyptian pagans worshipped Aïôn, the embodiment of Osiris, as their chief god.³⁸ But for the most part, paganism in fifth-century Egypt was becoming increasingly marginal. The situation in Egypt was the reverse of that found in Gaza or Carrhae.³⁹ And by the sixth century paganism in the Roman Empire as a whole had lost much of its “intellectual prowess.”⁴⁰ From that point on it is possible to observe small communities and concentrations of pagans here and there (a few lasting into the Islamic era, one—Carrhae—well into the ‘Abassid Caliphate), though collectively paganism ceased to exist.⁴¹

Anti-Pagan Legislation

Since the reign of Constantine, pagans had to learn to accept and live under a variety of anti-pagan laws. By the first quarter of the fourth century the major restriction placed on them by Constantine was his ban on blood sacrifices.⁴² By mid-century—the laws of 357-58 AD—divination and sorcery were also outlawed.⁴³ Throughout the century anti-pagan laws were passed; however, near

33 Geffcken, 228, 230.

34 See Chuvin, 135. And the *Life of Porphyry*, 51, 63.

35 Geffcken, 237. For the composition and religious tendencies of the Senate see Géza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome*, trans. David Braund and Frank Pollock (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), 194-200. Also Jones, “Background,” 29, 31, 36.

36 Chuvin, 118. It was pagan teachers of rhetoric who led the pagans when they fortified themselves in the Serapium during the rioting which eventually lead to the destruction of that temple.

37 This persisted until the reign of Justinian, who put an end to paganism on the island. The fact that paganism could only survive at such a remote location affirms the strength of Christianity in Egypt.

38 Bowersock, 27. Isis was also quite popular see Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997), 149.

39 See Bagnall’s discussion in *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 268-73.

40 Chuvin, 132, 135.

41 Chuvin gives a number of examples. The cult of the god Sin in the city of Carrhae continued “well into the Islamic period” (p. 62). The festival of Maiouma was celebrated until the eighth century (p. 75). A platonic school at Harran (Carrhae) survived until the eleventh century (p. 11).

42 See Scott Bradbury, “Constantine and the Problem of Anti-Pagan Legislation in the Fourth Century,” *Classical Philology* 89.2 (1994), 120-39.

43 Chuvin, 39.

the end of the fourth century Theodosius I initiated an onslaught of anti-pagan (and anti-heretical) laws. In 389 pagan holidays were no longer recognized and in 391-2 the practice of paganism in general was prohibited under penalty of death. By the beginning of the fifth century, at least in theory, pagans were also excluded from the army and the administration, and an edict ordered the destruction of pagan temples in case “there are any still untouched.”⁴⁴

The situation for the pagans—especially in Egypt where the edict of 391 was addressed directly to the prefect of Alexandria—was bleak.⁴⁵ However, at times there was leniency from the state; not all emperors were as rigid as Theodosius I. Valentinian (364-75) was relatively tolerant of all religions, and Arcadius and Honorius (395-408) allowed pagan holidays to be celebrated as long as the celebrants refrained from sacrificing and “unlawful superstition.” In general, although legislated against as a group, many individual pagans were respected and employed by the Christian Empire. Themistius, who was proconsul of Constantinople twice during the last half of the fourth century and teacher of prince Arcadius, as well as Olympiodorus of Thebes (in Egypt) who was an ambassador to the Huns in 412, are but two examples of competent pagans who made themselves invaluable to the state. (A long list of such individuals can be compiled especially when we consider the pagan teachers of rhetoric and grammar who retained their influence during this Christian age).⁴⁶

The Destruction of Temples

The destruction of pagan temples may be traced back to AD 326 when the temple of Asclepius at Aigeai in Cilicia was destroyed.⁴⁷ From that date, however, until the 380's there does not seem to have been much activity; temples were occasionally overthrown here and there but there was not a calculated campaign aimed at eradicating them, nor were any of the major temples affected.⁴⁸ However, within the span of the next forty years there was a dramatic increase in the rate of attacks on temples. This phenomenon occurred in many areas of the empire. In 399 the temples of Carthage were destroyed, as was the sanctuary of Isis at Menouthis (Egypt) in 414 and many temples in Athens also fell.⁴⁹ Most importantly, three of the most important pillars of paganism were devastated: the temple of Zeus in

44 *Codex Theodosianus* XVI 10, 25. See Pharr for English translation.

45 Garth Fowden, “Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire AD 320-435,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 29.1 (1978), 53. Fowden states that “between the years 320 and 435 . . . paganism ceased to be the dominant religion of the empire and became the creed of an isolated minority.”

46 See Chuvin, 38, 94.

47 Chuvin, 33.

48 In Egypt, there were three notable exceptions to this rule: the reign of the Arian bishop George of Cappadocia (356-61); and the two visits (ca. 384 and 388) of Maternus Cynegius, the Prefect of the East, to Egypt.

49 Geffcken, 232.

Apamea (AD 386), of Serapis in Alexandria (AD 392),⁵⁰ and that of Marnas in Gaza (AD 398). In addition, smaller, more rural temples were destroyed all over Egypt and the Roman Empire. Often these closings were enacted by prefects and imperial troops who tried to enforce the laws of the time.⁵¹

Ancient Egyptian tombs and temples were also taken over by Christians. The effect of this can be seen in many of the monuments of Upper Egypt, where crosses, icons, and Coptic graffiti were drawn and carved on many of the ancient monuments (where they can still be seen today). One such occasion was commemorated in a sermon by St. Shenoute of Atripe, delivered immediately after an ancient Egyptian temple was converted into a church. It reveals much of the Christian/monastic thought of the time. In the sermon, the Abbot states that where previously the temple portrayed dogs, crocodiles and cattle (the ancient Egyptian gods), it now possessed “the soul-saving scriptures of life;” it became the place where God’s “son Jesus Christ and all His angels, righteous men and saints [are] (portrayed).”⁵²

In general the destruction of the temples at this time was a peculiar phenomenon that seems to have been powered by an ideology rather than reasonable thought. Where Christians were already a majority, such as in Egypt, destroying the Serapium need not surprise us. However, where Christians were few, as in Gaza, closing the temples is far more noteworthy. The impracticality of a minority (the Christians) invoking the wrath of a majority (the pagans of Gaza) by closing down their places of worship did not play a role in the closing/destruction of the temples of that city. What did play a role was the idea that paganism must come to an end. In addition to the destruction of temples, some were simply abandoned. This was especially the case with smaller shrines which were not frequently used, and thus with a dwindling pagan population such buildings would have been abandoned first.⁵³ In general, the destruction of temples, especially in large cities, seems to have entailed a considerable amount of turmoil and violence.⁵⁴

50 See Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.16. Sozomen *Ecclesiastical History*, VII.15. In addition to the Serapium the important temples of Dionysius and Mithras were also destroyed around the same time. The Serapium, located at the southwestern corner of Alexandria, was the temple of the patron god of the city. The structure itself was immense and had a number of lecture halls, a library, and small shrines dedicated to various gods. See Haas, 146-7, 159-69.

51 Haas, 166. Jones LRE, 943, notes that “in general the official ban on pagan worship seems to have been submissively accepted.”

52 Dwight W. Young, “A Monastic Inveictive Against Egyptian Hieroglyphs,” in *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky*, ed. D. W. Young (East Gloucester: Pirtle and Polson, 1981), 353. I added the “are.”

53 Chuvin, 37, 41.

54 See Socrates’ *Ecclesiastical History*, III.3; V.16.

Pagan and Christian History and Historiography

During the fourth and fifth centuries an intellectual “war” over historiography was fought mainly in the Eastern Empire. Within Christian ranks were two new genres of historical writing: the first, inaugurated by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, was indeed profound. Eusebius not only initiated ecclesiastical history, but in fact a new way of writing history. The new genre quoted original sources and did not manufacture speeches—as was customary in historical writings up to that time. This was such a profound concept that it led A. Momigliano to argue that Eusebius was the predecessor of modern historical writing.⁵⁵ Eusebius’ model would soon become the historiographical template utilized even by pagan historians like Zosimus (discussed below) who were hostile toward Christianity.

What Eusebius had accomplished in relating the Christian worldview of history meets its pagan counterpart in Zosimus’ *New History* of the fifth/sixth century.⁵⁶ Interestingly, after numerous edicts had banned pagans from the imperial bureaucracy, we see that Zosimus was employed by the state in the imperial treasury. This further adds credence to the conclusion reached above that individual pagans continued to be employed by, and thrived in, the empire. Zosimus was a staunch pagan who despised Christians, monks, and Christian emperors. He especially harbored a grudge against Constantine, whom he called “a son of a harlot,”⁵⁷ and plainly stated that he was “the origin and beginning of the present destruction of the empire.”⁵⁸ Throughout his account, Zosimus portrays the pagans as the last true believers whose secret sacrifices upheld the empire, and—on several prominent occasions—even saved it from destruction.⁵⁹ His theme is simple; the empire was collapsing because its people had turned away from the proper worship of the gods.⁶⁰ This line of reasoning was very powerful at that time, for it seemed to explain why the Western Empire was devastated.

In addition, Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* introduced the genre of Christian hagiography. This genre had a number of antecedents, from the *Life of Alexander the Great*, to the acts of Martyrdom. However, what sets it apart (besides the central figure usually being a monk) is that this form of writing repeatedly demonstrates the immanence of God, and usually contains a number of miracle stories (to

55 A. Momigliano, “Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century AD,” in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford, 1964), 92.

56 This was also accomplished by Eunapius’ *History*, written in the fourth century; however, this source, for the most part, is lost.

57 R. T. Riddle, *Zosimus’ New History: A Translation with Commentary* (Canberra: Central Printing, Australian National Univ., 1982), 2:15-17. (hereafter, NH)

58 NH 2.34.1-2.

59 NH 4.18.2-4. In this section Zosimus tells how Nesters, an old priest of Achilles, saw a vision, which prompted him to perform a sacrifice, which saved the city from a disastrous earthquake. In NH 5.41.7, the goddess Athena saved the city named after her.

60 See section 2.5.5-2.7.1 of the *New History* for a thorough exposition of this point.

one extent or another). This type of literature met its pagan counterpart in the writings of such men as the fourth-century pagan philosopher Eunapius of Sardis. Eunapius was hostile to Christianity to the point that, according to Photius, his *History* had to be re-edited in a less offensive form.⁶¹ He especially despised monks, whom he blamed for Alaric's entrance into Rome. One of his major works, the *Lives of the Sophists*, is a great example of pagan hagiography. Its style emphasizes the miraculous and the immanence of the gods, thus indicated the heavily influence of Christian hagiography.

Eunapius and Zosimus stood on opposite ends of the pagan ideological spectrum. Whereas Eunapius hailed the philosopher/holy man who sought after wisdom (much like Apollonarius of Tyana), Zosimus capitalized upon the central act of sacrifice. What they shared was the belief that the chaos and turmoil in their world was a direct result of the presence of Christians. Ironically, the Christians, who believed that their misfortune was due to the presence of pagans, shared a similar viewpoint. One of the most important common denominators of this period's historiography was that victory in battles abroad and prosperity at home depended upon the favor of God/the gods.⁶² However, this was not always the case with the Christians; during times of persecution the Christians viewed their ill fortune as a direct proof of their virtue. But as political circumstances turned in their favor this attitude changed. It would take the repeated sacking of Rome to regain—at least partially through Augustine's *City of God*—the perspective of the “persecuted church.”⁶³ Much of the historiography of this period, whether pagan or Christian, tried to account for any misfortune by blaming it either on the irreverence of one's own camp or the sacrilege of the other.

Pagan and Christian Piety and Religion

The religious world views of pagans and Christians, though worlds apart, exhibit a number of striking similarities. This was especially the case between the Christians and the Neoplatonists. Three philosophers are credited with the type of Neoplatonism most prevalent in fourth/fifth-century Egypt: Plotinus (ca. 204-70), Porphyry (ca. 232-303) his disciple, and Iamblichus (ca. 250-330).⁶⁴ Beginning with Plotinus and increasing with his pupils, the Neoplatonists seemed to blur the

61 Momigliano, 95. Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright. Loeb Classical Library 134 (Harvard Univ. Press, 1968). On page 476 Eunapius refers to the monks as “the men clad in black raiment.” It is perhaps here, within the monastic institution, that we may trace the emergence of black as the dominant color of clerical garb. Regardless, the theory often circulated in modern Coptic circles that black was only taken up in the middle ages (11th c.) is certainly incorrect.

62 Jones *LRE*, 934.

63 Geffcken, 227.

64 It is also important not to underestimate Origen. Like Plotinus, he was taught by Ammonius Saccas; his writings greatly influenced the shape of Christian Neoplatonism.

line between philosophy and religion. They fasted, many were celibate, and they read and re-read the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the works of Plato in very much the same way Christians read the Scriptures; Plato's writings were indeed considered infallible.⁶⁵ In addition, as alluded to above, the philosopher became the pagan counterpart to the Christian "holy man." They sought after the One (also called "The Good," and "God"), and their goal—like that of their Christian contemporaries—was "assimilation to God."⁶⁶ In many circles Christ was accepted and included as one of the gods of the pagan pantheon;⁶⁷ He was placed alongside Asclepius, Apollonius of Tyana, and Apollo.⁶⁸ Miracles were also accounted for in a number of cults, especially those of Asclepius, Isis, and Serapis.⁶⁹

The association between Christ and other gods in cult worship and in magic demonstrates the important concept that both Christians and pagans considered the God (or gods) of the other faction to be in fact a real entity. The pagans often incorporated this entity into their worship. Christians believed the pagan gods to be in reality demons, but the fact remained that they were forces that could indeed impact one's life.

This Christian perspective is illustrated by an incident related in the *Life of Antony*. As an exercise in asceticism, the young Antony would spend a week at a time praying inside a tomb. If we assume that, according to custom, this tomb was decorated on the inside with the images of many gods, the following passage in which Antony is attacked by demons would take on new meaning: "The demons, as if breaking through the building's four walls, and seeming to enter through them, were changed into the forms of beasts and reptiles."⁷⁰ It would seem that the ancient Egyptian gods painted on the walls of the tomb were exposed for what they were—demons. In the conclusion of the passage, Antony successfully overcame these demons/pagan gods.

By the third century, the philosopher Porphyry had elevated the concept of faith (*pistis*) in philosophical circles to surpass that of rational thought (*logismos*). This is of unquestionable significance. In the early years of Christianity, according to the prevailing attitudes, *pistis* was regarded as blind faith, something for the ignorant and lowly, and it was believed that true religion was a product of *logismos*. However, during the third century we see the two factions approaching a

65 E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965), 122.

66 Dodds, 119-20.

67 Bowersock adds "it is very important to remember here that Christ had a powerful influence on the paganism that prospered in the late antique world," 91.

68 The life of Apollonius of Tyana was read by Jerome and Augustine, neither of whom considered it hostile to Christianity. Chuvin, 128.

69 Dodds, 124.

70 Robert C. Gregg, *Athanasius, Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, The Classics of Western Spirituality Series (N.Y., 1980), par. 9.

common ground. While Clement of Alexandria and Origen applied *logismos* to Christian theology, the pagans likewise applied *pistis* to their philosophy.⁷¹ Furthermore, in Neoplatonist circles faith was described as the only means by which one could achieve truth, love or hope.⁷² Although the emphasis is different, the similarity to St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:13 is striking. The pagans, in their own contexts, were also familiar with a number of Christian doctrines. Different pagan traditions were familiar with the concept of a trinity. However, it was not the "Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity" understood by Christians; it usually took the form of three separate gods—a father, a mother, and a son.⁷³ And in Syria and Arabia a god-man (*theandrites*) deity was worshipped.⁷⁴

Christianity also influenced pagan art. Bowersock cites a number of cases in his *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*. By late antiquity, the Egyptian goddess Isis was said to have given virgin birth.⁷⁵ A panel portraying the young Dionysus depicted him sitting on the lap of Hermes in the same manner that the Virgin Mary and Child Jesus are depicted in Christian iconography, to the extent that it even depicts individuals approaching the young god with gifts.⁷⁶ In Apamea, a mosaic depicted Socrates in the midst of six other sages in the same manner in which Christ is pictured with his disciples at the Last Supper.⁷⁷

The fifth century religious climate, with its emphasis on miracles, scriptures, and assimilation to God/gods, was the environment shared by pagans and Christians alike. But it would be wrong to underestimate the differences between the two camps, for they were many; certainly one of the most prominent was the theology of the incarnation—the cornerstone of Christian theology, which was simply incompatible with pagan theology. And with all the similarities the two sides viewed each other as belonging to completely different camps. This can be seen in the writings of Porphyry, who while advocating the concept of *pistis* as a fundamental component of philosophy, wrote vehemently against the Christians. However, the common elements constituted the language in which the Christian/pagan dialogue of the fifth century was conducted. In a way, religious ideas were one more component of the Hellenistic medium—Greek Language, philosophy, education—found throughout the Mediterranean world at that time.⁷⁸

71 Dodds, 122-3.

72 Ibid. Dodds notes that this is found repeatedly in the writings of Porphyry and Proclus.

73 Bowersock, 17, 21. Bowersock neglects to discuss the trinities commonly found in the religion of the Ancient Egyptians. See David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt" in *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*. ed. Byron E. Shafer (Ithaca, 1991), 41.

74 Bowersock, 18.

75 Ibid., 27. The same is said of the goddess Korê. A virgin birth was not associated with her until late antiquity. Bowersock, 26.

76 Ibid., 52.

77 Ibid., 33.

78 The presence of this Hellenistic medium is one of Bowersock's main themes. See xi, 5-9, and 73.

LIFE AND WORK OF SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Rodolph Yanney

Saint Cyril of Alexandria, the twenty-fourth patriarch of the See of Saint Mark is considered one of the greatest prelates of Christian antiquity.¹ Little is known about his early life except that he spent five years as a monk in Nitria, which was the first monastic center in the western desert of Egypt. At some time during this period he was under the guidance of St. Isidore of Pelusium who was probably the most learned monk in the desert. His uncle Theophilus, the reigning Patriarch, then summoned Cyril to Alexandria and ordained him as a presbyter. Cyril soon enjoyed a great reputation as a preacher.

When St. Theophilus died (October 15, AD 412), Cyril became automatically the leading candidate to succeed him. His rival, the Archdeacon Timothy, had the support of the government, and the commander of the Roman troops in Egypt took sides with him.² After a tumultuous contest, and despite the strong opposition of Orestes, the Prefect of Alexandria, Cyril was enthroned on the throne of St. Mark only three days following his uncle's death.

EGYPT UNDER THE ROMAN RULE

The Egyptians lost their freedom after the Persian invasion of their country in the 6th century BC. After the Persians, the Greek followed by the Romans and then the Arabs ruled Egypt. Early in the third century, when the Romans started to persecute the Christian population of Egypt, these found their protection in their religious leaders headed by the Bishop of Alexandria whom they have called *Papa* (Pope or father) since then.

In the middle of the same century, during the plague epidemic that swept the city of Alexandria, the Church organized among its members, both clergy and laity, teams to take care of the sick and dead. These dedicated people did not stop their charitable service when the epidemic subsided. They formed what was called the

1 Aziz S.Atiya: *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, New York, 1991; 3: 671.

2 Socrates: *Ecclesiastical History* :7: 7 (NPNF;2nd series:2: 156)

parabalani, literally “those who disregarded their own lives” in the service of the Church. Their number gradually multiplied till it reached thousands in the fifth century. Also they had more than their original charitable work to do, for they became always available for any drastic action.³

The Egyptians proved their faithfulness and love for the Alexandrine Pope after the Empire became Christian. They stood with their Popes when they suffered exile for their defense of the true faith; and they never accepted the usurping bishops appointed in their place by the Roman emperor.⁴ This love extended even to the pagan population and in certain cases the Pope was considered a national leader or hero. There were many reasons for the whole population to hate the foreign invaders, including the heavy taxation, the plunder of the wealth of the country by the Romans leaving the poor Egyptians in destitute need, the forcible taking of their children as slaves and their conscription for foreign wars.

EARLY YEARS OF THE ARCHBISHOP

From the beginning, Cyril stood for the Christian cause, having one aim, the establishment of Christian truth. For this he was unbending in his determination. Cyril was not afraid to take an uncompromising stand against all opposition from heretics, pagans or Jews.⁵ Soon after accession he set to act on several fronts, both in Egypt and in other places beyond his frontiers. His first action was directed against the Novatians. These were followers of Novatian who died as a martyr during the persecution of Valerian (257- 8). Before his death he formed a rival church in Rome, accusing the Roman Church of being lenient in accepting the apostates. Cyril shut the churches of the Novatianists and took possession of their consecrated vessels, ornaments and other belongings; and then stripped their bishop Theopemptus of all that he had.

Cyril and the Jews

Next came the turn of the Alexandrine Jews. As early as his first Festal Letter, issued in Autumn 413, Cyril engaged in a lengthy denunciation of the Jews; he even asserted that the Jews of his day were worse than their fathers.⁶ Hostility gradually escalated between Jews and Christians in the city; and one night (c. 414) a

3 Atiya, op. cit.

4 This happened many times in the history of the Coptic Church. Athanasius was exiled five times. (See Yannev R: *The Church Behind St. Athanasius*. In *Coptic Church Review*. 1988;vol. ix: 2, 35. His successor, Peter II, remained his whole patriarchate under exile. History is full of such examples when the Copts stood behind their Popes, who were exiled during the Roman Empire and under subsequent rulers. The latest was the exile of Pope Shenouda III in 1981-1984.

5 Young FM: *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983: 244, 45.

6 Haas C: *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*. Baltimore and London: JHUP, 1997: 300

cry ran through the streets that ‘Alexander’s church is on fire’. When the Christians rushed to save it the Jews slew whoever they met. At daybreak Cyril, accompanied by an immense crowd of people, went to their synagogues, took them away from them and drove the Jews out of the city, permitting the multitude to plunder their goods. Thus the Jews, who had inhabited the city since its foundation by Alexander the Great were expelled from it, stripped of all their belongings. Orestes, the governor of Alexandria was distressed at what happened and refused to be reconciled with the Archbishop.⁷ Both wrote complaints to the young Emperor Theodosius II who could do nothing. Cyril made a great case against the Jews, who since the fourth century have been treated as second class citizens by the Roman State. They were forbidden to make converts or marry Christians and were excluded from some public offices. Violence against them could go unpunished, nor compensated. It was not uncommon for the Fathers to denounce the Jews in their sermons or writings for their role in killing Christ and refusing his message and for persecuting the early Christians.⁸ The Sanhadrin was dissolved and the Jewish academics in Galilee were closed. Many of the Jews migrated outside the borders of the Roman Empire. They went to Babylon, which gradually became the world center of Judaism. Under the Sassanid rulers who were tolerant to them, they lived and flourished; they were even given control over their own affairs.⁹

Cyril and the Pagans

The conversion of Constantine and the declaration of Christianity as the official religion by Theodosius I did not mean that paganism was abolished. At the beginning of the fifth century Paganism was still prevalent and both religions were competing for converts. It is evident from Cyril’s early festal letters that he was preoccupied with warding off criticism of Christianity made by the Pagans. In his festal letter for 418, he had a detailed attack on Paganism which foreshadowed many of the arguments he used later in his treatise against Julian (c. 438). In the introduction to the treatise, Cyril mentioned that he had long been concerned with the appeal that the pagan emperor’s book had among the Alexandrines and the immeasurable harm it was doing to those who were weak in faith.¹⁰

Cyril’s opposition to paganism was not restricted to words. The worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis was still prevalent in the city of Menouthis. In June 414, Cyril transferred the relics of St. Cyr and St. John the Martyrs from Alexandria to

7 Socrates, op. cit. 7: 13; Atiya: op. cit.

8 Kelly JF: *The World of the Early Christians*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press. 1997: 78.

9 Wylen SM: *Settings of Silver: An Introduction to Judaism*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press. 1989, 182, 183.

10 *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*. op. cit.; 308-9.

the neighboring Menouthis. Thanks to the numerous healing miracles that occurred through the prayers of the martyrs, many people renounced paganism. The name of the city was changed to Abukyr, a name that it keeps till this day. It was also during the reign of Cyril that the Archimandrite Shenoute of Atripe led a great campaign in uprooting paganism and destroying its temples in Upper Egypt.

Cyril and Orestes

Since the fourth century when the Empire became Christian, the line that defined the relation between Church and State has become indistinct. This fact has to be in the background for understanding what happened in Alexandria early in the fifth century, as well as other major events in the Church history of that period. Bishops of the major cities of the Empire were often chosen or even appointed by the emperor. Although this worked peacefully in such cities like Constantinople and Antioch, in Alexandria it usually resulted in violence and riots; occasionally it ended in the murder of the bishop. Some civil powers were assigned to the bishops by the Emperor, such as the judicial function in the law suits among their subjects. This resulted in two rival authorities. In the case of a weak and partially incompetent governor such as Orestes who felt to be threatened by a powerful bishop, trouble could be expected. After the expulsion of the Jews, Cyril sent to the Prefect messengers in order to mediate reconciliation. When Orestes refused, the Archbishop tried to reconcile him in the context of a liturgical act by extending toward him the book of the Gospels, 'believing that respect for religion would induce Orestes to lay aside his resentment.'¹¹ Orestes spurned this offer, realizing that respect for religion in this charged atmosphere spelled respect for Cyril. Orestes opted not to be seen submitting to Cyril, and he persisted in implacable hostility to the bishop. However, Orestes refusal to clasp the Gospel book, an event that happened in public, immediately called his true faith into question, a question that resonated throughout the whole Church.¹²

News of the event quickly reached the Desert. Soon about five hundred monks streamed into the capital, ready to fight for the Patriarch. They met the prefect in his chariot. They called him a pagan idolater and described him in other abusive words. The prefect exclaimed that he was a Christian and that the bishop of Constantinople had baptized him. The monks gave little heed to his protests and soon rocks were thrown. One of them, Ammonius, threw a stone at Orestes, which struck him in the head covering him with blood. Finding themselves outnumbered and fearing for their lives, most of his bodyguards fled. This would have been the end of Orestes had not the populace of Alexandria run to his rescue and put the monks to flight. Ammonius was arrested and publicly tortured to death. Cyril then

¹¹ Socrates, op. cit. 7: 13.

¹² *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, op. cit., 305.

took the body of the dead monk and gave him a martyr's funeral, changing his pagan name to Thaumasius (i.e. wonderful or admirable). Both the Archbishop and the Prefect gave their reports to the Emperor, and the affair gradually sank into oblivion. But the situation remained tense in Alexandria. Although the Prefect was avowedly a baptized Christian, yet the Alexandrine Christians and especially the parabalani still accused him of betraying his faith. They thought that his head was turned by Hypatia the leader of the Neoplatonists School who taught in the Alexandrine *Museon*.¹³

Hypatia

Hypatia, was the daughter of the Alexandrine mathematician Theon whose works have survived till now. She was Alexandrine by birth and lived in the city all her life. She assisted her father and continued his work after his death. Hypatia wrote mathematical works that remained popular for generations after her. Philosophy was her second interest, yet she surpassed all the philosophers of her own time. She also made attainments in literature, astronomy and science. She explained the principles of the philosophy of Plato and Plotinus to her auditors, many of whom came from a distance, as far as Constantinople to receive her instructions. On account of her strong personality and integrity she became a leading authority in the public affairs of the city and she was frequently bestowed with civic honors. It was even customary for newly elected magistrates to pay her a courtesy visit, and she not infrequently appeared in public with the magistrates.

The most notable of her students was Synesius bishop of Ptolemais, who was ordained by St. Theophilus of Alexandria. Synesius describes her as a "blessed lady" and "genuine guide", and as "the most holy and reverend philosopher". She led her students to "union with the divine" through cognitive efforts and ethical perfection. Her students included many Christians. Two of her students became bishops. She practiced asceticism in her daily life, was famous for her chastity and remained a virgin all her life.

According to Socrates, the contemporary Church historian who described her tragedy in detail, "she fell a victim to the political jealousy that prevailed at that time. Her advice and support for the Prefect led to her death. For as she had frequent meetings with Orestes, it was calumniously reported among the Christian populace, that it was she who prevented Orestes from being reconciled to the bishop. Some of them therefore, hurried away by a fierce and bigoted zeal, whose ringleader was a reader named Peter, caught her while returning home, and dragging her from her carriage, they took her to the church called Caesareum, where

13 Atiya: *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, op. cit., vol. 3: 672. *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, op. cit., 305-307. Socrates, op. cit., 7: 14.

they completely stripped her, and then stoned her. After tearing her body in pieces, they took her mangled limbs to a place called Cinaron, and there burnt them. This affair brought not the least opprobrium, not only upon Cyril, but also upon the whole Alexandrian church. And surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort. This happened in the month of March during Lent, in the fourth year of Cyril's episcopate."¹⁴

The shocking and brutal murder of Hypatia in 415 has raised from the first moment many unanswered questions. Why was Hypatia killed? Who killed her? Did Cyril have any role, directly or indirectly in the event or in protecting those responsible for the murder? What consequences did the crime have on the events in Alexandria? There is no definite answer for any of these questions because all three ancient historians who have written about Hypatia have been accused of taking sides. Socrates who wrote the Ecclesiastical History (380-438 A. D.) has been described as an enemy of Cyril for his actions against the Novatian followers and his stand against Nestorius.¹⁵

Damascius ascribes her death to Cyril's jealousy over the honored position she enjoyed among the city's elite,¹⁶ and he asserts that he really prompted the murder.¹⁷ However, others do not trust Damascius since they "cannot consider as evidence the statement of a pagan philosopher who lived about 130 years after the event and was a thorough hater of Christianity."¹⁸

John, bishop of Nikiu, cites in his *Chronicles* that the Christians of Alexandria portrayed Hypatia as a witch and imputed to her the worst type of sorcery- black magic- which drew the severest punishment in the legal system of the Roman Empire. Hypatia's father's preoccupation with astronomical and mathematical research circulated in the City as magic practices. Hypatia was presented as a dangerous witch who 'beguiled many people through her satanic wiles'. The governor, Orestes, as a result of Hypatia's spells stopped going to church, and he encouraged Christians to go to her lectures.¹⁹ In John of Nikiu's perspective, "the killing of a witch was but the fulfillment of the common will of the Christians and of God himself. He described Peter, who led a group of the faithful in the murderous attack as a "perfect believer in all respects in Jesus Christ".²⁰

14 Socrates, op. cit.; 7: 15.

15 *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, op. cit., 308.

16 *Ibid.*, 311.

17 Wace H & Piercy WC: *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994: 236.

18 *Ibid.* , 236.

19 John of Nikiu: *Chronicles*, quoted in Dzielska M: *Hypatia of Alexandria*. Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1995: 92, 93.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Professor Aziz Atiya concludes, “Cyril continued to inspire the Parabalani with mortal hatred for the Neoplatonist philosophy, which was taught in the Museon. The tragedy (of Hypatia’s murder) aroused public feeling, and some followers of Orestes went as far as to accuse Cyril of indirectly inspiring the crime. Though it would be a mistake to involve Cyril in this act, the hostility of the Patriarch to Neoplatonism must have been the starting point of all the trouble that precipitated this ungodly crime inside a godly institution during the holy season of Lent.”²¹

Although modern historians are divided concerning the role of the parabalani in the murder, yet it cannot be by chance that in 416 and 418 new laws regulated the recruitment of the parabalani, limited their function and prevented them from attending public spectacles or meetings of the municipal councils. In addition the number of the parabalani was reduced to five hundred, and only the prefect was allowed to select them.²²

One of the consequences of Hypatia’s murder was probably the removal of Orestes from office since he did not appear in Alexandria anymore.

Cyril and Chrysostom

Cyril inherited the attitude of his uncle and predecessor toward John Chrysostom the Patriarch of Constantinople. John had died in exile after being deposed by the Council of the Oak that was headed by Theophilus in 403. After the death of Chrysostom his supporters called for his name to be inscribed in the *diptychs*, the formal list of persons commemorated in the liturgy. This would be the first step to imply that his deposition had been noncanonical. Their demand received powerful support from the bishop of Rome and other western bishops. However, it was unacceptable to Chrysostom’s enemies in the East, and communion was broken between the Eastern and Western Churches. But gradually, with pressure of the people who had sympathy with the dead bishop, the Syrian Churches, followed by the Emperor Theodosius II, and finally the Bishop of Constantinople accepted to place Chrysostom’s name in the diptychs. Cyril adamantly refused to go with the rest of the Church, writing in a letter to the Bishop of Constantinople that putting John’s name in the list of departed bishops was the equivalent of restoring Judas to the rank of the apostles; and if Atticus was really concerned for Church unity he should at once erase the name of a man who had ceased to be a bishop from the list of genuine bishops.²³ Finally around 418

21 *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, op. cit., 3: 672

22 *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, op. cit., 314-15. *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1997: 1217.

23 This letter is quoted from Baur C: *John Chrysostom and his Time*, ET London 1959: 2, 450-1. Cited in Kelly JND: *Golden Mouth: John Chrysostom*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959: 288.

Cyril found it prudent to fall into line instead of being isolated from the rest of the Christian world.²⁴ Among the factors weighing on Cyril to reach this decision were probably pressure from the Emperor and a letter he received from Isidore of Pelusium.²⁵ Henry Chadwick who puts the decision of Cyril to insert Chrysostom's name in the Alexandrian diptychs in 428 mentions that his ascent was won by Nestorius just a few months before the beginning of their theological debate.²⁶ A story circulated by eastern historians says that the change of Cyril's mind regarding Chrysostom was the result of a vision in which he saw himself transported to Paradise. However, John Chrysostom, who was standing near the door objected to his entrance. Then the Virgin Mary interceded asking the latter to let Cyril enter because of his work in glorifying her. With this the opposition of John fell apart and the doors of heaven were opened for Cyril. On waking up, Cyril decided to correct all the prejudice he had against his great colleague.²⁷

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

The three decades following the death of Hypatia were years of peace for Alexandria. For Cyril it was a period of literary activity in which he wrote most of his commentaries. The theological controversies regarding the person of Christ in which Cyril was involved in the later part of his life had been building up for decades before him. Beside the theological differences, secular and Church politics fueled the controversy. Since the time of Constantine, the emperor and the court had their word, supported by their authority, in Church and theological matters. Rivalry and competition for Church leadership began to appear during and after the 381 Council of Constantinople.

Since the last decades of the fourth century, the emerging School of Antioch differed from the School of Alexandria in the way of interpreting Scripture. The Antiochene theologians depended exclusively on the literal sense and refused to seek the spiritual interpretation with its use of typology. The first of the Antiochene theologians was Diodore, Bishop of Tarsus who taught both John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428). The latter was the teacher of Nestorius who was chosen as the Archbishop of Constantinople in 428. Nestorius learned from his masters the separation of the human and divine natures in Christ; in him the Son of God is distinguished from the son of David. Nestorius started to declare in his teaching in Constantinople that it is wrong to call Virgin Mary "*Theotokos*" (*God-bearer*), a term which has been in use by prominent Fathers since the third century as well as in popular piety. For Nestorius Mary could be nothing more than

24 Kelly JND, *ibid.*, 286-8.

25 Wace H & Piercy WC, *op. cit.*, 237.

26 Chadwick H: *The Early Church*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1967: 191.

27 Cheneau P: *Les Saints D' Egypte*, Jerusalem, 1923: I: 241 (under Jan 28).

mother of the man Jesus, and the term *Theotokos* was pagan and blasphemous. His congregation was scandalized and protested.²⁸ The people, including the monks, contradicted Nestorius in the pulpit and insulted him on the street. A report sent to the Emperor accused Nestorius of striking a monk who forbade him, as a heretic, to approach the altar. He then handed him to the officers who flogged him through the streets and then cast him out of the city.²⁹

News of the controversy reached Alexandria by spring of 429. However, Cyril has been denouncing the Antiochene theology, without mentioning names, since 421. As compared to Cyril, Nestorius was limited as a theologian. He was described by Socrates as 'extremely ignorant', and 'disgracefully illiterate', and that he had 'very little acquaintance with the treatises of the ancients'.³⁰ On the other hand, Cyril had a theological sensitivity far beyond that of his opponents. He knew how to express the deep christological beliefs of the Greek-speaking Christians.³¹ Cyril wrote a series of letters to Nestorius. In the first, written in June 429, he only asked Nestorius to acknowledge the word *Theotokos*. In his second letter, in February 430, Cyril built his arguments in challenging the Antiochene Christology on the words of the Nicene Creed that declares 'God was incarnate and He became man'. In the same year, Cyril wrote also three letters to the royal family concerning Nestorius, one to the Emperor, the second to his younger sisters Arcadia and Marina, and the third to his elder sister Pulcheria and his wife Eudokia. In the spring of 430, Cyril wrote five books, which in later years circulated under the title '*Against the Blasphemies of Nestorius*'. Without mentioning Nestorius by name in these books, Cyril critically examined a collection of sermons of Nestorius (published the previous year) that contained passages defending the duality of persons in Christ and attacking the title Theotokos in describing Virgin Mary.

In the same year Cyril had been strengthening his position. He gained the alliance of Celestine of Rome, Juvenal of Jerusalem and John of Antioch. In November 430, there was still no answer from Nestorius. Cyril then, armed with the authority of his local council in Alexandria, wrote to Nestorius his third letter. In it Cyril, sticking to the words of the Nicene Creed, explained in detail what he meant by the belief in the one nature for the incarnate Word. He appended the letter with twelve propositions (anathemas), to which he demanded the assent of Nestorius. These anathemas denounced all the points in the Nestorian teaching.

28 Frend WHC: *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984: 755.

29 Schaff P: *History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971:720.

30 Socrates: *Ecclesiastical History*, op. cit., 7: 32.

31 Frend WHC: *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press. 1984: 753

Nestorius responded by twelve counter-anathemas, which he composed in conjunction with Theodoret of Cyrrhus. With the threat of a schism in the Church, Emperor Theodosius intervened, calling for a general council to meet in Ephesus in the Pentecost of 431.

Ecumenical Council of Ephesus

Nestorius could not assess the danger of his situation. When Cyril arrived at Ephesus, fifty bishops and many devotees accompanied him from Egypt including some monks. Stories that these included St. Shenoute of Atripe³² cannot be supported by historical sources.³³ The delegates of Asia, Jerusalem, (and Rome who came after the council started) also supported Cyril. Nestorius had the Syrian bishops headed by John of Antioch on his side. These were delayed by bad weather, and the other bishops were weary of waiting. Illness, and even death, had occurred among them.³⁴ On June 22 Cyril finally opened the Council, over which he presided. Nestorius refused to attend. The three letters of Cyril, including the twelve anathemas, were read and approved by the bishops. After evidence of the views of Nestorius was laid before the Council, a decision was easily reached to excommunicate and depose him. There were processions and dancing in the streets of Ephesus that night.³⁵ Four days later, John of Antioch and the Syrian bishops arrived, and held a rival Council of 43 bishops; they deposed both Cyril and Memnon of Ephesus. The Emperor ratified the decision of both councils as if they were the acts of one council. As a result Cyril, Memnon and Nestorius were put under arrest. However, after much maneuvering and diplomatic intrigue Cyril managed to recover his freedom and he returned to Egypt.³⁶

Aftermath of the Council and Formula of Reunion

The Church of Alexandria has reached in the Council of Ephesus the highest summit she ever had in leadership and theological influence over all Christendom. However, the hectic events at Ephesus were not totally beyond reproach. Immediately after his release and return to Alexandria, Cyril had to write an apology, addressed to the Emperor, in which he justified his actions before and during the Council.³⁷ Even St. Isidore of Peluseum, Cyril's close friend and mentor, wrote to him at the time saying:

“Many of those who were assembled at Ephesus speak satirically of you as a

32 Besa: *The Life of Shenoute*, 128-130. Tr. by Bell DN. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, pp. 78, 79.

33 *The Life of Shenoute*, op. cit. Introduction, pp. 17, 33. *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, op. cit., 673.

34 *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, op. cit., 240.

35 Frend, op. cit., 760.

36 *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, op. cit., 673. Chadwick, op. cit., 199.

37 Quasten J: *Patrology*. Utrecht/Antwerp:Spectrum, 1960:I, 127.

man bent on pursuing his private animosities, not as one who seeks in correct belief the things of Jesus Christ. 'He is sister's son to Theophilus,' they say, 'and in disposition takes after him. Just as the uncle openly expended his fury against the inspired and beloved John, so also the nephew seeks to set himself up in his turn, although there is considerable difference between the things at stake.'"³⁸

Although the Council of Ephesus succeeded in defending the faith, yet it failed to unite the Church and it was left for Emperor Theodosius, who actually controlled the religious situation in the East, to take further action. He appointed a new bishop for Constantinople and Nestorius was exiled to an oasis in the western desert of Upper Egypt. The Antiochenes refused to accept the twelve anathemas, which undermined their theology. Finally in 433 a new formula, originally written by Theodoret,³⁹ was carried to Egypt by Paul bishop of Emesa who succeeded in convincing Cyril to accept it. The formula acknowledged 'the holy Virgin to be *Theotokos*', and declared that "the Word became incarnate" and that "out of two natures a union was made. For this cause we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord."

However, the formula of reunion resulted in a very fragile peace. and it was difficult to swallow on both sides. Although Nestorius died miserably in exile (c. 451), yet his followers separated themselves from the Church and formed the Nestorian Church. In Egypt, there were voices against the formula, since it protected some elements of the Antiochene theology. Even the moderate Isidore of Pelusium sent to Cyril expressing a fear that he had made too great concessions to vindicate his orthodoxy in answer to his critics both in and outside of Egypt. In defense of the formula Cyril wrote a long letter to Acacius of Melitene, in which he showed that it was consistent with the Nicene Creed and totally different from the Nestorian errors.⁴⁰

For Cyril, things remained quiet for more than a decade, during which he worked on several theological works related to the christological controversy. Fueled by the works of Theodoret and Theodore, even after the death of the latter in 428, Nestorianism was prevalent in Syria. The Nestorians were indefatigable in circulating the works of Theodore in several cities, including Jerusalem. The teaching of Nestorius was circulated in ignorance by some bishops, who were thinking that he was only condemned for denying the *Theotokos*. About 438, Cyril wrote an exposition of the Nicene Creed, to prove to the Syrian monks its incompatibility

38 Young, op. cit., 241.

39 Chadwick, op. cit., 199. *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, op. cit. ,241

40 Ibid., 242.

with the denial of the personal unity of the Savior. He also wrote three books against Diodore and Theodore, the teachers of Nestorius. In these writings, Cyril insisted that no one should be allowed to preach Theodore's opinions, but he did not urge any condemnation of his memory. He saw that it would even be imprudent to proceed publicly against the memory of a theologian who was highly esteemed by the people of some eastern churches.⁴¹ Ironically, it was these writings of Cyril against the Antiochene theologians, which finally caused the condemnation of the christological writings of Theodore and Theodoret in the 553 Council of Constantinople. Probably one of Cyril's last anti-Nestorian writings was a dialogue 'On the Unity of Person in Christ', in which he refutes the false doctrine saying that the Word of God was not made flesh but was only united to a man.

St. Cyril died on June 27, 444. By 450, the Church leaders who signed the Reunion Formula of 433 were all dead, as well as Theodosius II who died in that year. Ecclesiastical and secular politics were ripe for the tragedy of Chalcedon and the first great schism of Christianity.

WRITINGS OF CYRIL

Cyril's works express his encyclopedic knowledge of the previous Fathers. He frequently appealed to the ancient Tradition, especially in his dogmatic writings. However, his profound dependence on the past was married to a brilliant judgment of contemporary needs and an ability to use the traditional inheritance appropriately.⁴²

Biblical Interpretation

Most of Cyril's writings deal with biblical exegesis. Despite the fact that most of his biblical work has disappeared, seven out of the ten volumes of Migne edition of Cyril's work deal with exegetical treatises.⁴³ A large part has reached us in fragments or in Syriac, Latin, Armenian, Ethiopian or Arabic translations. Cyril wrote the majority of his biblical works before 429 when he got engaged in the christological controversy for the rest of his life. Of his Old Testament writing we have studies on the Pentateuch and commentaries on Isaiah and on the twelve Minor Prophets. Numerous fragments remain of his commentaries on Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Canticles, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Some of these fragments are very extensive. Of Cyril's New Testament studies we have his full Commentary on John and Homilies on Luke. Only fragments remain of his commentaries on Matthew, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians and Hebrews.

41 Ibid., 243.

42 Young, op. cit., 246.

43 Young, op. cit., 254, 55.

Dogmatic and Polemical Writings

Beside his extensive writings against the Nestorians, which we discussed under the Christological Controversy, Cyril wrote two treatises against the Arians, and an Apology against Julian the Apostate. His first book against the Arians, the *Thesaurus*, a trinitarian summa, is the first book written by Cyril; he probably began in 412. In this book he followed closely the writings of Athanasius especially *Contra Arianos*, and probably also a lost work of St. Didymus the Blind, *Contra Eunomium*. Cyril's second book against the Arians, *On the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity*, is composed of seven dialogues written in more personal form and character. They deal with the consubstantiality of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Some time after 433 Cyril wrote the *Apology Against Julian the Apostate* in which he refuted his three books *Against the Galilaeans*, written in 363. Ten books of this are extant in Greek. Fragments of Books 11 to 20 survived in Greek and Syriac.⁴⁴

Other Writings

Cyril continued the custom of his predecessors of sending every year a letter to announce the beginning of Lent and date of Easter. These letters, known as the *Paschal Letters*, usually dealt with pastoral problems and current theological issues. We have 29 of Cyril's Paschal Letters for the years between 414 and 442. Cyril had also a large correspondence which is extremely important for the history of State and Church, doctrine, Church canons and the rivalry between theological schools and episcopal sees. Many of these letters have survived in Greek and some in Syriac, Coptic and Armenian translations.⁴⁵

Only 22 sermons remain of Cyril's homilies including eight homilies given during the Council of Ephesus. These include the most famous Marian homily of antiquity which Cyril delivered in June 431 in St. Mary church at Ephesus.

Last but not least, the greatest tribute to St Cyril given by the Coptic Orthodox Church is her liturgy that carries his name. It is considered the oldest liturgy that has kept the Egyptian liturgical tradition. Its origin is traced to St. Mark the Apostle and Evangelist. It is introduced in the euchologion of the Coptic Church by the words, "the Anaphora of our Holy Father Mark the Apostle, which the thrice-blessed Saint Cyril the Archbishop established." The liturgy is still in use to this day both in Bohairic Coptic and Arabic. A few fragments in the Sahidic Coptic have been discovered. The liturgy is basically the same as the Greek Liturgy of St. Mark that was formerly used in the Melchite Church of Alexandria.⁴⁶

44 Quasten J: *Patrology*, op. cit., I 119-132.

45 Ibid, 132-33.

46 Cody A: *Anaphora of Saint Cyril*. In *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, op. cit., I: 123.

ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: BIBLICAL EXPOSITOR

Robert Louis Wilken

St. Cyril of Alexandria is best known for his defense of the doctrine of Christ against the errors of Nestorius. With vigor, clarity and theological insight he defended the reality of the human nature of the divine Word and the Church's practice of calling the Blessed Virgin Mary *Theotokos*. The one who was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary was the only Son of God and it was this same divine son who had undergone suffering and death as a human being. The Christ, the divine Son of God, came to live among us to restore all things to their original beauty. "In the time of his love for us," writes Cyril in one of his Paschal Homilies, "when Christ became man for us, he reformed the whole nature in himself to newness of life, and transformed it to what it was from the beginning."¹

Cyril was also a prolific biblical commentator and many of his commentaries are still extant. From him we have two large commentaries on the Pentateuch, the Adoration and Worship in Spirit and in Truth and the Glaphyra. The former treats passages from the books of Moses under theological themes, the fall of mankind, justification and redemption through Christ, love of God and love of neighbor, et al. The latter expounds select passages from the Pentateuch, e.g. Cain and Abel, Noah and the ark, Abraham, Isaac and Esau, et al. Cyril also wrote verse by verse commentaries on the prophets and two are extant in their entirety, Isaiah and the Minor prophets. Of his other commentaries on the Old Testament only fragments remain.

Cyril's most important commentary on the New Testament is a large verse by verse commentary on the Gospel according to St. John. There is also extant a series of Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Luke preserved in a Syriac translation. Besides these works there are numerous fragments on the Gospel of Matthew, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews.

Robert L. Wilken is the William R. Kenan Professor of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia

1 PG 77, 581a-d.

It is of some importance for the understanding of the Alexandrian theological tradition that many of Cyril's exegetical writings are still available to us. Cyril was the standard bearer of the theological tradition that stemmed from St. Athanasius, and little of Athanasius' exegetical works are extant. But we know that in his defense of the Nicene faith against Arius and his followers, most of Athanasius' effort was devoted to an exposition of biblical texts that the Arians had misused to support their heretical views. Some of Athanasius' exegesis is available to us in his theological works, for example the *Orationes Contra Arianos*. In Cyril, however, we can often find a fuller exposition of passages that are treated in cursory fashion in Athanasius.

But Cyril's exegesis is not only valuable to understand the Alexandrian theological tradition, it is interesting in its own right. For Cyril was a bishop and pastor and he expounded the Scriptures with an eye to the moral and spiritual edification of the faithful. A good example is his homily on the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42.

Cyril sets the theme of the homily by citing the provocative and suggestive text from Hebrews 13:3, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." The story of Martha and Mary, says Cyril, is about hospitality and it teaches us not only how one should receive a guest but how one should behave when received as a guest. St. Paul writes: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you." (Romans 11:1) Paul's relation to the community in Rome is taken as an example of how one should conduct oneself when being received as a guest. A guest should bring a "spiritual gift" as Paul intended to do, and as the Lord did when he visited Martha and Mary. Hospitality requires something of the guest as well as of the host, for the guest brings an offering that is transmitted through his words and behavior.

Then Cyril turns to those who receive guests. Because the guest brings a gift the host need to cultivate receptivity and openness to what they will receive. For this reason the host should not allow himself to be "distracted by much service." Cyril reminds his hearers of the most famous case of hospitality in the Scriptures, when Abraham received the three men at the oak of Mamre. Abraham's reward for his gracious hospitality displayed in his receptivity to the gift offered by his visitors, was the gift of a son Isaac.

What gives Cyril's exposition its charm is not only Cyril's insight into human relations but his skill in drawing on passages from elsewhere in the Scriptures to illuminate the text at hand. By selecting texts that speak of the role of the guest and not simply of the host, the story becomes more than an account of the difference between Mary and Martha, but a story about Christ and how he is to be received

into our lives. In hearing the story one is encouraged to look to Christ as the model of Christian behavior. Cyril's is an unconventional interpretation, one that would not be discovered by a more pedestrian exegete.

Cyril's dexterity in relating the various parts of the Bible to each other is one of his most conspicuous accomplishments as an interpreter of the Bible. An instructive example is his exposition of John 1:12-13. The text reads: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Cyril begins his exposition by citing Romans 8:15, "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship" whereby we cry 'Abba Father.' A person becomes a child of God by faith, writes Cyril, when one is "baptized into the Holy Trinity through the mediator, the Word, Mediator, who joined himself to human kind through the flesh to which he was united to him, at the same time, because he is by nature God, he was naturally joined to the Father." Through Baptism into Christ those who are joined to Christ by faith are "raised up to the dignity which is [Christ's] by nature."

Cyril's first step is to interpret the phrase "children of God" in John 1:13 by analogy to Christ's sonship. That is to say, just as Christ was "begotten" of the Father, so those who come to faith are "begotten" of God, i.e. they become "children of God." Christ's coming made it possible for human beings to enter into a new relation to God as children of God. This relation is similar to the relation between Christ and God, with one difference. Christ's relation to God is that of a son by nature, Christians become children of God by adoption, as Paul says in Romans 8.

To explain further what "children of God" means Cyril introduces the well known passage from 2 Peter with the words "sharers of the divine nature." The phrase "begotten of God" means that those who are joined to Christ through faith become participants in God's nature, and are called "gods." Such dignity is only possible because God has become incarnate and dwelled among us. To say, then, that we are "born of God," says Cyril, does not mean that we wing our way to God by our own efforts but that God through the Incarnation comes to dwell within us and makes his lodging among us, as is spoken by the prophet, "I will dwell in them and walk in them." The citation is from Lev. 26:12 (whom Cyril calls a prophet), but it comes via 2 Cor. 6:16 where Paul asks, "What partnership have righteousness and iniquity," and answers: "We are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'" (2 Cor. 6:14-18) We cannot become temples of God unless the one who dwells among us is God by nature.

For Cyril the passage in 2 Corinthians, specifically the language, "I will dwell in them," is understood to refer to the Incarnation, and is seen as parallel to John

1:14, “dwelt among us.” He interprets John with the help of Paul, and, one might add, Paul’s citation of Leviticus with the help of John. But then he returns to the Gospel of John and cites another passage that speaks of God dwelling in us. “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14:23)

Next Cyril adds a new note suggested by the earlier citation of Romans 8. Paul had written that sonship was a gift of the Holy Spirit. “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” When, then, we cry “abba Father,” says Paul, “it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. . . .” (Rom. 8:14-16) There is of course no mention of the Holy Spirit in John 1:13, but by citing St. Paul he is able to show that it is only by being born of the Holy Spirit that one can be said to be born of God. To lend support to this interpretation he cites 1 John. “By this we know that we dwell in Him and He in us because he has given us his own Spirit.” The sign that we are children of God, born not of the flesh but of God, is that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Through the gift of the Spirit, who is God, we come to share in the divine life.

Cyril’s use of parallel texts in his exposition of John 1:13 is very instructive. The first passage, Romans 8, is somewhat obvious because of the reference to divine sonship, but the citation of 2 Cor. 6 and 2 Peter are not. They add depth and perspective to the interpretation by relating the phrase “children of God” to the ultimate end of human life, namely sharing in God’s life. And by citing 1 John Cyril secures a trinitarian reading of the text, indicating that it is not only the incarnation of the Word but also the sending of the Holy Spirit that makes one into a child of God. The Son does not act on his own but is accompanied by the Holy Spirit. Even though John 1:13 speaks only of the relation of the divine word to God and the Incarnation of the Son (not the sending of the Holy Spirit), Cyril shows that it requires a Trinitarian exposition.

His exegesis expands the context in which the passage is found. The specific text is lifted from its immediate setting so that it can be viewed in light of other texts and terms and ideas found in the Bible. Yet one might argue that Cyril’s interpretation of John 1:13 is rigorously contextual. For John 1:13 is understood in light of John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” and in turn John 1:14 is seen in light of John 1:1, the God who brought the world into being and the divine Word who was sent from God. Only by taking into consideration the larger Trinitarian framework is it possible to interpret the immediate context.

All biblical commentators invest certain texts, certain terms, and certain images with an interpretive power that transcends their specific setting. For example Irenaeus’ interpretation of the Scriptures in his *Adversus Haereses* is supported by the well known passage in Ephesians 1:10, “Christ recapitulates all things in heaven and on earth in himself.” One text that recurs again and again in

Athanasius' *Orationes Contra Arianos*, is John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." Spiritual writers loved Philipians 3, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own."

A number of biblical passages occur regularly in Cyril's works, but none is more important than the Pauline image of Christ as the second Adam as found in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22; cf. Romans 5:19 and 1 Cor. 15:45). Cyril's use of the Adam-Christ typology is complemented by the text we have already discussed briefly, 2 Cor. 5:17: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come." First let us look briefly at Cyril's exposition of these texts in his commentaries on Romans, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.

Though we only possess fragments of Cyril's commentaries on St. Paul, we do have fragments dealing with Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5. At Romans 5:11ff. which includes the words, "therefore sin came into the world through one man . . ." Cyril writes: "The ancient curse has become ineffective, the curse which human nature endured in Adam as in a first fruit of the race and as in a first root." Adam's transgression was not the act of a solitary person; he was a representative human being and in humanity, "the entire human race," in Cyril's phrase, became subject to sin and death. Adam was the "first formed" among human beings, the "beginning of the human race," the root from which all others have sprung. In the same way, Christ too is a representative figure, a "new root," a "model of that which is to come," the "first fruits" of a new humanity, the "first born", "a new creation." "The Son has come from heaven justifying the impious by faith, fashioning anew as God human nature to incorruption and returning it to what it was in the beginning. In Christ all things are a new creation, a new root has been planted, for he is the second Adam."²

By drawing on 2 Cor. 5:17 Cyril's exposition of Romans 5 emphasizes the difference between Adam and Christ, and the newness that Christ brings. In what does Christ's newness consist? At Romans 5:16, "the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin," Cyril says that through Christ the second Adam "righteousness found for the first time a way to us" for Christ was the "first and only man on earth 'who knew no sin nor was guile found in his mouth.'" (1 Peter 2:22)³ Christ is new because he did things no man had ever done. In places, in an effort to explain what is unique about Christ Cyril says that he lived a "holy life,"⁴ that he "was stronger than sin",⁵ that he was "superior to all".⁶ But the most significant thing

2 Comm. in Rom. 5:11 (Pusey, 3:181-2).

3 Comm. in Rom. 5:16 (Pusey, 3:184-5).

4 *Quod Unus Christus Sit* 724c (ed. de Durand, p.334).

5 Comm. in Ioann. 16:33 (Pusey, 2:657).

6 Comm. in Ioann. 1:19 (Pusey, 1:170).

about Christ was that he overcame death by the Resurrection. In a fragment on 1 Cor. 15:20, “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep,” Cyril interprets the text as follows: “Christ was the *first person* on earth to strike down death,” just as our ancestor Adam was “the first to introduce death.”⁷ Until the time of Christ mankind was incapable of overcoming death. “Our natural life failed up to this time to crush the power of death and had not even destroyed the terror that it casts over our souls.”⁸

The Scriptures are filled with images for Christ, the good shepherd, the light of the world, the way, the life, the vine and branches, bread of life, morning star, paschal lamb, et al. Like other commentators Cyril used and exploited these images in his exegesis of the Bible. But he invariably returns to the parallels between Adam and Christ as the framework for his interpretation of individual passages. The Adam Christ typology provided Cyril with an image that was at once particular and universal. It was particular in that it spoke of Adam and Christ as unique human persons. It highlighted what Adam and Christ *did*, thereby accenting the voluntary, hence human and moral, quality of their actions. But it was universal in that it presented Adam and Christ as representative figures (root of the entire race) whose actions have consequences for all of humanity. It allowed Cyril to speak about Christ as fully human, as Adam, yet to show in what way he was more than a man, as the heavenly Adam who conquered death.

The Bible is a very big book and many who have tried to read it without a guide have gotten lost along the way. All exegesis requires judicious forgetfulness, interpretation that quietly moves to the periphery matters which, in the larger scheme of things, are insignificant. Cyril’s exegesis keeps the reader’s attention focused on the Bible as a whole (Adam at the beginning, the heavenly Adam at the beginning of the end) and on what gives the entire biblical narrative its meaning, the Resurrection of Christ.

Cyril also uses the Pauline typology of Adam and Christ to interpret the Gospel of John. The gospels are of course narratives, and what makes Cyril’s exegesis provocative is the way he employs the imagery of the second Adam to interpret key events in the life of Jesus. A good place to begin is John 1:31, John’s account of the baptism of Jesus, in particular the descent of the Spirit: “And John bore witness, ‘I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him.’”⁹ The phrase that forms the basis for Cyril’s interpretation of the passage is “remained on him.” Why does the text not simply say that the Holy Spirit “descended” on Christ, but says adds it “remained on him.”

7 Comm. in I Cor. 15:20 (Pusey, 3:303)

8 Comm. in Ioann. 13:36 (Pusey, 2:392).

9 Comm. in Ioann. 1:32-33 (Pusey, 1:174-190); ET: Pusey, 1:134-147.

Cyril first discusses the creation and fall of Adam and Eve. At the time of creation Adam and Eve were sealed with the divine image through the descent of the Holy Spirit. But Adam and Eve sinned and their descendants did not live in accord with the image of God implanted in them. Over time the image impressed on humans by the Holy Spirit began to fade until, as a consequence of man's continuing disobedience, the Holy Spirit "left for good."¹⁰ Human nature had become inhospitable to the presence of the Spirit.

To undo the work of sin, a new man was needed, one who could create a more congenial home for the Holy Spirit, a place in which the Spirit could remain. "Since the first Adam did not preserve the grace given to him by God, God the Father decided to send from heaven the second Adam to us. He sends in our likeness his own son who is by nature . . . not knowing sin in any way, so that by the disobedience of the first we became subject to God's wrath, so through the obedience of the second, we might escape the curse and its evils be destroyed."¹¹

By using the Adam typology Cyril is of course able to show how the actions of each man has consequences for the "entire human race."¹² But he wants to say more. To say that Christ is the "second Adam" is to say that he is a human being like other human beings, but also that he is not an ordinary man. He is a new man, one who will not repeat what others have done, and "who by receiving the Spirit as man will preserve it for our nature by rooting in us again the grace which had departed."¹³ What then is the meaning of the phrase "remained on him" in John 1:31? In Christ the new man the Holy Spirit "became accustomed to abiding in us, having no occasion to depart or withdraw."¹⁴

Later in the commentary on John, commenting on John 7:39 ("this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive"), Cyril expands on this same theme: "The divine Scriptures call the Savior the second Adam. For in that first one, the human race proceeds from not being to being; in the second, Christ, it rises up again to a second beginning, reformed to newness of life and returned to incorruption, 'for if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature,' as Paul says. Therefore the renewing Spirit, i.e. the Holy Spirit, has been given to us." This came about "after the resurrection when having burst the bonds of death and showing himself triumphant over all corruption, he came to life again, having our whole nature in him, in that he was man and one from us."¹⁵

Note how the imagery of the second Adam allows Cyril to accent what Christ does, what in traditional theological language is called his *work*. Cyril, as an

10 Pusey, 1:183, ln.16.

11 Pusey, 1:184.

12 Pusey 1, 184.

13 Pusey 1, 184.

14 Pusey, 1:184, Inn. 27-29.

15 In Ioann. 7:39 (Pusey, 1:691-2).

Alexandrian theologian, has sometimes been interpreted as making Christ's work incidental to his person, subordinating the historical account of Christ in the gospels to his role as mediator of divinity and humanity. In this view, what is significant about Christ is that the divine Logos became man, not what he did as a human being.¹⁶ But Cyril's commentaries on the gospels present quite a different picture, in particular his discussion of Christ's passion.

The Gospel of John depicts Christ's suffering as the time of his glorification. For example: "Now is the son of man glorified." (John 13:31-32) This text caused difficulties for Origen¹⁷ and it is never cited by Athanasius. Glory, it was thought applied to Christ's resurrection, not his suffering. Cyril, however, realized that the term "glory" is used in John in a distinctive way. The more conventional meaning of glory is that it refers to divine power. For example it is evident that Christ's glory was displayed when he rebuked the waves of the sea, or brought Lazarus back to life, or satisfied the hunger of a crowd with five loaves and two small fishes. But John suggests something different. Why, asks Cyril, is Christ said to be glorified "now"? "The perfection of his glory and the crowning moment of his life is clearly this, when he suffered for the life of the world and made a new way by his resurrection for the resurrection of all."¹⁸

Cyril's exegesis of John 13:32 is significant, for it shows how the text of the gospel shapes his understanding of Christ's work. Another example is his exposition of John 12:23, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified." Here Cyril makes a similar point: "Finally Christ desires to come to the crowning point of hope, to put an end to death. There was no other way this could come about unless life underwent death for the sake of all so that we all might live in him. For this reason he calls death his own glory. . . . His cross was the beginning of his being glorified upon earth."¹⁹ In Cyril's view, the divine Word became man not simply to unite man and God in his person; he came to suffer and to die, and at the very moment that his suffering begins, the Gospel speaks of his glory.

Because he expounded the Gospel of John chapter by chapter, verse by verse, Cyril was forced to rethink aspects of the Alexandrian christology. Christ's suffering was given a more central place, and this in turn led to a much greater emphasis on the work of Christ and on Christ's humanity. Even though the Alexandrian christology stressed the role of the divine Logos in the person of Christ, Cyril is at pains to show that what Christ does he does as man, i.e. as Adam. A particularly

16 See in particular, Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Tuebingen:1931), 2:354; also Jacques Liébaert, *La Doctrine Christologique de Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie avant la querelle nestorienne* (Lille:1955), p.229.

17 Comm.in Ioann. 32:318-330 on John 13:30-32 (ed. C. Blanc, 5:324-328).

18 Comm. in Ioann. 13:31-32 (Pusey, 1:378). On this topic, see Augustin Dupré la Tour, "La Doxa Christ dans les oeuvres exégétiques de saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie," *Recherches de science religieuse* 68 (1960), 521-42; 69 (1961), 68-94.

19 Comm. in Ioann. 12:21-22 (Pusey, 2:311). See also Comm. in Ioann.13:36 (Pusey, 2:393): "For the saving passion of Christ is the first means that ever brought release from death, and the resurrection of Christ has become to the saints the beginning of their boldness in facing it."

striking passage is his commentary on John 16:33, "I have overcome the world." The plain meaning of this text, says Cyril, is that Christ "appeared stronger than sin." "For our sakes Christ became alive again making his Resurrection the beginning of the conquest over death. For surely the power of his Resurrection will extend to us, since the one who overcame death was *one of us*, in so far as he appeared as man." Then Cyril makes the remarkable statement: "For if he conquered as God, then it is of no profit to us; but if as man, we are herein conquerors. For he is to us the second Adam come from heaven according to the Scriptures."

Paul's image of Christ as the second Adam provided Cyril with a set of biblical categories to interpret the central mystery of Christian faith: that the one who comes to save is God but he lived in this world as a human being. If Christ were not a human being, Adam, nothing he did would have significance for the rest of humanity. What he did, living in obedience to God, submitting to suffering and abuse, giving himself voluntarily over to death, and most important of all, overcoming death, he did as a human being. At the same time he was no mere man, he was not simply Adam, he was the second Adam, the man from heaven. His Resurrection from the dead shows that it was God who lived this human life, suffered, died, and broke the bonds of death. "Though he became man he was no less from heaven," writes Cyril.²⁰

Cyril is very much the theologian when he is expounding the Scriptures. His exegesis of individual passages is informed not only by parallel texts from elsewhere in the Bible but also by the Church's doctrinal tradition. No doubt this is one reason why he was read by later writers.²¹ Yet, Cyril seldom strays far from the language of the Bible, and even when he uses more technical theological language, it is the biblical imagery and language that shapes his thinking. One cannot disengage Cyril's theology from the Bible as though it could stand on its own as a theological system.

In his Commentary on John Cyril makes frequent reference to the Arian interpretation of specific texts. For example, in his exposition of the Baptism of Jesus, he asks whether the descent of the Spirit on Jesus implies that Christ did not have the Spirit before that time. Does the coming of the Spirit on Christ mean that he receives "sanctification as something imported as though he does not possess it?"²² Cyril's response is that one must distinguish two stages in the career of the Logos, the time before the Incarnation, and the time after the Incarnation. "Before the Incarnation he was in the form and equality of the Father, but in the time of the incarnation he received the Spirit from heaven and was sanctified like others."²³

20 *Arcad.* 124 (Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 1:1,5,95, 25-28).

21 See P.Renaudin, "Le théologie de saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie d'après saint Thomas," *Revue Thomiste* 18 (1910),171-184; II (1913)129-136.

22 *Comm.* in Ioann. 1:32-33 (Pusey, 1:176).

23 *Comm.* in Ioan. 1:31-32 (Pusey, 1:179).

Prior to the Incarnation one could not ascribe human experiences to the son, but when he became man he experienced suffering, hunger, and for that reason he can be said to have received the Holy Spirit as did other men. Of course, Cyril then goes on to show, with the use of the Adam imagery, that there was a reason why the Spirit descended on Christ. He was the first man in whom he could once again take root and remain among human beings.

One task then of Cyril's exegesis of the New Testament was to provide a consistent interpretation of the many texts that had been disputed in the decades that the doctrine of the Trinity was being debated across the Church. By the time Cyril was writing most of the theological issues concerning the doctrine of the Trinity had been settled and the biblical basis for the Church's teaching was well established. Yet, the Bible is not a collection of ancient texts stored in a library. It is a book that was read in the Churches and the faithful continued to hear and read those texts that had been disputed in previous generations. Thus there was a continuing need for bishops to show how the Church's teaching was rooted in the Scriptures, how specific texts were to be understood in light of the Creed and the sacraments, to show how passages in one book of the Bible were related to passages in other books. Cyril's Commentary on the Gospel of John is of enormous significance in the history of exegesis because it is the first thoroughgoing Trinitarian interpretation of the entire gospel.

In Cyril's day, however, a new dispute had arisen concerning the doctrine of Christ. In this controversy too he appears very much the exegete (as well as polemicist), and his chief contribution to the debates was to present an overall interpretation of the New Testament account of Christ, particularly the things said about him in the gospels. The most important statement of Cyril's principle occurs in the fourth anathema in his third letter to Nestorius. Cyril writes: "Whoever allocates the terms contained in the gospels and apostolic writings and applied to Christ by the saints or used of himself by himself to two persons or subjects and attaches some to the man considered separately from the Word of God, some as divine to the Word of God the Father alone, shall be anathema."²⁴ What is at issue here is how one is to understand passages such as Lk 2:52, Matt 27:46, Jn. 14:28, or Hebrews 3:1ff. Are they to be understood as referring to the divine Word who has become man or does one interpret them as referring solely to the human nature of Christ? Cyril insisted that one could not understand the gospels without recognizing that all the things said of Christ are spoken about the divine Word incarnate. The Scriptures always conceive of Christ, whether depicted as Word or Son or Messiah or Lord or Jesus as one person and one subject of predication.

24 Ep. 17 (Third Letter to Nestorius) in Lionel R. Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria. Select Letters* (Oxford: 1983), pp.30-31.

Whether the gospels are speaking about divine acts, e.g. healing the sick or stilling a storm, or human acts, growing in wisdom or feeling forsaken by God, all are attributed to the same subject, the divine Word who lived among human beings. In Cyril's words: "All the sayings contained in the Gospels must be referred to a single person, to the one incarnate subject of the Word. For according to the Bible there is one lord, Jesus Christ."²⁵

A good illustration of how this principle works out can be seen in the interpretation of Hebrews 3:2, in particular the phrase "made (appointed) him."²⁶ Arian exegetes took these words to mean that the "son is created," hence they saw Hebrews 3 as an argument against the divinity of Christ. In a sermon preached on this text Nestorius sought to meet the Arian exegesis by arguing that that text does not refer to the divine Word but to the man Jesus. Immediately prior to this passage St. Paul had said that Christ is "made like his brethren in every respect." According to Nestorius, this indicates that the text refers to Jesus. Does not Paul say that it is "not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham." The "godhead" is not the seed of Abraham, says Nestorius, and the "life-giving God does not suffer." It is the seed of Abraham who suffers. This passage is to be understood in the way one interprets Luke 2:52. There we read: "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature." Therefore, concludes Nestorius: "Humanity was anointed. . . not the divinity. This one [i.e. Jesus] is he who was made a faithful priest to God for he became a priest and did not exist as such from eternity."²⁷

Cyril thought that Nestorius' exegesis confounded the biblical account of Christ. For Cyril it is essential that the interpretation of the Bible be consistent, and it can only be consistent if one reads the Bible in light of its overall Scopus. With respect to the Gospels this means that they depict the divine Word under the conditions of human life and experience. The person presented in the gospels is a human being, but not a mere human being. Christ, according to Cyril's interpretation, is the eternal Son sent from God. When the Scriptures speak about the human experiences of Jesus it is the Logos who is the subject of these experiences. To say, however, that Christ suffered, that he grew in wisdom, that he was abandoned by the Father cannot mean the same thing that such experiences mean for other human beings. This is why the second Adam was such a congenial way of speaking about Christ: the man whose life is depicted in the gospels is a human being like others, for he is Adam, but he is more than Adam, for he is the second Adam, a unique man among men, one who did what no other man could do. He was the man from heaven.

25 Wickham, pp. 24-25.

26 On this text, see Robert L. Wilken, "Tradition, Exegesis and the Christological Controversies," *Church History* 34 (1965), pp. 1-23.

27 See Friedrich Loofs, *Nestoriana* (Halle: 1905), pp. 232-236.

Cyril's exegesis is seldom idiosyncratic. Whether he is expounding a story about Moses or one of the patriarchs, an oracle from the prophets, a theological text from St. Paul, or an incident in the life of Jesus from the gospels, his theme remains the same: the restoration of fallen humanity in Christ. One cannot read long in any of Cyril's commentaries without coming across some form of the statement found at the end of his exposition of the "rock that was struck: "In Christ we bloom again to newness of life." For Cyril the renewal of all things in Christ is the central Scopus of the Bible.

St. Paul provided Cyril with the key to the interpretation of the Bible. But his Paul was not the Paul of St. Augustine, the Paul of Romans 7 or Romans 9 (nor the Paul of justification by faith), it was the Paul of Romans 5, of 1 Corinthians 15 and of 2 Corinthians 5. From Paul Cyril learned to speak of the second Adam, the heavenly man, a new creation and, most of all, the centrality of the Resurrection in the biblical narrative. At the same time, the gospels, particularly the Gospel of John, offered him a concrete and nuanced portrait of what it meant for the eternal Son of God, Christ the second Adam, to live a human life. As one scholar has observed, "Cyril's depiction of Christ (*Christusbild*) is as historical or unhistorical as that of the Gospel of John."²⁸

For Cyril the second Adam is a theological reality as well as an exegetical tool. The subject of Cyril's exegesis is never simply the text that is before him, it is always the mystery of Christ. He is less interested in understanding what Moses or Zechariah or Paul or Matthew "meant" than he is in understanding what Christ means. Exegesis is an occasion to discuss Christ as taught in the church's creeds and worshipped in the church's Liturgy. Christ is Cyril's true subject matter. Yet without the Bible there is no talk of Christ. Cyril knew no way to speak of Christ than in the words of the Bible, and no way to interpret the words of the Bible than through Christ. His biblical writings are commentaries on Christ and only if one reads them in that spirit can one appreciate his significance as interpreter of the Bible.

28 Werner Elert, *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie* (Berlin:1957), p.92.

A SYNOPSIS OF ST. CYRIL'S CHRISTOLOGICAL DOCTRINE

*John Anthony McGuckin**

It would be no exaggeration to describe Cyril as one of the most profound and subtle of the Church's theologians. As might be expected of one who worked in an era where Christian terminology demanded an unusually acute reworking, his doctrine is both technical and philosophically demanding. One of his most important contributions to Christian history is the way in which he worked out an exact terminological scheme of discourse. It would be a mistake, however, to think that this makes Cyril a dull writer. There are passages where, like many another ancient rhetor, his capacity for elaborating an argument through several variations sometimes exceeds the patience of modern readers, but throughout all his work there is a spirit of passion and religious fervor that communicates itself to those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear, and the Dialogue presented here represents Cyril in the full flight of his theological maturity, yet in a literary style that is at once fluent and elegant.

Cyril is motivated by a profoundly mystical understanding of the indwelling power of God, one that makes the incarnation of the Logos not merely a theological nicety of dogmatic history, but the primary way in which a Christian person experiences the presence of the Lord and the effects of his deifying grace. This particularity and religious spirit is visible even in those passages where our author makes demands on the philosophical acumen of his readers. The full complexity of his theological doctrine, and that of Nestorius his opponent, has been expounded in several places...Here I will attempt merely a short sketch of his general christological doctrine, with a minimum of technical and historical digressions.

As far as Nestorius was concerned, language about the incarnation had to retain a primary sense of the difference between deity and humanity: both that distance between God and his creatures, and that between the divine and the human aspects of the Christ. Once language had established the respective differences, the Christian mind could appreciate the closeness of a God who, in the person of Jesus Christ, entered into association with humankind. If Nestorius' scheme was a little

* Fr. John A. McGuckin is an Orthodox priest and theologian. He is Professor of Early Church History at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

woolly on the critical question of whether this man (Jesus) was or was not God,¹ then at least, as he saw it, it was a scheme that insisted on the full integrity of all the elements that comprised it: God and the creature were radically different, Jesus was fully human in every respect including human limitations of consciousness, psychology and power, while the divine Logos was fully God, untrammelled by the human body of Jesus. For Nestorius, the human life of Jesus was something that the Logos was in communion with, not one that dominated or subjugated him in any way.

Cyril's instinct on the incarnation ran counter to this. He found the notion of the Logos' "association" with a man to be abhorrent to Christian tradition on two grounds: First, it made for little distinction between Jesus and one of the ancient prophets who could also be said to have God inspiring them, or "indwelling" them; second, it did not convey enough of the power and intimacy of the "Union" between divinity and humanity, or its effects on human nature, which Cyril saw to be the very heart and central purpose of the whole scheme of the incarnation. In short, for Cyril the primary message of the incarnation was not about the discrete relationship of God and man, but nothing less than the complete reconciliation of God and Man in Jesus.

Cyril consistently opposed the keyword of "Union" (*Henosis*) to that of the Antiochenes who used "Association." Cyril insisted that the incarnation is not for the sake of God, but for the redemption of the human race. As such, it is an "economy," or practical scheme, that is meant to do something. In the incarnation, God is at work among creatures, not merely playacting on the stage of the world, and that work is a mysterious but inexorable transformation of the human life of his disciples into something radically new. This aspect of dynamic transformation (*Theosis*) is something critical in Cyril's thought; it is, indeed, its main pillar, and those who have accused Cyril of being too cavalier in his attitude to Jesus' real experience of human life, have largely failed to appreciate his point: that the divine Lord truly experiences all that is genuinely human, in order to transform that which is mortal into the immortal.

Cyril understand that the incarnation of God as man is not a static event, but rather the pattern and archetype of a process. He points to the seamless union of God and man in the single divine person of Jesus, truly God and man at one and the same time, founded on the single subjectivity of Christ, as not merely a sacrament of the presence of God among us, but a sacrament of how our own human lives are destined to be drawn into his divine life, and transformed in a similar manner. In short, for Cyril the manner of the incarnation is analogous to the manner of the sanctification and transfiguration of Christ's disciples.

1. He regarded the question posted as too crude to be given a direct answer—but that did not stop his critics, then or now, from asking it of him, and sensing that the question was too critical simply to be dismissed as illicit because of its clumsiness of phrasing. For a fuller elaboration of Nestorius' doctrine cf. J.A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Brill, 1994).

This process of transformation was referred to by the Alexandrian theologians as “deification” (*Theosis*). As Sts. Irenaeus and Athanasius had succinctly put it centuries earlier. “He (the Word) became man, that man might become god.” In his turn Cyril teaches that “What he was by nature, we become by grace.” *Theosis* does not signify a pagan conception of becoming divine, which would be either crass mythologism or one of the worst excesses of Nietzschean arrogance, but on the contrary denotes something radically different and biblically founded—something that the Western Church approached through its theological doctrines of Atonement and Beatific Vision.

Cyril had in mind that when the divine Logos became incarnated he summoned his church to a new style of being, a new theandric destiny. Before the incarnation, “divine” and “human” signified ontologically different categories of being. A vast chasm existed between the creature and the Creator, not only morally, but existentially. After the incarnation, the order of being (God’s ordering of the terms of the universe) has been radically altered. In the incarnation, two realities which were philosophically and theologically impossible to combine, have been demonstrably united in Christ. This union is impossible, but it is nonetheless accomplished as a simple act of God’s infinite power; the invisible Lord is now made visible, the Immaterial One is made flesh, he who cannot be limited accepts the limitations of an earthly life, the Immortal One comes willingly to his own death. Cyril loves to apply such strong paradoxes of language. The antitheses give his thought a religious drive and vigor which he knows well how to put to effect in preaching. He accuses Nestorius of being too ready to judge what is or is not fitting for God by the terms of human logic, which he has mistakenly elevated as an absolute indicator of truth. As Cyril sees it, he has forgotten that human logic is flawed because of sinfulness and the limited vision consequent on our corruption. The argument over theological method was very intense between Cyril and Nestorius, and in turn moved into an important debate over the right interpretation of scriptural texts. In both instances, Cyril resisted the application of logic alone as a guide to the Christian mind, and appealed to a sense of tradition as manifesting a common inner spiritual experience through several generations of theologian-saints.

But in spite of his appeal to represent traditional belief, does not his language involve the Church in a semi-pagan concept of God, where, like Zeus, a divinity can descend to earth and change his form to live in a physical fashion? Far from it, Cyril argued. The incarnation does not limit or remove the infinite power of God, it is itself simply an expression or act of that infinite power, one which presses the limits of our understanding, but which is not contradictory or illogical (as Nestorius had accused him of being). To imagine that the Logos’ divine omnipotence is compromised by the human life he now leads is to regard him as having “laid aside” his deity when he became man. Cyril rejects this conception and argues that he who was eternal God became man while ever remaining what he was, that is eternal God.

But was this, in turn, merely to make theology a meaningless conundrum? or make the human life of the divine Jesus merely a pretense, or a factor all but wiped out in the face of the overwhelming presence of a deity taking it over? Cyril argued that this followed only for those who had failed to understand that the incarnation was fundamentally a timebound act of rescue for the human race, one that had to be contextualized in a larger scheme of God's eternal philanthropy and providence for the world. The physical incarnation was a specific divine philanthropy of healing addressed to physical creatures, and meant to have an effect that began at physical level and brought material creaturehood back up into a divine communion that transcended material capacity, while never eschewing materiality. This position of being a transcendently immanent creature was for Cyril a mystery, but not an illogicality—on the contrary, a promise held out to the world in the doctrine of the glorified resurrection body.

As Cyril saw it, divine power in the incarnate Lord did not strive to express itself in contradistinction, or in opposition, to other forms of life (including human consciousness), but on the contrary was the very context which allowed all other lifeforms to subsist and develop. For Cyril, then, the deity and humanity were not like two weights on a pair of scales, poised in an uneasy balance in Christ; rather the one was the nurturing matrix of the other. Just as the deity of Christ did not suppress or falsify his own humanity, so Cyril understood it to be paradigmatic that, for the redeemed person, union with God would not cramp individuality but rather liberate personhood and enhance it. As far as Cyril was concerned, even an ordinary human life exhibited at its heart a sense of spiritual yearning and transcendence which often tried to employ its material condition as part of its spiritual ascent—or, put another way, to express its spiritual identity through its material consciousness. For Cyril, what was true of the whole race, that it ontologically subsisted within the orbit of God's powerful presence, was most particularized in the case of the Christ, whose humanity was a unique, direct, and personal expression of the divine presence.

Cyril took the image of a dual capacity, spirit animating flesh (the soul in the body) as an example of how he conceived the union of God and man in Christ. The Godhead lives without restriction in the incarnate form, just as it enjoys omnipotence in its eternal state, before the incarnation. Once within the incarnation, however, the divine Logos lives by the choice within the human material conditions of incarnated life. The two modes of the life are like the proximity of soul and body in an ordinary human being.

In the case of an ordinary person, the different "natures" of both realities does not preclude their union, nor does it demand that both entities be reduced to one or the other; on the contrary both can have integrity while at the same time enjoying an integral union that allows new conditions and new possibilities of existence to flourish. From the very fact of the union of body and soul Cyril points out how a human being results. For Cyril the full deity of the Word unites with a perfect

human existence and from the intimacy of that spiritual and material union, the one Christ results.

Cyril felt that the soul-body image was the best attempt he could make to depict an irreducibly mysterious reality of the divine human relation within Christ, one he saw as a uniquely personal act of God. He offers supplementary images for the relationship in the form of the lily and its perfume, the fire within a coal, a jewel and its radiance. What he was searching for was a concept of natural interpenetration where the two realities (e.g., deity and humanity) both subsisted perfectly intact, but not in any parallel association, rather in a dynamic interpenetration and mutuality that effected new conditions and possibilities by virtue of that intimate union. This was why he was very anxious to insist that the Word of God, deity in all its fullness, united with a human existence. The Word did not unite with a man, but with humanity. What this means is that he wished to avoid any sense that there was a human being (Jesus, a Jewish rabbi from Nazareth) alongside a divinity (The Word of God), or any suggestion that a man was seized by the Spirit of God, in the way the Adoptionist heresy of earlier centuries had taught. But what does it mean to say that the Word united with humanity? Is it not a fundamentally abstract conception ill suited to express so personal a theological mystery?

For Cyril the criticism did not follow at all. He regarded humanity as a way of being, a manner of expressing identity in and through the material circumstances of bodily life. He did not define humanity as personal being per se. In other words he distinguished personhood both from the condition in which personhood arose, and from the manner in which it was expressed. If, as he would argue, even ordinary human beings could never be reduced in their spiritual identities merely to that bodily condition, so it was (and even more so) for the Word of God Incarnate. His person was divine and could not be reduced to the bodily life, yet it elected to express itself through that bodily manner. As a result even the bodily life became a direct vehicle of the revelation of the divine.

Cyril knew that at the center of this vision lay a great and serious question over his understanding of the subjective unity of Christ. If he rejected the whole of the Nestorian scheme as being too divisive of Christ's personal unity (he accused it of inevitably suggesting "Two Sons," or a man Jesus alongside a divine Logos) then how did he himself account for Christ's inner subjectivity?

This was the key question of all his writings after 428, and it is a dominant idea within his treatise, "On the Unity of Christ." His task was not an easy one. The prior tradition had suggested ways of approach but not clearly defined them. In addition, Cyril's generation had come to the point of crossroads between two very disparate theologies, both of which had proved, or were proving, unacceptable to Orthodox consensus: the Syrian doctrine of Two Sons, and the Apollinarian doctrine which accounted for the subjective unity of Christ by teaching that the divine Logos dispensed with a human mind or consciousness in Christ, because the superior displaced the inferior. The latter position had rightly been rejected as a poor

account of the incarnation that turned out to be a destruction of humanity, not an assumption of it.

Cyril knew that his task lay in a different direction to both extremes. He had to account for the integrity of the deity and the humanity while demonstrating their integral communion, and the results of it. He settled on the key term of "Union" (*Henosis*). From deity and humanity a union has taken place; not an overlap, or a co-habitation, or a relationship, or a displacement, or an association. None of the things his opponents had proposed. He argued for a union in the strict sense of the word, yet a union that was of the type that did not destroy its constituent elements. It was thus in the manner of the soul-body union in humans, a union that effected new conditions and capacities for both constituents while preserving their basic elements intact, and not, for example, in the manner of a union of sand and sugar (one that did nothing to either element and did not really combine either part for any positive end), or a union of fire and wood (one which only worked by destroying the basis of the elements so united).

In the case of Christ, Cyril speaks of this union of deity and humanity as a "Hypostatic Union." The person of the Logos is the sole personal subject of all the conditions of his existence, divine or human. The Logos is, needless to say, the sole personal subject of all his own acts as eternal Lord (the creation, the inspiration of the ancient prophets, and so on), but after the incarnation the same one is also the personal subject directing all his actions performed within this time and this space, embodied acts which form the context of the human life of Christ in Palatine. The phrase "the selfsame" recurs time and again in his writings as a way of insisting on this doctrine of single-subjectivity as the keystone of the entire Christology debate. Cyril would undoubtedly argue that Christ was fully human in every possible sense, but in the twentieth century new problems have arisen over this understanding of what that might mean, for today, and in this we are unlike all the ancient protagonists of all sides, since we tend to see the whole issue of subjectivity and personhood in terms drawn from the analytical psychology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Accordingly, we approach the notion and the problem insofar as it impinges on the doctrine of incarnation, in terms of what could be called "psychic consciousness."

Cyril, however, would refuse to reduce the notion of person to those psychic experiences. For him, personhood (either in the case of Jesus, or in the case of humans in general) was not a product of a material based consciousness, but, on the contrary, consciousness was the effect of a divinely created personhood. Modern psychology finds this perspective a difficult one to assimilate, but Cyril was adamant in rejecting the Aristotelian empiricist view that identity was reducible to brain act. He approached personhood as a god-given and transcendent mystery, with the full destiny of such an identity lying in another age and another condition: the Kingdom of God.

For Cyril, then, there was only one personal subject, and one personal reality

in Christ, and that was the divine Logos. But Christ was not simply the Logos of God, he was the Logos as he had chosen to enter fully into human life; and in so far as the Logos lived a human life, directly and personally, within all the historical and material limitations imposed by the lifeform (constricts that applied within his life in history as man, but not within his co-terminous life outside time as God), then Christ was at once divine and human-inseparably so. Cyril regarded this “at once” as a synchronized enjoyment of two life-forms, neither of which prevented the terms of the other, but both of which were enhanced by the intimate experience provided by the other. In other words, neither the deity or humanity of Christ was diminished by the incarnation, but both were, in a real sense, “developed” by the experience: the humanity ontologically and morally so, the divinity economically so.

His critics wanted elaboration of what this enhancement meant. An “enhancement” after the manner of Apollinaris was not regarded as acceptable at all. Cyril argued that this was far from the only way of depicting the benefits the divine presence conferred on the human nature of Jesus. He drew, instead, a picture of Jesus’ humanity which was suffused with the divine light and graciousness: a divinization of the flesh of Christ which rendered it uniquely powerful and health-giving, while remaining essentially human flesh. The fact that Christ’s touch conferred healing was explained by Cyril on the basis that it was the human finger of none other than God, and therefore human flesh, but by no means ordinary human flesh—rather the life-giving flesh of God.² He was thus presenting an image of something that remained integral (or intact) but not unchanged, on the contrary enhanced. To those who would argue that this “change” destroyed the essential human condition, Cyril argued rather that it fulfilled the essential human condition, whose destiny was not to resist divine transfiguration but to be summoned to an ever deepening communion with God’s transforming grace. This is why Cyril saw the Logos’ enhancement of Jesus’ flesh as the first-fruits of his transformation of the humanity of all disciples. For Cyril, the incarnation was a fundamental “process” of such transformation.

If this explains how the deity can enhance the humanity, how could it possibly be said that humanity can enhance divinity? Nestorius accused Cyril particularly on this point, arguing that his way of thinking could only lead to a reduction of the status and capacity of the deity. To this Cyril developed on what he meant by the divinity’s “economy of salvation.” Cyril argued that while the deity considered in itself (that is considered outside the incarnation, and outside time or space), could never change, since it was already absolute and perfect, this did not mean that the deity could never act in different ways: otherwise there would be no relationship between God and his creation. God acted within time and space, not because this

2. Cyril’s eucharistic arguments are very important in this regard, and follow up this central insight sacramentally. Cf. Chadwick H., “Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy,” *JTS* (NS) 2 (1951) 145-164. Gebremedhin, E., *Life-Giving Blessing. An Inquiry into the Eucharistic Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria* (Uppsala, 1977).

was his own way of acting, but because it was his creation's way, and for the sake of his philanthropic relation to the world God was prepared to perform the impossible: the Timeless One engages with history. For Cyril, if one denied that, one denied the whole validity of a Creator God who worked out his covenant with the human race within history. In the case of the incarnation, the same paradox was witnessed again, yet in a more intimately unique manner. The incarnation, as Cyril saw it, was an act of omnipotent power, in which the eternal Lord directly and personally chose to experience the conditions of an historical and material life. If that life was a mere sham, Cyril says, and he did not really experience limitation, doubt, suffering, and all the knocks and blows that human life is prey to, then why bother to engage in the incarnation at all? The answer, for Cyril, is not far behind—he chose to engage personally in all the range of human experience in order to set new terms for the transfiguration of that condition. In particular, Cyril discusses human suffering and death.

He used a recurrent phrase which his opponents pilloried, interpreting it as an indication that Cyril did not take Christ's human experience seriously; he spoke of how Christ "suffered impassibly" (*apathos epathen*). The catchiness of the slogan was typical of Cyril's apologetic style, and as with other catch-phrases he chose terms that most shockingly set out the lines of his thought while flatly contradicting the main premises of his opponents. In other words, the phrase is a densely apologetic one that has to be carefully unpaced in order to appreciate what he meant by it. One thing is unarguable, Cyril is no docetic who is denying the reality of Christ's sufferings. On the contrary, he points to the whole experience of incarnation as adding a unique aspect to the divinity: the personal experience of a lifeform. And in the incarnation Cyril sees the eternal God directly experiencing suffering and death—insofar as like other men he too is brought under the terms of the human lifeform.

Cyril sees this part of the incarnate transaction as the key to redemption. For although God experiences suffering and death, just as he experiences all other human factors,³ he does not become dominated by suffering or death. It is the same with his deity as with his humanity: the conditions of the one do not wipe out the distinct realities of the other, even though there is a dynamic mutual experience passing between the two.

Cyril presses this point home with a decisive move of language that has since become known as the doctrine of the "Exchange of Properties," or the "Communication of Idioms" (*Antidosis Idiomatum*). He argued passionately that, on the basis of this direct personal mutuality of experience founded on the single divine personality of the Logos who enjoyed both conditions or lifeforms, it was

3. Like the other Fathers, Cyril excludes the experience of sin from Jesus, something which he sees as not essentially "human" in any case, merely a perversion of true humanity.

permissible to attribute the experiences of both natures to one and the same person—always understanding that one’s language referred to the incarnate condition. And so Cyril pressed his point home in his usual graphic and paradoxical linguistic style: God wept. God died. God sat upon the Virgin’s lap and suckled. To his opponents, especially Nestorius, this language broke the very foundations of their christological scheme, and they attacked it vehemently as akin to mythology. For Cyril, it was the one truth (that the divine Logos was the only personal subject experiencing all the acts of the incarnation) that saved the doctrine of incarnation from mythology, and at the same time explained why the incarnation was necessary. Before the incarnation the Immortal God could not possibly die, in any sense of the words. Now, in the conditions of the incarnation, it is perfectly true to say that God has willingly died, yet being God has burst the chains of death in the very act of submitting to them.

This redemptive system of exchange and transformation in Cyril is called “Appropriation Theory,” and it is in some senses the very heart of his christological argument. Whenever he insists, as he does time and time again, on pressing the logic of phrases like “the death of God,” or “the Mother of God,” it is this wider theological construct he is invoking. This is why, as has often been said, Cyril’s robust defense of the title of Theotokos was at heart a christological and soteriological statement rather than a statement about Mariology per se. Apart from the use of this form of “Exchange of Properties” language, Cyril also applies a favorite phrase, “One Incarnate Nature of God the Word,” to sum up and signify the transactive element at the heart of the incarnation. Like his other terms, this was deliberately designed as a “tweaking of the nose” of his opponents. Some critics have suggested that this manner Cyril had of using such loud colors in his apologetic pallet made the controversy more lurid than it needed to have been. It was Cyril’s opinion that only such stark terms were capable of forcing his opponents out from a bland theological vagueness that covered up their essentially unacceptable premises. His contemporary opponents, such as Nestorius, Theodoret of Cyr, Andrew of Samosata, and others in the Syrian patriarchate, simply read them as examples of extreme Apollinarian heresy. In this they were wrong. There are grounds for thinking that there is some truth in both the other two views expressed: that Cyril made the argument sharper and faster than it might otherwise have been, and that perhaps there was a negative as well as a positive side to that.

It is much the same when we consider his treatment of Nestorius as an opponent. It is certainly the case that Cyril was doggedly opposed to all Nestorius stood for, and that he might not have read his opponents’ works with due regard to the subtlety of their argument on every occasion. There are no grounds, however, for thinking that Cyril did not understand Nestorius’ theology. What he felt to be at stake was an underlying tendency that disturbed him greatly. If he was not ready to

compromise over the doctrinal disagreement with Nestorius, seeing it turn on the fundamental issue of single subjectivity, this does not mean to say that he was a rigid or intransigent thinker. When he was convinced that the central issue was safe, he was quite prepared to go the extra mile to meet the Syrian theologians' points. It was his willingness to compromise when the central facts had been established, that cost him some popularity at home in his final years.

Over the last century, in our own time, the issues for which he fought so passionately, the subjectival unity of the incarnate Lord, and the difference between the Christian theology of incarnation and pagan mythological schemes of religion, have once again come into large scale dispute. This has caused considerable christological revision in the Western churches, and it is not surprising to see a concomitant review of Nestorian theology in the process and (one might deduce) something of an attempt to revive it in terms of popular dogmatics. It is certainly the case that, in the European literature of the last hundred years Cyril has been denigrated both as a thinker and as a person, in ways that suggest unspoken doctrinal battles are being waged behind the front of historical scholarship. In several influential modern studies, the Antiochene tradition which Cyril attacked (that of Diodore, Theodore, and Nestorius) has been offered as a legitimate and ancient part of an authentically pluralist Christian vision, and Cyril has been censured as one who arrogantly crushed it. Given that these old arguments are far from dead, and given the importance of the debate in terms of what constitutes the Church's doctrine of Christ, and how it articulates its authentic tradition, then it should prove both opportune and instructive to present a new translation of Cyril's treatise, 'On the Unity of Christ.' It is one of Cyril's most elegant and approachable writings, and explains at the end of a long battle from which he has emerged successful, why in his own time he utterly rejected such a relativistic and inclusive approach to the nature of Christian Paradosis—that "Tradition" of Christianity which is not merely a historico-theological matter, but an enduring question of the articulation of the church's spiritual experience of its redeeming Lord.

ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA
ON THE UNITY OF CHRIST

translated with an introduction by John A. McGuckin

This recent book is available from St. Vladimir's Seminary Press,
575 Scarsdale Road, Crestwood, NY 10707 (1 800 204 2665, Fax 914
961 5456) Price \$8.95 plus shipping

ST. CYRIL'S "MIA PHYSIS" AND THE POPULAR PIETY OF THE COPTS

*Otto F. A. Meinardus**

Ever since the days of Pope Kyrillus VI (1959-1971) Coptic theologians and churchmen were - and still are - engaged in wide-ranging ecumenical debates pertaining to the theological questions of ecclesiology and christology. The age-long christological obstacles and problems which for many centuries used to separate the Chalcedonian from the pre-or non-Chalcedonian churches have been finally overcome through the persistent debates focusing around the famous "mia physis" formula of St. Cyril of Alexandria (412-444). Indeed, for the first time since the christological decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 Coptic theologians and hierarchs are able to discard the very issues that for centuries had alienated the churches, both in the East and in the West. The champion of Orthodoxy, whose christological formula eventually overcame the drawn out ecclesiastical stalemate, was St. Cyril of Alexandria, the 24th Pope and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, also known to the Copts as "the Seal of the Fathers" or "the Pillar of Faith." It was St. Cyril's eloquent formulation of the "*alla mian physin tou theou logou ensarkomenen,*" of the "One Nature of the Incarnate Word," that led to the signing of the Document of Agreement between the two pontiffs, Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenûdah III at the Vatican in May 1973.

At the same time, while Coptic hierarchs and theologians convened to discuss the various theological concepts like "*physis*," "*ousia*" and "hypostatic union" and argued about the semantic differences between "*monos*" and "*mia*," the popular religion of the Copts has taken little if any notice of these dogmatic and metaphysical debates. For the fellah, the shopkeeper, the industrial labourer or even the accountant, it is beyond understanding if people speak of Jesus as being "without confusion, without change, without division and without separation!" Moreover, names and dates of cities where Coptic theologians met with Catholic and other Orthodox church-leaders like Aarhus, Bristol, Geneva, Vienna, Chambesy or Addis Ababa to study the christology of St. Cyril are understandably meaningless to the majority of Coptic believers. While in the days of the 4th century St. Gregory of

* Professor Otto F. A. Meinardus, is a member of the German Archaeological Society. He taught in the American University of Cairo and in the Institute of Coptic Studies. He has written numerous articles and books on Coptic history and monasticism.

Nyssa the city (Constantinople) was full of tradesmen, mechanics and slaves, all of whom were profound theologians, the same cannot be said about the 20th century Coptic citizens of Cairo, Upper Egypt or the Diaspora. Whereas the 4th century shopkeepers of the 'polis' could argue about the theological differences existing between the Father and the Son and could debate whether the Son was begotten out of nothing, the average sons of St. Cyril in today's Egypt are not likely to reason much about the christological refinements of their 4th and 5th century theological ancestors.

Following the weekly Wednesday pontifical service at St. Mark's Cathedral in Abbasiyah we had asked some Copts what they knew about Abba Kyrillus (St. Cyril). "He was a great man, he had healed my mother and relieved my sister of her pains. Once a year we visit his tomb at Mari Mina in Maryût." "You mean Abba Kyrillus VI (1959-1971), the great pope who was both saint and healer." Murqus nodded thereby giving his assent. We approached an elderly Coptic priest about Abba Kyrillus. "He was one of the greatest leaders of our church, he had opened several schools for boys and girls and restored our old churches and monasteries. He was abbot at St. Antony's. Finally the government people poisoned him." He referred to the great 19th century Coptic Reformer Abba Kyrillus IV (1854-1861). We turned to a young theological student from the Clerikiyah (the theological seminary) mentioning beforehand that we didn't mean Kyrillus VI or Kyrillus IV. He thought for a while. "You must mean Ibn Laqlaq Kyrillus III (1235-1243). After all, he provided us with a complete set of our Canon Law, to this day his canons are the foundation of our Personal Status Laws." We just didn't bother to continue our questioning. Who knows, they might have thought of Cyril II (1131-1145) with his 42 canons or even of Cyril V (1875-1927) who have occupied the pontifical throne of St. Mark longer than any other pope. No one has thought about the 5th century "mia physis" theologian, and the reasons are somewhat plausible.

The Copts are a deeply religious people. Neither their piety nor their religiosity follow the hellenistic thinking of the great 4th and 5th century Doctors of the Church. They know that falling into heresy is regarded by the Church as the worst of all sins, and, therefore, the common people do not engage in the kind of philosophical semantics that they don't understand. After all, the Apostle had wisely counseled: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the cleverness of the clever" (1 Cor 1:19). For the great majority of the Copts their spiritual guides and models, their examples to be followed are not the 4th and 5th century Doctors of the Church, be they Athanasius, Basil, Hippolytus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril et al. Their religious prototypes, past and present are either the "stars of the desert" or the saintly thaumaturgs and wonderworkers, men like Anbâ Sarabamûn of Minufiyah in the days of Muhammad 'Ali, Anbâ Abra'am of the Fayyûm (1829-1914) or Pope Kyrillus VI (1959-1971). In times of crises, grief, despair, sickness, mourning and sorrow the Copts have turned and still turn to the well-known eques-

trian warrior-saints like Mari Girgis, Abû-Saifain, Mari Mina, Amir Tâdros, etc. And for personal advice and counsel they do not consult the learned theologians and professors of the Church but rather the saintly Fathers of the desert. The monastic leaders who surpassed each other in ascetic endurance and austerity are their spiritual ideals of excellence and perfection, be they Sts. Antony, Paul the Theban, Onuphrius, Yustus al-Antony (1910-1976) or 'Abd al-Masîh al-Habashî (1907-1973). They were simple men: St. Macarius the Great was a camel-driver, St. Macarius the Alexandrian a seller of sweet-meats, St. Apollo of Bawît used to be a goat-herd. Sts. Pambo and Paphnutius were illiterates, like so many desert fathers who had memorized large portions of the Holy Scriptures.

It is significant that until recently not a single Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt or in the Emigration has been dedicated to St. Cyril of Alexandria.¹ Since the British Orthodox Church under Metropolitan Seraphim joined the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in 1994, the Copts can claim a church of St. Cyril in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. The Catholic Copts in Egypt maintain since 1926 the Franciscan Theological Seminary of St. Cyril at Tereat az-Zumur in Gizeh and the Greek Catholics have the Church of St. Cyril in Ain Shams.

Undoubtedly, the lack of religious enthusiasm and feeling of the common believers for St. Cyril's christology is partly due to the non-chalance of the Church in this matter. For the Doctors of the Church there are neither times nor places for veneration as in the case of the popular *mawâlid* for the equestrian warriors. Though once buried in the ancient Cave Church of Alexandria with the 3rd and 4th century popes Heracles, Dionysius, Theonas, Peter I and Alexander I, the Copts do not possess any relics of St. Cyril, their "Seal of the Fathers." His relics, once having been laid down in the imperial city of Constantinople were translated to the 8th century church and monastery of St. Maria in Campo Marzio (next to the Palazzo Firenze) in Rome during the days of Leo III the Isaurian (717-741). Other parts of his body repose in the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. John the Theologian on the Aegean Island of Patmos.

The traditional Orthodox iconography according to the medieval "Guide to Painting" from Mount Athos (§ 404) characterizes St. Cyril as "grey-haired with a long divided beard. The cap covering his head shows a cross-design."² Probably the earliest pictorial representation shows him as bishop clothed with an omophorion in the Greek Orthodox Church of St. George in Thessalonich (5th century).³ In the Church of Haghia Sophia in Istanbul St. Cyril appears with St. Athanasius in a

1 At present, there is only one church named after both St. Mary and Pope Cyril I, in the whole Coptic Orthodox Church. It was built in 1975 in Cleopetra, Alexandria. There are few Coptic Churches in the Emigration dedicated to St. Athanasius: Bankstown, NSW, Australia; Mississauga, Ont., Canada; Granada Hills, Calif., USA.

2 This cap may well have been the prototype of the monastic *golunsua* of the Coptic monks, which was introduced by Pope Shenudah III.

3 Diehl, Ch. *Manuel d'Art byzantine*. Paris, 1925, Pl.xi.

4 Leroy, J., *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures, etc.* Paris 1964, II, 49.2.

partly damaged mosaic. A Syrian miniature of 1053 in the Jacobite Church of Mâr Tûmâ in Mosul, Mesopotamia, shows him as the Alexandrian “Pillar of Faith.”⁴ Well-known is the mosaic-medallion of the saint in the 12th century monastery of Hosios Lukas in Greece.⁵

Iconographical representations of St. Cyril in the West are rather rare. He appears as a Byzantine bishop in a painting by Guido Reni (1575-1642) in S. Maria Maggiore, Capella Paolina, Rome.⁶ Similar representations are by P. Rasina in S. Clemente, Rome⁷ and by Domenichino (1581-1641) in the famous Abbazia di Grotto Ferrata.⁸ Together with the Doctors of the Orthodox Church St. Cyril appears in numerous Orthodox churches, e.g. in a 12th century mosaic in the Church of St. Sophia in Kiev, in the 14th century fresco Karije Jami in Istanbul or in the 13th century wall-painting in the Serbian Church of the King in Studenica (III. 1).⁹

In Egypt, only very few pictorial representations of St. Cyril have survived the vicissitudes of the ages. In the Catholic Church of St. Mark at Camp de César, Alexandria, a stained glass-window shows St. Cyril defending the Divine Maternity of the Virgin Mary. In the Coptic Catholic Cathedral of St. Antony in Faggalah, Cairo, the altar-mosaic includes St. Cyril. The beautiful iconostasis in the Greek Catholic Cathedral of the Resurrection in Faggalah shows among the Doctors of the Church also St. Cyril. In the Coptic Orthodox Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Abbasiayah the mosaic of the semidome includes St. Cyril among the Fathers of the Church.

In view of the recent theological dialogues with Christians of other traditions it is imperative that Copts appreciate the ecumenical dimension of the new age. This is especially true for the Copts in the Emigration, who represent a Christian minority among a host of Christian denominations. Although it is unnecessary to know all the intricacies of the 5th century christological debates, nevertheless, it is important to realize that the Copts - especially in the emigration - have stepped out of their enforced isolation.¹⁰ Therefore, Copts ought to acquaint themselves with the persons behind the present developments. Both, Sts. Athanasius and Cyril should be introduced in some manner that they become “real people.” Iconography is merely one method to accomplish this goal. Yussef Nassif and Bedour Latif (picture #1) have designed St. Cyril clothed with the Coptic burnus (Phelonion) and the traditional hood. In his right hand he holds a pectoral cross and in his left

5 Diez, E., O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece. Hosios Lukas and Daphne*. Cambridge, Mass. 1931, 29.

6 *Bibliotheca Sanctorum. Pontificia Università Lateranense*. Rome, III, 1310.

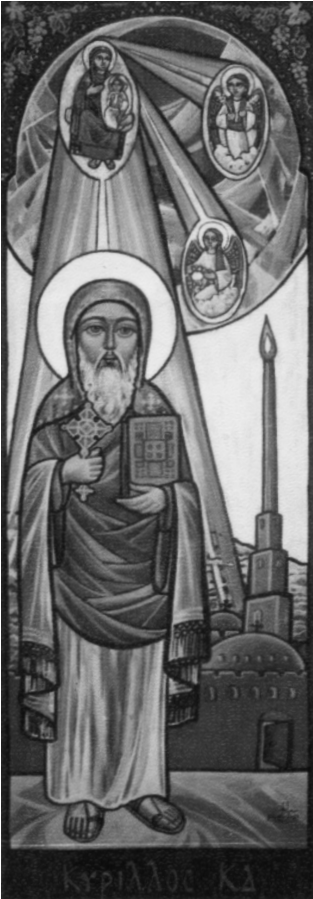
7 *Ibid.* III, 1314

8 Künstele, K., *Ikongraphie der Heiligen*. Freiburg 1926, Pl. 79.

9 The picture of this painting appears on the backcover.

10 Meinardus, O., “The Copts Towards an International Christian Community,” *Coptologia XV*, 1995, 27-48.

hand the Gospel. The three medallions above him portray the Holy Trinity. The building in the background is the Monastery of St. Macarius where St. Cyril spent some time prior to his call to the pontificate. The devotional picture of St. Cyril by Yusuf Girgis Ayad (1982) shows him as a contemporary Coptic bishop clothed in a sticharion. In his right hand he holds the pectoral cross, in his left hand a Coptic episcopal crozier. (picture #2)



Picture #1
Icon of St. Cyril I drawn by
Yussef Nassif and Bedour Latif



Picture #2
Icon of St. Cyril I drawn by
Yusuf Girgis Ayad



SAINT CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

*The picture is from the
13th century wall-painting in the
Serbian Church of the King in Studenica.*