

# COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

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- *The Coptic Orthodox Church*
  - *Saint Shenoute of Atripe*
- *Index of Volume XXI, 2000*



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# ***THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH***

*Boulos Ayad Ayad, Ph.D.\**

## ***A. The Establishment of the Church and its Creed***

The church was established in Alexandria between 55 and 68 A.D.<sup>(1)</sup> by St. Mark, one of the 70 Apostles of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the church is the same one that is cited in the New Testament according to the teaching of Jesus Christ and his Apostles (Mt. 16:18; 24:14). The Church believes in Jesus Christ, the Son of Man (Mk. 8:31, 38), Son of God (Mt. 3:17), and God (Jn. 14:8-11), who was born by St. Mary through the Spirit of God (Mt. 1:18-23) 2,000 years ago. He came to our earth to give salvation to mankind through his crucifixion on the cross (Mt. 27:27-44). After his death, Jesus was buried for three days in a tomb (Mt. 27:57-61), and on the third day his resurrection took place (Mt. 27:62-63). He appeared to his disciples (Mt. 28:16-20) relatives, and others. After 50 days, Jesus ascended to Heaven (Mk. 16:19). St. Paul emphasized such faith as follows: "He [God] was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the word, taken up in glory" (I Tim. 3:16). The Fathers of the Church summarize their faith according to the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:16-20), Three in One."

Pope Discorus of the fifth century A.D. as well as all the Alexandrian Fathers believed in and taught the pure Orthodox faith of their predecessors.<sup>(2)</sup> Pope Discorus says the following concerning the Faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church:

"If a piece of iron, heated to white heat, be struck on the anvil, it is the iron which receives the blows and not the white heat, though the iron and the heat form an indivisible whole. The unit of the iron and the white heat is symbolic of our

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1. Aziz S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 27; many topics about the Coptic Church have been discussed in the *Coptic Encyclopedia* edited by Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991, vols. 1-8; see also Boulos Ayad Ayad, "Coptic Orthodox Church," in the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Religion* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 152-154.
2. Iris Habib Elmasry, *Survey of the Coptic Church* (Cairo, 1961), p. 19.

Saviour's incarnation, whose divinity never parted from his humanity, not even for a moment nor the twinkling of an eye. Yet though His divinity parted not from His humanity, their union was without mixing nor fusion, nor change, like unto the union of the iron and the white heat." The Fathers of the Alexandrian School define this union as "The one Nature of God the Word made "flesh" and is synonymous with St. John's saying "the Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).<sup>(3)</sup>

One scholar writes about the early Fathers of the Coptic Church as follows: "Alexandrine Christianity became the light of the world. The venerable Fathers of the Coptic Church, the great theologians of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, the Coptic Saints and heretics, the founders of monasticism, the immortal leaders of the oecumenical movement, all these and numerous other categories of illustrious Copts made indelible contributions to the establishment of the new faith."<sup>(4)</sup>

### ***B. The Coptic Language and its Alphabet***

The Coptic language is the last phase of the ancient Egyptian language.<sup>(5)</sup> We know that the ancient Egyptian language was used by the Egyptians through the country's long history, even during the Greco-Roman period. But when the Ptolemaic Dynasty started to rule Egypt after the invasion of Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., Greek was used as the official language while the ancient Egyptian language remained the popular or common one used by the Egyptians. Both languages continued to be employed after the Roman and Byzantine occupation until the invasion of the Arabs in the 7th century A.D. (642 A.D.). "In 705/706 A.D. the Umayyad Viceroy 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Abd-al-Malik issued the hazardous and untimely decree substituting Arabic for Coptic in all state affairs. Though his injunction could not be carried out in practice, it proved to be an incentive for the native scribe to learn the language of the conqueror, and this resulted in the appearance of many bilingual documents in subsequent centuries".<sup>(6)</sup> The Coptic language was employed as "a spoken and liturgical language until approximately the thirteenth century A.D."<sup>(7)</sup> But in the late Middle Ages (about the 17th century A.D.) the Coptic language was discontinued as the spoken language of Egypt, "though it is still used as a liturgical language in Coptic churches to the present day"<sup>(8)</sup> (with the Arabic language), among some Coptic communities in a few villages scattered in Upper Egypt. Much of its vocabulary has been used in the spoken Arabic of Egypt.

Philologists have noticed that the Coptic language has different dialects such as Bohairic (the dialect of Lower Egypt), Saidic (Upper Egypt), Faiyumic, Bashmureic, Akhmimic, and sub-Akhmimic. The Bohairic dialect is still used in the Coptic liturgy.<sup>(9)</sup>

3. Ibid., p. 18.

4. M. Kamil, *Coptic Egypt* (Cairo, printed by Le Scribe Egyptian, 1968), p. 34.

5. Aziz S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, p. 17.

6. Ibid., p. 18.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 84.

9. Ibid., p. 18.

The Coptic people left many writings in Coptic that include the sayings of the Egyptian Fathers, the monastery rules, theological writings, biographies of saints and martyrs (the Synaxarion), prose narrative, poetry,<sup>(10)</sup> contracts, letters, stories, funeral texts, religious texts, grammatical study, historical events, gnostic writing, magical text, miracle texts, and medical texts as well as the translation of the majority of the books of the Bible. Most of the books of Old Testament were translated from Hebrew into Coptic, and all the books of the New Testament were translated from Greek into Coptic. In addition, they left texts “of the apocryphal gospels and Acts, the violent tenor of the lives of their martyrs”<sup>(11)</sup> and “the Coptic Manichaean papyri discovered in 1930 in the Faiyum.”<sup>(12)</sup>

“Today, the Copts (Christian Egyptians) write in the Arabic language. Their literature is part of Arabic literature. Among the modern Coptic literary men are Ikladious Labib, Akhnoukh Fanous (1856-1946), Tadros Wahba (1860-1934), Francis El-Atr (b. 1882), Nasr Losa El-Assiuti (b. 1887), Iskander Kousman, Roufail Nakhla.”<sup>(13)</sup> I would add to this list: Yassa Abd El-Messih, Ayoub Faraq, Pahor Ikladious Labib, Shaker Basilios, Iris Habib El-Masry, and many others. “All these had an Islamic Arabic education, in addition to a thorough knowledge of Coptic Christian doctrine and history.”<sup>(14)</sup> These people “are of Ancient Egyptian stock, without such Turkish or other foreign blood, being the direct descendants of the Pharaohs.”<sup>(15)</sup>

About the third century A.D. onwards, the Egyptians or the Copts adopted all the 24 Greek letters and other seven letters from the Demotic (the last phase of the writing of the ancient Egyptian language which in Greek means the writing of the commoners) using all the 31 letters as a new system of writing, the Coptic language, instead of about 750 signs which the ancient Egyptians invented. These signs usually were pictures of buildings or parts of buildings, human beings, parts of men, mammals and parts of mammals, birds, amphibia, fish, insects, plants, heaven, stars, earth, water, sea, boats and their parts, wind, temple articles, clothing, jewelry, insignia and more pictures from their environments.<sup>(16)</sup>

### ***C. The History of the Coptic Church***

The Coptic Church of Egypt started during the Roman Empire and continued under the Byzantine Empire, thereafter under the Islamic rule and into modern times. The church and its people met severe persecution since early Christianity in

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-145. See also Mary M. F. Massoud, “A Brief Survey of Coptic Literature,” *St. Mark and the Coptic Church*, Cairo: The Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, June 1968, pp. 117-140.

11. Atiya, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

13. See Mary M.F. Massoud, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. See Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Griffith Institute Ashmolean Museum, 1988), pp. 5-6, 442-543. See also Samuel A. B. Mercer, *An Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd printing (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 150-168.

the first century A.D. and through the centuries. Thus it has its own history of two thousand years which includes:

**1. The history of the Popes** with their deeds since the first century A.D., starting with the first Pope, Anianus, until the life of His Holiness the 117th Pope, Shenouda the Third. We know the lives and deeds of all these Popes without any gaps with the number of years when each occupied the seat of Alexandria.

**2-. The Popes and their relationship with the ruling dynasties of Egypt.**

The founder of the Coptic Church was St. Mark, who was martyred during the rule of the Roman Emperor Nero (54-68 A.D.). Since that time, the Coptic Church and its creed spread throughout Egypt. The Christians of Egypt met 10 persecutions during the reigns of the following Roman Emperors: Nero (54-68 A.D.), Domitian (81-96 A.D.), Trajan (98-117 A.D.), Hadrian (117-138 A.D.), Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) Septimius Severus (193-211 A.D.), Maximinus (235-238 A.D.), Gordian III (238-244 A.D.), Decius (249-251 A.D.), Valerianus (253-259 A.D.), Diocletian (284-305 A.D.), and Maximian (286-305 A.D.).<sup>(17)</sup> The relationship between the Popes of the Coptic Church and the ruling dynasties of Egypt, was sometimes good or bad, according to the policy of the many rulers of Egypt.

**3-The Popes and their relationship with the other churches.**

Christianity started in the first century A.D. and, until the middle of the fifth century A.D., there was “a strong unity among the traditional church.” “Each church was considered a bishopric under the leadership of an archbishop who was in complete charge...When there were problems concerning the creed, the heads of the churches met in ecumenical councils to resolve them.”<sup>(18)</sup>

The first ecumenical council of Nicea took place in June 325 A.D. because the Libyan priest Arius denied the divinity of Christ; this heresy was rejected by the council.<sup>(19)</sup> The second council, that of Constantinople, was held in 381 A.D., to discuss “the heresy of Bishop Macedonius of Constantinople who did not believe in “the divinity of the Holy Spirit.” The members of the council “excommunicated the heresiarch.”<sup>(20)</sup> In 431 A.D., the members of the third ecumenical council gathered in Ephesus and excommunicated Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople,

17. See Aziz S. Atiya, op. cit., pp. 28-33; Saad Qusah Saad, Amgaad al-'Asr al-Qibty (The Glories of the Coptic Period), Alexandria, Egypt: The Press of Don Bousku, pp. 113-134 (in Arabic); Edward Gibon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963), pp. 317-318.

18. Boulos Ayad Ayad, “Christian Unity and its Importance,” *Coptologia, Journal of Coptic Thought and Orthodox Spirituality*, Vol. XIII, 1993, p. 93.

19. See Fr. Yuhanna Manassa, *Tarikh el-Kanisah el-Qibtīyah (The History of the Coptic Church)* (Cairo: Mahabah Bookstore, 1993), pp. 191-201 (in Arabic).

20. Iris H. Elmasry, *Survey of the Coptic Church*, p. 10; Fr. Yuhanna Manassa, op. cit., pp. 201-203; Iris Habib Elmasry, *The Story of the Coptic Church* (Cairo: Dar el-Alam el-Arabi, Vol. 1, pp. 330-333 (in Arabic); Fr. Yustus el-Dewery, *Mugaz Tarikh el-Masihīyah (A Brief History of Christianity)* (Cairo: Malga el-aytam el-Qibti), pp. 227-280 (in Arabic).

who believed “that the Christ was two distinct persons: one divine and the other human; that each of these two acted independently of each other.”<sup>(21)</sup> Only the first three ecumenical councils were accepted by the Coptic Orthodox Church.<sup>(22)</sup>

The fourth council was held in 448 A.D. in Ephesus<sup>(23)</sup> because Eutyches who became an archimandrite of one of the monasteries in Constantinople, rejected the humanity of Christ. But during the council, he changed his opinion and accepted that “Christ is ‘the Word made flesh’,” which saved him from excommunication.<sup>(24)</sup> In 451 A.D., the fifth council took place in Chalcedon,<sup>(25)</sup> because of the “false accusations that Pope Discorus of the See of Alexandria was Eutychian, although he was not”.<sup>(26)</sup> Pope Discorus interpreted his faith to the members of the council, that his faith and the faith of the Alexandrian Fathers is the pure Orthodox faith of their ancestors; the council believed that “his orthodoxy was true indeed.”<sup>(27)</sup> During the meeting of this council, a strong conflict appeared among the different churches because of their creeds. After the council of Chalcedon, no other ecumenical councils were held.<sup>(28)</sup> Before and after this council, major gaps opened among these churches. “The first of the churches to be alienated was that of Egypt, then those of Antioch, Armenia, Ethiopia and India.”<sup>(29)</sup>

The classical and modern historians tell us that many of the Christians of Egypt, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, the United States, Central and South America, Canada, Australia, and Asia are following the same creed of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Many of Coptic Orthodox Churches were established in Egypt and other countries in the early centuries A.D. and have continued through the centuries until today.

“It is evident from the foregoing “story” that the Coptic Church is not a Church of the past alone, she is also a Church of the present: stretching across the generation from the moment of St. Mark founded Her to the present day. She has conserved the Legacy bequeathed to Her most carefully; at the same time, encouraging the endeavors of the human mind in its search after knowledge. This encouragement is clearly seen by the members of creative works still extant despite all the destructive forces.”<sup>(30)</sup>

21. Iris H. Elmasry, *Survey of the Coptic Church*, p. 11; Fr. Yuhanna Manassa, op. cit., pp. 256-257; Fr. Yustus el-Dewery,(Anba Isodorous), op. cit., pp. 483-495.
22. Iris H. Elmasry, *Survey of the Coptic Church*, p. 11.
23. Fr. Yustus el-Dewery,(Anba Isodorous), op. cit., pp. 496-510; Iris H. Elmasry, *The Story of the Coptic Church*, vol. 2, 4th ed., Cairo: The Karnak Press, 1983, p. 29.
24. Iris H. Elmasry, *Survey of the Coptic Church*, p. 13.
25. Fr. Yustus el-Dewery,(Anba Isodorous), op. cit., pp. 510-534. See also Fr. Tadros Malaty, *The Coptic Orthodox Church and Spirituality*, Vol. 2 (Ottawa: St. Mary Orthodox Church, 1986), pp. 41-55.
26. Iris H. Elmasry, *Survey of the Coptic Church*, p. 17.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
28. Boulos Ayad Ayad, op. cit., p. 96.
29. H. H. Pope Shenouda III, “*Christian Unity*,” *Coptic Church Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1985), pp. 4-8. On the subject in general see, Boulos Ayad Ayad, op. cit., pp. 93-100.
30. Iris H. Elmasry, *Introduction to the Coptic Church* (Cairo: Dar el Alam el Arabi, 1977), p. 70.

# ***DUALISM AND THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF SHENOUTE OF ATRIPE***

*Clinton E. Hammock\**

Shenoute has been described by his modern critics as harsh, violent, authoritarian, his spirituality as lacking in any mystical dimensions, and his theology as “Christ-less.”<sup>1</sup> Although some more recent studies have attempted to reverse this characterization,<sup>2</sup> there is no denying the abrasive aspects of Shenoute’s personality. These abrasive aspects of Shenoute’s personality can be related to his vision of Christianity and his Christian cosmic dualism (the struggle between Christ and Satan). This dualistic perspective is what legitimized and drove his acts of violence against pagan religion, Christian heretics, and his subordinate monks and nuns who failed to live up to his moral vision of the followers of Christ. Shenoute’s behavior was driven by more than just his abrasive personality. His personality, combined with a set of social and economic conditions, and his concern for the peasants that he saw as being under his pastoral care, allowed him to rise to a position of religious leadership as the abbot of the White Monastery, and that garnered him a prominent place in the history of the Coptic Church.

Shenoute’s dates are uncertain, but he probably died in 466 CE at the attributed age of 118. If so, then he was born in 348 CE.<sup>3</sup> Shenoute is said to have

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1. This characterization was made by Johannes Leipold, *Shenoute’s biographer in Schenute von Atripe und die entstehung des national-agyptischen christentums* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903). See also, Armand Veilleux, “Shenoute or the Pitfalls of Monasticism.” Preface to *Besa: The Life of Shenoute* by David N. Bell (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1983), v.
2. KY.: Moybray and Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 168-170
3. K. K. Kuhn, “Shenoute, Saint,” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 2131. For a discussion of Shenoute’s birth and death dates see Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, 7.



entered the White monastery at the age of 9.<sup>4</sup> He became a monk in 370-371 CE,<sup>5</sup> and the abbot of the White monastery, succeeding his maternal uncle Pjol, its founder and first abbot, in 385 CE.<sup>6</sup> Shenoute attended the council of Ephesus in 431 CE. Besa succeeded Shenoute as abbot around 466 CE after Shenoute's death, and later wrote his *Life of Shenoute*.

The way in which Besa remembers Shenoute is in stark contrast to Shenoute's own writings. For instance, Besa's *Life of Shenoute* provides little authentic biographical information, but instead narrates miracle stories to boost Shenoute's reputation as a wonder-worker and a religious hater of pagans. Besa portrays Shenoute as being routinely visited by heavenly messengers, who are characters from the Old and New Testaments, notably Christ himself, and many of the miracles attributed to Shenoute resemble the miracles of Christ, including several instances of feeding the hungry.<sup>7</sup> Shenoute is also credited with having influence over the flooding of the Nile, possessing the ability to know the future and read minds, and being miraculously transported through space in a luminous cloud. Shenoute is also frequently sought out for blessings and consultations by bishops, generals and emperors.

Shenoute's own writings include numerous didactic sermons that focus on God's wrath and punishment, Christ's judgment and retribution on the wicked, and the nature of the beyond, and also show that he was informed about the doctrinal disputes of his time such as Origenism and various Gnostic ideas.<sup>8</sup> This paper, drawing from both Shenoute's own writings and Besa's *Life of Shenoute*, will consider some of Shenoute's main themes: his cosmic dualism, the role of Christ and Satan in his cosmology, the issues of free will, obedience, and morality, and the punishment of sinners, heretics and pagans, and briefly comment on the social context of Shenoute's pastoral care.

### ***Shenoute's Cosmic Dualism***

Shenoute's cosmology revolves around the struggle between Christ and Satan that is part of God's divine purpose. As Shenoute informs us, "It is godlessness which he [Satan] has placed opposite the divinity of God.... It is not that [God] who will destroy him in the end cannot scatter him abroad as dust in his anger, but

4. David N. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Cistercian Studies no. 73 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1983), note 40, page 27.

5. Kuhn, 2131.

6. *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, 7-8. For Besa's fanciful story relating this event see sections #128-130, pages 78-79. Grillmeier provides evidence from Shenoute's writing to support Shenoute's attendance of the council.

7. This concern with the multiplying of food reveals an economic concern over its scarcity. See Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, sections #20, 27-28, 76, 138-143, 144-150, and 162.

8. Tito Orlandi, "Literature: Coptic," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya. (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1452.

it is [God's] desire to leave him be."<sup>9</sup> In Shenoute's vision, this cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan is a struggle for the salvation or damnation of human souls. For instance, he states "why do we not know that just as it is God's will that not a single soul among the works of his hands be destroyed, it is also Satan's will that not a single soul become steadfast or saved?"<sup>10</sup>

Satan was commonly believed to be a great angel that fell from heaven and led other angels into sin, and who became the great devil and the leader of the lesser demons.<sup>11</sup> It is Satan's previous existence as an angel that gives him the power to deceive human beings, and his role, along with the demons, is to work to distract the monk into sin. Satan, Shenoute saw as, particularly adept at deceiving pagans. Quoting from the apostle Paul, Shenoute says that "'Satan takes the form of an angel of light,'<sup>12</sup> so that he can mislead the simple with false light, as [indeed] he has led astray many. He has turned them aside to bring them to his delusions, especially the pagans."<sup>13</sup> Satan's role is to lead people into vice and impiety, and away from piety and virtue. Satan's work is to cause the person to become deluded and ignorant of Christ's salvation and which makes people foolish, senseless, and shameless. This lack of knowledge is what leaves the person defenseless against Satan and is what leads a person into sin. However, Christians need not be deceived because God has made provisions for revealing the truth to the saints through their ability to discern spirits. In this way, Satan's deceptive practices are revealed.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it was Christ who has made the Christian's struggle against Satan possible. This was the purpose of Christ coming into the world. According to Shenoute:

With his coming he destroyed the power of every demon, for like a righteous king he throws down his enemy in battle, he has brought him low and has told all those who belong to him to lay their hands on him, since he wants all of them to gain glory at the same time. Then he returns and takes off his head. In this way when the Lord Christ came, he destroyed the devil like an absolute monarch: his legs were cut off at his thighs, his arms at his shoulders, and [like-wise] the other limbs of his body: front and back, he smote them all. It is impossible for him to move, not even to raise himself or pursue a man. Only his breaths come and go, [and] these--that is, his thoughts--[Christ] has left him because he wants his sons and his soldiers and his servants and all who belong to him to lay their hands upon him--that is, to fight against his godless thoughts--so

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9. Harold Seymour Jaye, "A Homily of Shenoute of Atripe on Human Will and the Devil: Translation, Commentary, and Literary Analysis" (Ph.d. diss., Brandeis University, 1980), 25.

10. D. Brakke, "Shenoute: On Cleaving to Profitable Things," *Orientalia Louaniensia Periodica* 20 (1984): 125.

11. Jeffery Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 170.

12. 2 Cor 11:14.

13. David N. Bell, "Shenoute the Great: The Struggle with Satan," *Cistercian Studies* 21 (1986): 182.

14. Bell, "Shenoute the Great: The Struggle with Satan," 183.

that they will gain glory with him and also reign with him.<sup>15</sup>

As Shenoute's metaphor of Christ's work reveals, Satan is weakened, but not totally defeated or powerless. Satan is left with just enough power to oppose Christians, and to keep himself alive until Christ returns and permanently defeats him. In the meantime, Christians must continue to fight the weakened Satan because he can still pollute the Christian's mind, and cause the Christian to fall into sin. Individuals, who allow themselves to be polluted by Satan, and follow him into sin, will, when Christ returns as judge, be condemned along with Satan to hell.<sup>16</sup>

Christ, for Shenoute, is the perfect example to follow. Just as Christ fought Satan and weakened him, Christians must continue the fight against Satan. Because Christ weakened Satan, the Christian's fight against Satan is made possible.<sup>17</sup> It is the responsibility of the Christian to follow Christ's example in opposing the devil with the weapons that Christ has provided for this purpose. According to Shenoute, the Christian "will lift up against him these weapons and shields: the lifting up of their hands in righteous prayer, [thereby] slaying him and cutting him to pieces."<sup>18</sup> However, Satan cannot be entirely defeated by Christians, but only the Christians have been given the power to defeat Satan. Everybody else is condemned to the deception and ignorance brought on by Satan, and thus to punishment. This is because non-Christians do not have access to the weapons that Christ has provided. By not believing in Christ, non-Christians have left themselves defenseless, and have been conquered by Satan. This includes pagans, heretics and Jews.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, it is important for the Christian not only to struggle individually with Satan, but also to work to free others from the delusions caused by the demons, and bring them out of this demonic ignorance into the truth of Christ. Furthermore, for Christians there is a reward for their continuing violence against Satan, and the heretics and pagans that he controls. For Shenoute, the continuing struggle against Satan, by leading a life of piety and virtue, is the Christian activity that merits reward, and the purpose of Satan's continuing existence.

Thus God put up with the devil, in order that his righteous ones may receive glory. Because if there were no devil fighting against you there would be no crown for you to receive, nor would there be a separation between he who has conquered sin and he who has been conquered by sin, nor would there be a difference between the pious and the impious person, and between the pure and the impure.<sup>20</sup>

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15. Bell, "Shenoute the Great: The Struggle with Satan," 183.

16. David N. Bell, "Shenoute the Great and the Passion of Christ," *Cistercian Studies* 22 (1987): 297.

17. Bell, "Shenoute the Great and the Passion of Christ," 297.

18. Bell, "Shenoute the Great: The Struggle with Satan," 182.

19. Bell, "Shenoute the Great: The Struggle with Satan," 183.

20. Frederik Wisse, "The Naples Fragments of Shenoute's '*De certamine contra diabolum*,'" *Oriens Christianus*, eds. J. Assfalg and H. Kaufhold 75 (1991): 136.

At the end of time Christ will return and completely destroy Satan and then renew the earth and purify it of sin.<sup>21</sup> This final judgment will do more than destroy Satan; it will also be the Day of Reckoning for non-Christians. They will be judged and condemned to hell because they followed Satan into wicked deeds and impious words and rejected the truth of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Shenoute's main understanding of Christ is as the cosmic warrior and victor over Satan in the past, the teacher, illuminator, and suffering figure that the Christian can imitate in the present, and the final judge of human righteousness and sin in the future.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Christians are also Christ's warriors who fight against impiety and sin. What all this suggests that is relevant to Shenoute's dualism is that this ongoing conflict between Christians and Satan is continuous, and this provides Shenoute with the theological justification for his own religious violence. It also reflects the aggressive side of Shenoute's personality in the theme of Christ and Christians as violent warriors against evil.

### ***Shenoute's Teachings on Free Will and Living of the Righteous Life***

Shenoute's vision of the righteous life revolves around obedience to God. Shenoute contrasts good and bad people: "are not the people who are responsible for the existence of the wrath [of God] different from those for whom the kingdom is prepared?"<sup>24</sup> But living righteously is difficult. Shenoute had a negative estimate of the individual: "if we are not sin-loving people, why is evil so difficult for us to abandon? Unless a person works at it, he will not find the good, it will not come to him."<sup>25</sup> Shenoute, nevertheless, stressed the free will of humans to choose their path and that they deserve the consequences. For Shenoute, angels and demons offer people choices and make opposite demands on the person. The individual's behavior can be either good or evil,<sup>26</sup> and the person's status in the after-life depends upon the choices that the person made in life. Those people who had Christ with them in their earthy life will go to be with Christ in heaven after their death, and those who were with the devil in their earthy life, when they die, will go to be with Satan, and be punished with him in the fires of hell.<sup>27</sup> Those who are included among the damned are "every pagan and heretical race [who] will go

21. Bell, "Shenoute the Great: The Struggle with Satan," 184.

22. Bell, "Shenoute the Great and the Passion of Christ," 301-302.

23. Bell, "Shenoute the Great and the Passion of Christ," 291.

24. Brakke, 132.

25. Brakke, 132.

26. Janet Timbie, "Dualism and the Concept of Orthodoxy in the Thought of the Monks of Upper Egypt" (Ph.d. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1979), 145.

27. Brakke, 130.

down there, and not only every godless nation, but also those who perform impiety among the people who say, ‘We know God.’”<sup>28</sup> Christian heretics and pagans are damned because they did not put their trust in the right power, that of Christ. As Shenoute tells us, “for just as the person who trusts in the Lord and for whom the Lord is hope is truly blessed, so even more truly cursed are the people who trust in wood and stone because they are gods and who say about the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the other created things that they are their hope.”<sup>29</sup> These things are the false teachings of Satan.

The righteous life is a life lived in obedience to the “laws of God revealed in scripture.” Those who do not live in accordance with the laws of God are “like people who toppled huge stones from high on themselves, having broken their own bones and smashed the flesh of their bodies.”<sup>30</sup> For those who are not obedient, “they sin before the Lord and bring down upon themselves great curses from God and all the curses of the scripture.”<sup>31</sup> Consequently, Shenoute spends a great deal of time telling people what to do and what will happen to them if they don’t. Because people have free will, Satan cannot stop a person from truly repenting. If a person wishes “to renounce him and his impieties, he cannot restrain them, including even the sorcerers and enchanters and those who offered sacrifice to him and became slaves of all his deceit.”<sup>32</sup> Sin is behavior, a personal choice. According to Shenoute, “it is impossible for the devil to cause a man to sin unless [the man’s] will goes to meet the thought of the devil so he is joined with him.”<sup>33</sup> Thus for Shenoute, one side of human nature inclines toward sin, but humans also have free will, and Satan can only dominate those who yield to his influence.<sup>34</sup> Shenoute’s view of the human, however, tends toward the negative since for him “things contrary to our nature have been those easy to do, and things proper to our nature have been those difficult for us to do.”<sup>35</sup>

The monastic life in the White Monastery can provide an example of how Shenoute’s vision of the righteous life is intertwined with the Christian struggle for salvation against Satan. In his time, Shenoute gained a large monastic following and supervised a dramatic expansion of the population of the White monastery. According to the Arabic *Life of Shenoute*, the White monastery included 2,200 monks and 1,800 nuns.<sup>36</sup> The rules of the monastery were very strict and life

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28. Brakke, 129-130.

29. Brakke, 122-123.

30. Alla I. Elanskaja, *The Literary Coptic Manuscripts in the A.S. Pushkin State Fine Arts Museum in Moscow, Supp. to Vigiliæ Christianae*, eds. J. Den Boeft, R. Van Den Broek, A. F. J. Klijn, G. Quispel and J. C. M. Van Winden, vol. 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 298.

31. Elanskaja, 298.

32. Jaye, 24.

33. Jaye, 21-22.

34. Timbie, “Dualism and the Concept of Orthodoxy,” 130.

35. Jaye, 21.

36. Antoine Guillaumont, “Monasticism, Egyptian,” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1662-1663.

severely ascetic.<sup>37</sup> Every monk, before being admitted into the monastic community, was required to swear the following vow:

I vow before God in his holy place, the word which I have spoken with my mouth being my witness: I will not defile my body in any way; I will not steal; I will not bear false witness; I will not lie; I will not do anything deceitfully secretly. If I transgress what I have vowed, I will see the kingdom of heaven, but will not enter it. God, before whom I made the covenant, will destroy my soul and my body in the fiery Gehenna because I have transgressed the covenant I have made.<sup>38</sup>

The punitive nature of this vow illustrates the level of righteousness that Shenoute required of his subordinates. This vow links virtuous behavior to salvation. Failure to live up to the moral standard set forth in the vow was to result in the damnation of the monk. Furthermore, Shenoute insisted that all the monks and nuns learn to read so that they could understand scripture and its requirements and curses.<sup>39</sup> The monks and nuns were also required by Shenoute's monastic rules to meditate. That is to recite from memory passages from scripture, sometimes, whole books. It was through ascetic living that works of Satan were revealed to the mind. The ability to discern between evil and truth is developed in a regiment of strict piety and virtuous behavior, and spiritual illumination through the recitation of scripture. Physical beatings or expulsion from the monastic community were also used to enforce obedience and discipline, and could be used to punish violations of the monk's or nun's oath, or of Shenoute's monastic rules.<sup>40</sup> Physical punishment could be severe. One monk died after undergoing such a punishment.<sup>41</sup>

Work and prayer were an important part of the monks' and nuns' aspirations to salvation. Physical work was valued for moral and religious reasons because it was believed to provide mental stability,<sup>42</sup> and furthermore, strict obedience to Shenoute's rules that were thought to assure salvation.<sup>43</sup> In all asceticism had the purpose of destroying evil by punishing the body and its passions. This is because Shenoute saw evil deriving from the passions of the body. It was asceticism that destroyed the demon within. For Shenoute: "blessed are they whose flesh and stomach and mouth are dried up for Jesus' sake, and in whom all that is evil is even more than dried up. Blessed are they whose eyes have failed on account of thirst

37. Kuhn, 2131.

38. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, 9-10.

39. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, note 30, page 66.

40. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, 10-11.

41. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, 10. For examples of physical punishments see D. W. Young, *Coptic Manuscripts from the White Monastery: Works of Shenoute. Vol. 1. Textband*, Papyrussammlung der Osterreichischen Nationalbibliothek (Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer). n.s., forlge 22 (Vienna: Hollinek, 1993), 112-113.

42. Jean Gascou, "Monasteries, Economic Activities of," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1640.

43. Veilleux, x-xi.

for Jesus, because they have blinded the devil.”<sup>44</sup> The monks and nuns were expected to struggle with the devil, in thought and behavior. In this struggle the monks’ and nuns’ defense was their asceticism and faith, and the protection of Christ, which included the sign of the cross and the name of Christ.<sup>45</sup> Shenoute likens his monastic rules to a wall around a city over which a watch must be kept. If not, then “the barbarians will take the city, like one which has no defense.”<sup>46</sup> But if the wall is fortified with God’s teachings and ordinances then it is “not possible for sin or the devil to enter God’s assembly.”<sup>47</sup>

### ***Shenoute’s Religious Violence Against Pagans***

In his time, Shenoute became an important defender for poor Coptic Christians against Hellenized landowning pagan and their exploitation of the poor. These Hellenized Egyptians were supporters of the Hellenized old religion of Egypt.<sup>48</sup> Shenoute opposed them not only because of their exploitative behavior, but also because of their paganism. Shenoute linked economic exploitation with religious opposition.

It would not be surprising then if Shenoute’s Christianity encompassed both economic concerns in addition to spiritual concerns for piety and salvation. Besa’s *Life of Shenoute*, for instance, provides some examples of Shenoute using Christian miracles to assist the rural poor against exploitation. In Besa’s *Life*, Shenoute brought relief by destroying the land of pagan landowners when he caused an island to sink into the Nile.<sup>49</sup> This opposition to exploitation is also revealed in Shenoute’s hatred of pagan temples, against which he led attacks and removed and destroyed cult objects.<sup>50</sup> According to Besa, Shenoute even raided the private homes of pagans as well.<sup>51</sup> In one of Shenoute’s own writing, an “*open letter to a pagan notable*” translated by John Barns, Shenoute enumerates a list of complaints against a pagan landlord including accusations of theft, exploitation and oppression committed against Christian peasants,<sup>52</sup> and gives his defense of his and his monk’s raid, removal and destruction of pagan cult items from this pagan landlord’s house.<sup>53</sup>

44. Dimitri Cozby, “Abba Shenoute of Atripe: First Homily on the Patriarchs,” *Coptic Church Review* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 19.

45. Jeffery Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 166, 175-176.

46. Cozby, 19.

47. A. Shisha-Halevy, “Unpublished Shenoutiana in the British Library,” *Enchoria* 5 (1975): 101.

48. Janet Timbie, “The State of Research on the Career of Shenoute of Atripe,” in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, eds. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 267.

49. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, sections #85-86, pages 66-67.

50. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, sections #83-84, page 66.

51. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, sections #125-127, pages 77-78.

52. John Barns, “*Shenoute as a Historical Source*,” *Actes du Xe congres international de papyrologues: Varsovie-cracovie 3-9 septembre 1961* (1964): 158.

53. Barns, 151-159.

Shenoute was also very concerned about what he saw as idol worship by the pagans, and its corrupting influence on his Christian followers. His response to idol worship was aggressive. According to Shenoute, Satan owns the pagans, asserting that the pagans are physically possessed by the demons. According to Shenoute, "Satan reposes in every heathen, every heretic, and all those who perpetrate lawlessness with every sort of impurity, and he never gets enough of waylaying those who effect righteousness and every kind of good deed."<sup>54</sup> Satan takes control of pagans and heretics by seizing "these crowds of ungodly men...in their will, which he made a single one with his own. He mastered their hearts: he made them weak until he brought them under his yoke."<sup>55</sup> For Shenoute, the most dangerous demonic work is idol worship. Pagans were believed, by early Christians, to worship idols that were inhabited by demons that trick people into worshiping them by false miracles.<sup>56</sup> Shenoute's attacks on pagan temples were part of his concern over demons, and the Egyptian gods were seen as demons and thus adversaries.

In one of Shenoute's sermons, "On the idols of the village of Pneuieit,"<sup>57</sup> he responds to charges brought against him and other Christians, by the pagan priests of Pan, after he led an attack on a pagan temple there and confiscated the idols.<sup>58</sup> Shenoute provided a list of some of the items that he took from the temple:

"As for the pillaging that we are said to have done, look (and you will see) everything that we are keeping: the statue of Pan that we have whose shamefulness equals the hardness of their hearts, the sword with which they kill and destroy God's creation, the book full of magic, even their idols and the things offered to them, the vessels full of bread, all the first-fruits, the lampstand in front of them."<sup>59</sup>

This incident illustrates the meeting of Shenoute's aggressive personality with his demonology and his practical emphasis on morality and piety on a religious level. It also illustrates Shenoute's authority on behalf of his Christian followers against economic exploitation by pagans.

### ***Shenoute's Pastoral Care***

If Shenoute's letter to the pagan landowner at Panopolis, responding to the landowner's complaint against Shenoute's raid on the pagan religious objects in his house,<sup>60</sup> is an example of Shenoute's authoritarianism, it is also an example of

54. Young, 31.

55. Jaye, 29.

56. Timbie, "Dualism and the Concept of Orthodoxy," 127.

57. Timbie, "Dualism and the Concept of Orthodoxy," pages 261-265 for a translation of Shenoute's sermon "On the idols of Pneuieit (I and II)."

58. Frank R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization* C. 370-529, Vol. 2, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, eds. R. Van Den Broek, H. J. W. Drijvers and H. S. Versnel, vol. 115/2 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 209.

59. Timbie, "Dualism and the Concept of Orthodoxy," 264.

60. Barnes, 151-159.



Shenoute's pastoral care for Christian peasants in defending them against the thefts, exploitation and oppression that they suffer from.

David Frankfurter finds in this letter more than just a defense of his actions, but a rhetorical ploy on the part of Shenoute to convince the peasants to their religious loyalties. Frankfurter notes that scholars tend to assume that the scenario presented in this letter represents real social-economic tensions of the time, and gives an accurate historical portrayal of the situation of the impoverishment and exploitation of the native "Egyptians" by "Greek" overlords, in which these overlords are practitioners of paganism, and who force pagan worship on native Christian Egyptians as a sign of their hegemony.<sup>61</sup> He contends that this reading is inaccurate. He also rejects this reading because it characterizes Shenoute as contributing to nationalistic sentiments in order to galvanize "Egyptians" against "Greeks," and bring the peasants to Christianity by equating Egyptians with Christians, and opposing them to "Greek" pagan oppressors.<sup>62</sup>

Frankfurter disputes this reading, the reading that I have been following up to this point, by noting that Shenoute's monks were not exclusively "Egyptian" peasants, but also included urban and literate "Greeks," and that the social disparities that scholars perceive in this letter, did not in fact cut along ethnic, nationalistic or religious lines. Frankfurter suggests that:

Shenoute's 'social-economic' juxtaposition seem to have functioned as a rhetorical means of convincing a peasant audience of the appropriateness, indeed the protective power, of Christianity through identifying traditional [pagan] religion exclusively with the people who own the land and patronize the culture (and, to be sure, would occasionally oppress them). "Rich pagan" and "poor oppressed" are polarized in order that the audience might identify with the latter and thus choose as protectors not the former but rather Shenoute and his Christians.<sup>63</sup>

Frankfurter contends that Shenoute's opponents, the rich pagans, are actually the local benefactors of the community, and who supported pagan religious traditions that the peasants themselves attended and participated in. What these landowners supported were the religious rites and festival that addressed issues of health and safety, and agricultural fertility.<sup>64</sup> Shenoute's charge against the pagans is thus an attempt to offer a new kind of religious security to the peasants, and what one might conceive of as a form of pastoral care. This security was based on the Christian gospel, and consequently it threatened the established pattern of relationships between the landlords and the peasants, by demonizing the landlords, and by

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61. David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 77-78.

62. Frankfurter, 78.

63. Frankfurter, 78-80. Emphasis in the original.

64. Frankfurter, 81.

drawing attention to the “protector’s” exploitive activities. In this case, Shenoute’s activities were done with an eye toward developing a new form of counter-leadership that was to come from the Christian monasteries.<sup>65</sup> We can imagine that Shenoute sincerely believed that his monastic leadership of the peasants was an improvement to the peasant’s situation, and that it was in their best interest to come into a relationship with the true loving, but stern, God of Christ, and be liberated from the demonic influence of the demons and the pagans that they control. Shenoute’s sincere concern for his monks, and for the Egyptian peasants, can also be seen in Shenoute’s activities of feeding the hungry, and freeing captives and caring for them, such as is narrated in Besa’s *Life of Shenoute*.<sup>66</sup>

It is based on this view of Shenoute’s pastoral concern, aimed at the spiritual liberation of his followers from the demonic, that Aloys Grillmeier seeks to invalidate Johannes Leipoldt’s harsh judgment of Shenoute as having a “Christ-less” theology.<sup>67</sup> According to Grillmeier, “we are dealing not with a ‘Christ-less’ but, on the contrary, with an emphatically ‘Christocentric’ spirituality. It can be called ‘barren’ only if one does not look for the center and wealth of Shenoute’s piety and pastoral work.”<sup>68</sup> Even if we, like Leipoldt, find Shenoute’s personality to be aggressive and authoritarian, and find limitations in his Christology and see his monastic practice to be far too focused on the practice of piety and virtue, we cannot doubt Shenoute’s sincere concern for his monks and those whom he considers it his responsibility to care for. In Shenoute’s own words:

“Many times I have said, ‘Why then should any man or woman who enters these establishments not be saved, and (why) should we establish other (cloisters) which we would construct on their behalf when those who deserve all kinds of relief now would suffer on account of the unworthy?’

“I know, Jesus, that not only did you form the whole world for mankind’s sake, but you also gave your blood for those who live therein. And it is by this that we shall know it is no thanks to us when we shall have built ten thousand establishments dedicated to you. But it is this way that I should say it: O God, for whom do we toil? For whom do we care? For whom do we build houses? For whom do we dig wells and cisterns? For whom do we gather every bodily need? Things for food, clothes, oils, all the concerns pertaining to the ministry of our assembly, and not that having to do with (life on) the outside?

“The ministry to the poor is sheer rest, joy, comfort, and assurance, because to carry it on is a righteous deed and (because) God will not require us their souls.”<sup>69</sup>

65. Frankfurter, 81-82. Frankfurter does not think that Shenoute was successful in this attempt to persuade the peasants to re-align their allegiances.

66. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute*, sections #89-90, page 68.

67. Grillmeier, 168-170. Grillmeier uses Tito Orlandi’s reconstruction and translation of a Coptic work published under the title “A Catechesis Against Apocryphal Texts by Shenoute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi,” in which Shenoute combats Gnostic, Originist and Nestorian ideas to make this argument.

68. Grillmeier, 217; cf. Matt. 25: 31- 46.

69. Young, 36; cf. .Matt. 25: 31- 46.

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# ***THE MYSTERY OF THE AKHMIM-MARTYRS***

*Otto Meinardus, Ph.D.*

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The observant and attentive visitor to the Coptic Orthodox Churches of the various cities, towns and provinces in Egypt and to those in the regions of the diaspora must notice the recent widespread dissemination of relics. According to the information of the local clergy they belong either to the so-called Fayyum<sup>1</sup> or to the Akhmim-martyrs. They are normally kept in a small octagonal, cylindrical tube covered with some precious textile. They repose in the choir on a table or in a specially constructed reliquary.

Should the interested visitor inquire about the identity of those recent acquisitions, with all probability he would receive the standard reply: "They belong to the martyrs of the early persecutions, meaning those of the period of Diocletian and his colleague Maximian." In 284 A.D. Diocletian ascended the imperial throne, a date which corresponds to the beginning of the Coptic Era of the Martyrs (A.M.) The severe persecutions, however, did not arise until 303 when the emperor issued an edict against the open profession of the Christian faith.

What is the reason for the sudden interest in the relics of relatively unknown martyrs? Furthermore, what is the purpose for the dissemination of ecclesiastical reminiscences of events that are said to have occurred 1600 years ago? In an age in which the Western churches have practically abolished the veneration of the relics of their saints, the Coptic Church seems to experience a fascinating resuscitation of a medieval cult. What should be attained with this reflection upon a rather distant past?

History does repeat itself! It occurred in 1578 that the ancient Roman Via Salaria collapsed, thereby giving access to the famous Roman catacombs and the subsequent widespread export of relics of such notable persons whose names are even mentioned in the Epistles of St. Paul. Just as the discovery of the relics of the

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1. Meinardus, O., "The Enigma about the Coptic mummies of Naqlûn," Coptic Church Review 15, 3, 1994, 73-80.

Roman catacombs provided welcome spiritual support for the Tridentine Counter-Reformation, the discovery and almost global distribution of the relics of the Fayyum-and Akhmim Martyrs of 1989 and 1990 offered an additional “historical dimension” to the present renaissance of the Coptic Church.

### ***Akhmim, An Ancient Upper-Egyptian Christian Center***

According to a local tradition, Akhmim, the Panopolis of the Hellenistic period, was the oldest city of Egypt and was founded by Kush, the brother of Misraim (Gen 10:6.7). Both, local Coptic priests and laymen, assured me that on their flight to Egypt the Holy Family proceeded as far as Akhmim and found shelter in the Wadi leading to the Monastery of the Seven Mountains (*Dair as-saba 'at-gebel*) and the *bir al-ain*.<sup>2</sup> The beduins of the wadi insisted that Jesus had blessed the spring. Since that time they mix the water from the well of Zemzem (Mecca) with the water of this spring! Furthermore, the Apostle Thomas is said to have stopped there on his way from the Red Sea, returning from India. Here the Virgin Mary had appeared to him.<sup>3</sup>

During the first decades of the 4th century, Artemidorus served as bishop of Akhmim. His successor was the orthodox Bishop Arius of Akhmim. He approached St. Pachomius to establish monasteries in his diocese (346). Bishop Serapion of Akhmim occupied the see during the patriarchate of Theophilus (402-412) and Bishop Sabinus of Akhmim was one of the suffragan-bishops accompanying St. Cyril of Alexandria to the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431. Throughout these years there existed very close relations between the Archimandrite Shenuda of the White Monastery (*Dair al-Abiad*) on the westbank of the Nile and the hierarchs of Akhmim. Shenuda was the only prominent original writer in the dialect of Atripe or Saïdic. He also attended the Council at Ephesus and made himself remarkable by his violent bearing towards the Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople. In 451 he joined the Coptic Patriarch Dioscorus to the 4th Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon.

In 1731 the Franciscan Mission established the first Catholic monastery in Akhmim. Already fifteen years earlier 113 Coptic families had joined the Roman Catholic Church. In 1947 the Catholic Copts established the diocese of Thebes with the see of Sohag/Akhmim. Since 1955 the Catholic lay-order “The Grail” maintains a social center in Akhmim for the education of women in home-economics and weaving.

The Copts have in Akhmim (see of the metropolitan of Akhmim and Saqulta), four churches which are dedicated to St. Anthony, St. Damiana, the Holy Virgin and St. Mercurius (Abu 's-Saifain).

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2. Meinardus, O., “*Bitr al-'Ain, eine volkstümliche Kultstätte bei Akhmim*,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 34, 2, 1985, 183-186.

3. The Apostle Thomas should not be confused with St. Thomas the Anchorite of Shinshif, a contemporary of St. Shenuda.

## ***Akhmim, City of Ecclesiastical Exile***



***Entrance to the Church of  
the Martyrs***

Already in the 3rd century Panopolis (Akhmim) gained fame as a renowned place of exile for important ecclesiastical personages. Sabillius, the founder of the theological modalism - meaning that God had three “*prosopa*” or “*statures*” - denying the Orthodox teaching of the Holy Trinity, was anathematized by St. Dionysius of Alexandria (+264) (Euseb. *Eccl. hist.* VII, 6). He was exiled to Akhmim. According to Coptic tradition also the Patriarch Athanasius spent several months in exile in Akhmim (Bashons 7, May 15). When the Emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363) started to persecute the Christians and ordered the arrest of Athanasius, the Patriarch left Alexandria in October 362 and sailed on the Nile, narrowly escaping some over-zealous officials who were anxious to please the emperor. Finally he settled in Akhmim where he was

received with open rejoicings. After the death of Julian on June 20, 363, the new Emperor Jovian (363-364) requested Athanasius to return to Alexandria.

Following the excommunication of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople from 428-431, he was sent into exile. After being deposed from his patriarchal see in 431 on account of his ‘unorthodox’ mariological views, denying that the Virgin Mary was the God bearer (*theotokos*), he was first banished to Petra in Arabia and later to the Oasis of *al-Kharga*. He was exposed to further persecutions from the Archimandrite Shenuda of the White Monastery at Sohag and exiled to the Monastery of the Seven Mountains.(?) east of Akhmim. He died in the village of Psoumbeled near Akhmim in 451(?).



***The Relics of Sts. Dioscorus and  
Aesclepius Church of  
St. Shenuda old Cairo.***

### ***Akhmim, Center of Upper Egyptian Monasticism***

During the first period of Egyptian monasticism the movement grew in the Nile Valley on account of the ascetic zeal of the founding father Sts. Pachomius (+349) and Shenuda of Atripe (+466). In addition to the famous monasteries on the west bank of the Nile, the White and the Red monasteries west of Sohag, there existed in the 7th and 8th Centuries east of Akhmim the monasteries of Harpocrates (7th century), Christophorus (8th century) and Colluthus (7th century). Abû 'l-Makarim (13th century) mentions three monasteries, that of St. Pachomius at Barjanus, Abû Halbanah east of Akhmim and St. Paul. Al-Maqrizi (15th century) still refers to the Monastery of the Seven Mountains at the entrance to Seven Valleys and the Monastery of Sabrah, dedicated to St. Michael, but there is only one monk there.<sup>4</sup>

Today, there are eight monasteries east of Akhmim, some of them were recently reactivated. These monasteries are dedicated to the Martyrs, the Holy Virgin, St. Michael at as-Salamuni, St. Thomas at Sawamiah Sharq, St. Pachomius the Martyr, St. George (Dair al-Hadid), St. Bisada opposite of Minsha and the Seven Mountains at Bir al-'Ain.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Akhmim, City of the Martyrs***

The persecutions of the Christians during the reign of Diocletian and Maximian resulted in the largest number of martyrs. In Upper Egypt, they were carried out by the Governor Arianus who had come to Akhmim from Lycopolis (Asyut) to hunt for Christians in the provinces of Panopolis (Akhmim) and Antaioupolis (Qaw al-Kebir). His arrival in Akhmim is commemorated by the Copts on Kihak 30 (Jan 8). The Vatican recension of the Coptic synaxar for Tubeḥ 1 (Jan 9) mentions 8140 Christians who refused to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods and subsequently suffered martyrdom in Akhmim.<sup>6</sup> Whereas most of the Akhmim martyrs remained anonymous, some of them received special commemoration. Dioscorus and Aesclepius (Tubeḥ 1) were ascetics in the desert east of Akhmim. St. Michael appeared to them and ordered them to witness before Arianus. They were tortured and finally beheaded. Forty soldiers of the garrison including their captains Philemon and Akourius joined the saints in their martyrdom. Both, Ananias and Chuzi of Akhmim laid down their lives for Christ and are commemorated on Kihak 16 (Dec 25).

However, not only the Romans persecuted the Christians. Mercurius and Ephraem (Abib 30, Aug 6), natives of Akhmim, were monks in the Thebaid and suffered martyrdom during the reign of the Arian Emperor Constantius (337-361) because they upheld the orthodox faith. Menas the "new martyr" (Amshir 17, Feb

4. Timm, St., *TAVO* 1, 1984, 80-95.

5. Viaud, G., *Les Pèlerinages Coptes en Egypte*. Cairo, IFAO, 1979. 57-59.

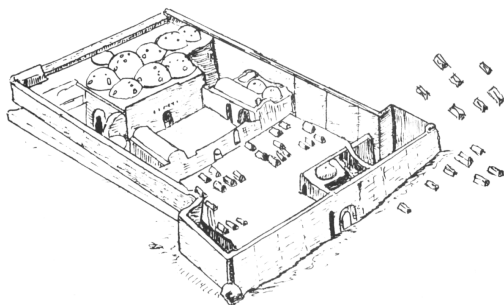
6. Mai, A., *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio*. Roma 1825 f.





*Chancel-Screen Altar of the  
Martyrs*

by another mud-brick wall. A passage leads from the inner court to the church\*, which extends to the eastern section of the outer wall. The altar-rooms and the nave are covered with altogether eight domes. Three domes cover the nave, five domes the four altars and the baptistery which occupies the southern section. Only the second altar from the north - dedicated to the Martyrs - has a wooden ciborium. The iconography of this ciborium corresponds to the altar-ciborium of the Church of St. Mercurius (*Abû's-Saifain*) in Akhmim and should be assigned to the 18th or 19th century.<sup>8</sup> Only the walls of the altar-room (*haikal*) of the Martyrs are decorated with several paintings of Coptic crosses with the shroud. These designs are undoubtedly copies of the famous 11th century apse-fresco of the Church of St. Shenuda in the White Monastery (*Dair al-Abiad*) west of Sohag. According to the infor-



*Monastery of the Martyrs Dain as-Shuhada  
Model, Coptic Art Exhibition, Essen, 1963*

7. This is not the 8th century Monastery of the Martyrs 6 km southwest of Esna.

8. Meinardus, O., "Ein Oberägyptisches Altarziborium," *Thiasos ton Mouson*, Fschr. Fink, Köln 1984, 159-164.

\*Picture on page 134.

24) lived in the 7th cent. as a hermit near one of the monasteries east of Akhmim. He went to Hermopolis Magna (al-Ashmunain) where the Arabs killed him.

### *The Monastery of the Martyrs*

The Monastery of the Martyrs (*Dair as-Shuhada'*) is situated on an elevation at the edge of the desert east of al-Hawawish, 6 km northeast of Akhmim. On the desert ridge there are three monasteries, the northern one near as-Salamuni is dedicated to the Angel Michael, the central one to the Martyrs and the southern monastery to the Holy Virgin.<sup>7</sup>

A wall, built of mud-bricks about 3 m high, encloses the Monastery of the Martyrs. Upon entry through the western gate one reaches an extensive outer courtyard with 24 tombs of notable citizens of Akhmim and al-Hawawish.

The inner court is separated from the outer court

mation of the local clergy the altars are dedicated from the north to south to St. George, the Martyrs, the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Michael.

The present buildings date to the 18th/19th century. This is substantiated by the iconographical and calligraphic testimonies on the walls of the altar-rooms. The chancel-screen of the altar of the Martyrs has an inlaid Coptic text (18th/19th century). "Be greeted church, thou mansion of angels." In 1740 (?) Richard Pococke mentioned that the monastery was inhabited.<sup>9</sup> In 1889, so U.Bouriant, only one priest lived in the monastery.<sup>10</sup> In 1904, the famous copy of the *Book of Proverbs*, the earliest complete papyrus text in the Akhmimic dialect (Berol. orient. oct 98) was discovered in this monastery. This monastery is not to be identified with the 15th century Church of *Asutir* (*Soter*, Savior), in Akhmim, which according to al-Maqrizi (15th century) was also known by the name of the martyrs.

The monastery is built within a large necropolis.<sup>11</sup> Many tombs were desecrated and plundered. Obviously they belong to various periods. This necropolis provided the large quantity of Coptic textiles which are exhibited in the art-collections of Europe and America. Among these are, for instance, the famous 8th/9th century orbiculi with the history of the Old Testament Patriarch Joseph (Gen. 37, 9-36) of the Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Paris and the Puchkine Museum, Moscow.

### *The Necropolis east of Akhmim*

According to the statement by Abuna Ghobrial al-Antuni of the Monastery of the Martyrs, a large number of mummies were discovered in March 1990 as they were preparing an olive-yard near the monastery.<sup>12</sup> In the process of clearing the tombs, remains of mummies - supposedly to be Christian martyrs - were unearthed and subsequently dispatched to the archbishopric in Akhmim and from there to numerous dioceses and parishes for veneration.

The modern history of this necropolis begins with the reports about this vast burial-site by such European travellers as Paul Lucas (1714) Richard Pococke (1740), W.G. Browne (1797), M. Saint-Gènis (1798), N. l'Hôte (1839), etc. Their impressions of the necropolis are certainly informative.

It was in March 1884 that G. Maspero and Schiaparelli entrusted the excavations of the necropolis east of Akhmim to the Reis Chalib of Qurna (Thebes) who engaged for the actual work of digging the local soldiery. Moreover, a number of licenses for digging in the necropolis were given to certain citizens of Akhmim. Maspero records the great success that in a short time as many as 8,000-10,000 mummies were unearthed "*mais la plupart sans valeur.*" Many mummies were

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9. Pococke, R., *Description of the East*. London 1743, 78.

10. Bouriant, U., "Notes de Voyage, 3: Le Rocher de la Vallée d'Akhmini," *Recueil de Travaux* 11, 1889, 145-149.

11. According to Baedecker, K., *Agypten und der Sudan*. Leipzig 1928, 222, the tombs belong to the 5th/15th century.

12. Mutraniya Beni Suef, Qummus Lûgâ al-Antûnî, preface by Anbâ Mattaus: *The Akhmim Martyrs*. Beni Suef 1990.

subsequently sold to the Egyptian Railway as fuel for the engines, others were purchased by American paper-mills. At least during the years 1884-1888 the necropolis was thoroughly despoiled. In 1889, U. Bouriant described the devastations and destructions: "*Aujourd'hui c'est une véritable pillage qu'il est impossible de réprimer. Tout est bouleversé, arraché, brisé...la nécropole copte, c'est une nécropole finie...*" In 1895 R. Forrer visited the necropolis of Dair as-Shuhada' at al-Hawawich. "As far as you can see, there are black holes, cavities, where tombs were opened, other black spots are bodies, mummies that were robbed of their textiles...everywhere the necropolis has been systematically plundered (Reisebriefe, 30 f).

There is no doubt that here and there some mummies and fragments of bones escaped the search of the late 19th century "excavators." The history of the plunder of the necropolis is described in detail by Klaus P. Kuhlmann of the German Archeological Institute in Cairo.<sup>13</sup> It would be advisable for the members of the Reverend clergy of the diocese of Akhmim to consult this standard study on the tombs of Akhmim that produced the relics of the "Akhmim martyrs."

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13. Kuhlmann, Klaus P., *Materialien zur Archäologie und Geschichte des Raumes von Achmim*. Mainz 1983.

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# ***REVIEW ARTICLE: HENRI NOUWEN***

*John Watson*

Fr. Henri Nouwen (*born January 24, 1932; died September 21, 1996*), was a friend and admirer of the Monastery of Saint Macarius in the Wadi Natroun and of its spiritual father, Abouna Matta el-Miskin. Fr. Nouwen once observed that the “Western world must listen to this penetrating message coming to us from the Egyptian Desert”. (*Foreword to the Communion of Love*, St Vladimir’s Press, Crestwood 1984). In the same essay he said “Fr. Matta’s radical God-centredness stands in contradiction to our pervasive human-centredness. All that Father Matta says is guided by the question: ‘How do I make God the centre of my life?’...In our society - with its emphasis on the personal and interpersonal and its interest in emotions, passions, and feelings - Father Matta’s radical God-centredness comes as a shock which wakes us up from a long dream”. Fr. Nouwen was an authentic spiritual director and teacher, and observed that the Coptic teacher was a “very perceptive observer of human behaviour. He knows what goes on in the human heart”. Very few Western Christians know enough, especially enough about the Copts, to comment in this way. Fr. Henri was a quite exceptional person with a rich, all-inclusive response to all that is authentically spiritual and Christian.

The Coptic Church Review is an appropriate place to comment briefly upon two posthumous publications from the pen of Fr. Henri J.M. Nouwen. *Sabbatical Journey*:

## ***The Diary of his Final Year***

*By Henri J.M. Nouwen ISBN 0-232-52296-0, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998. Sterling £9.95 pp. xii x 226.*

In the year before his death, Fr. Henri was given a sabbatical from l’Arche Daybreak Community, Toronto. He had earlier left a highly regarded academic career to share his life with people with mental disabilities at l’Arche. During that year, Fr. Henri kept a journal. It has become *Sabbatical Journey*, his last book.

During the sabbatical, one of the members called Adam Arnett dies. It is February. Fr. Henri returns quickly for the Requiem. Some time later in May he writes about Adam in his journal: “It is so clear to me that Adam’s story is the story of God, and it needs to be told. Every aspect of Adam’s life speaks about God’s

way of loving. Adam's light, Adam's personality, Adam's hiddenness, Adam's silence, Adam's disabilities, Adam's suffering, and Adam's healing presence - they all reveal the mystery of strength and weakness and power in vulnerability. Writing about Adam gives me energy and New Hope. Even my deep anguish lingering around the surface of my busy life is somewhat alleviated in the writing. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to Adam". The journal contains many comparable passages of intense depth and beauty.

Henri's great love for life and for God is expressed by his great devotion to the daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist, reminding the writer so forcibly of the same passion in the life of Abba Kyrillos the Sixth. Fr. Henri was a priest gifted with the ability to make connections between social issues, political events, literature, the arts, the Scriptures and the Liturgy in writing that is pellucid and pure. His brief but incisive comments on one great painter are characteristic and convincing: "I have always greatly admired the work of the American painter Edward Hopper. But I have equally disliked it. As much as I would desire to have a real van Gogh in my room, I would fear having a real Hopper. The light in Hopper's painting is brilliant, but that light has no warmth. Everything in his work, it seems to me, speaks of alienation, separation, and distance. There is no intimacy, only immense loneliness".

### ***Beauty of the Beloved: a Henri J.M. Nouwen Anthology***

*Edited by Robert A. Jonas ISBN 0-232-52301-0, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999. Sterling £8.95 pp. x x 211.*

For those who do not have the time to read Fr. Nouwen's books - there are more than forty in all - here is a beautiful anthology of his writings, collected by Robert Jonas the Director of the Empty Bell contemplative centre in Watertown, Massachusetts. A psychotherapist, spiritual director and retreat leader, Jonas was a close friend to Fr. Nouwen and offers us words that throw light on the priest's personality, and perhaps explain why he has helped so many of us in our lives. "He courageously stood with one foot in the shadow of self-rejection and one foot in the daylight of God's love. We know that he stood there for all of us, articulating so simply and beautifully what that wild, dangerous territory between the human and the divine looks like...somehow to us the effect of his ever-present accompanying shadow was to draw attention to the Light in which he walked."

This is an anthology overflowing with insights. One, which has a special appeal to all of us who try to write, is selected as representative and sharp: "When I have to write an article and face a white, empty sheet of paper, I nearly have to tie myself to the chair to keep me from consulting one more book before putting my own words on paper. And after a busy day when I am alone and free, I have to fight the urge not to make one more trip to the mailbox, one more phone call, on one more visit to a friend who will entertain me for the last few hours of the day. And when I think of the day, I sometimes wonder if the educational enterprise...and

examinations have in fact become one big distraction, once in awhile entertaining, but mostly preventing us from facing our lonely self, which is our main source of search and research”.

Henri wrote in a clear and clean prose style. He struggled to be simple, but the intellectually gifted and the politically powerful were drawn to him. Hillary Rodham Clinton, the First Lady in the USA, has said that Fr. Nouwen's *Return of the Prodigal Son* (CCR Fall 1993) is her principal spiritual reading. While Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago gratefully received Henri's spiritual direction as he prepared for his death from cancer. His life and his words touched many of us who did not know this priest.

The books of Fr. Henri have been reviewed before in this journal, and this reviewer will miss him. May he rest in peace, and rise in glory.

## ***BOOK REVIEWS***

### ***Guirguis the Torchbearer***

*By Iris Habib El-Masri. Introduced by Bishop Youssef of Southern USA, 1999, 151 pp. 117, \$ 5.00 (Hardcover). To be ordered from: Dora Elmasri, 9 Clubhouse Lane, Wayland, MA 01778-3801.*

This is a historical novel that describes the life of the Coptic Christians a century after the Arab conquest of Egypt. The author Iris Habib El-Masri (1910- 1994) is known for her '*Story of the Coptic Church*', the first comprehensive book on Coptic history that follows a modern historical approach. This new book, published posthumously, is a historical novel that describes the life of the Copts a century after the Arab conquest of Egypt. The events of this romance happened during the reign of Marwan II, the last of the Ommiad Caliphs, who ruled the Islamic Empire from Damascus. The author describes all aspects of the daily life of the Egyptians during that era, giving a vivid picture of the culture and the life of the Coptic family in the eighth century. She describes the Church life and prayers, with examples of the kind love of the Church leaders toward their flock, to the degree of sacrificing their liberty for their sake. During the Coptic revolt in that era, the story relates how the clergy gave their Christian advice to the military leadership, without trying to force their own personal views. A bishop had no trouble hiding a Coptic girl in his own home after the ruler tried to rape her.

### ***Women Officeholders in Early Christianity***

By Ute Eisen. Translated by Linda Mahoney. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000. Pp. 322. \$ 49. 95 (paperback). ISBN 0814-5950-0

This is a scholarly study with many archeological and historical evidence in support of the claim that certain women in the first few Christian centuries have attained leadership and held positions of authority in the early Church. These included prophets, teachers, deacons, widows and other Church leaders. The book is provided with a 69-page bibliography, and three indices for epigraphical and papyrus sources, ancient literature, and modern authors.

### ***Coptic Language Analysis***

By Monir Barsoum Raphael. Published by Copts in Chicago (P. O. Box 408328, Chicago, IL 60640).

Part I *The Eucharistic Liturgy of St. Basil*, 1994. pp. 148. \$20.00.

Part II *Liturgy of the Catechumens*, 1995. pp. 66. \$8.00.

Part III *Raising of Incense*, 1996.. pp. 144. \$10.00.

Parts IV & V *St Gregory and St. Cyril Liturgies*, 1998. pp.339. \$20.00. ISBN 0-9644158-3-6.

Part VI *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, 1999. Pp.185. \$10.00. ISBN 0-9644158-4-4.

Each volume contains the whole text of the Gospel or Liturgy in three columns-Coptic, English and Arabic, with a grammatical analysis of each Coptic and Greek loan word used. This series of books is of great value for seminarians and young Copts who want to understand their liturgy and their original language, as well as for liturgical and scriptural scholars and students of Bohairic Coptic..

### ***Coptologia, volume XVI.***

Pp 112 (paper), \$8.50 (US), \$10 (Canada), \$12 (overseas). Edited by Professor Fayek Ishac. Published by St. Mark's Foundation, 21106 South Woodland Road, Shaker Heights, OH, 44122.

With this new 2000 volume Coptologia has become associated with St. Mark Foundation and St Shenouda Society for Coptic Historical Studies. Topics discussed in this volume are *St. Mark the Apostle* by H. H. Pope Shenouda III, *Tradition* by Bishop Gregorios, *The Kingdom of God* by Dr. Noshi Abdel-Sheheed, *The Evolution of the Coptic Language* by Fr. Shenouda Maher, and *The Second Coming* by Bishop Gregorios. There are two articles by the editor-*The Clementine Connaissance* and *Saint Discorus*, beside a review article on Meinardus' *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*.

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\* Please correct the page numbering of the summer issue; it should start by page 33 instead of 97.

# 2001 CALENDAR OF FASTS AND FEASTS

\* *THE SEVEN MAJOR FEASTS OF OUR LORD*

\*\* *The Seven Minor Feasts of Our Lord*

\*\*\* Feasts of Virgin Mary

\*\*\*\* Fasts

\*January 7 - *CHRISTMAS*

\*\*January 14 - *Circumcision of Our Lord*

\*\*\*January 18 - *Paramoni (1)*

\*January 19 - *EPIPHANY*

\*\*January 21 - *First Miracle of Our Lord at Cana*

\*\*\*January 29 - *Dormition of Virgin Mary*

\*\*\*\*February 5 - *Fast of Nineveh (3)*

\*\*February 15 - *Entrance of Our Lord into the Temple*

\*\*\*\*February 19 - *Great Lent (55)*

March 19 - *Feast of the Cross*

\*\*\*April 2 - *Apparition of the Virgin at Zeitoun in 1968*

\*April 7 - *ANNUNCIATION*

\*April 8 - *ENTRANCE OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM (PALM SUNDAY)*

\*\*April 12 - *Holy Thursday*

\*April 15 - *EASTER*

\*\*April 22 - *St. Thomas' Sunday*

\*\*\*May 9 - *Birth of Virgin Mary*

\*May 24 - *ASCENSION*

\*\*June 1 - *Entrance of Our Lord into Egypt*

\*June 3 - *PENTECOST*

\*\*\*\*June 4 - *Apostles' Fast (38)*

July 12 - *Martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul*

\*\*\*\*August 7 - *Fast of the Virgin (15)*

\*\*August 19 - *Transfiguration of Our Lord*

\*\*\*August 22 - *Assumption of the Body of Virgin Mary*

September 11 - *New Year's Day (Feast of the Martyrs)*

September 27 - *Feast of the Cross*

\*\*\*\*November 25 - *Christmas Fast (43)*

\*\*\*December 12 - *Presentation of Virgin Mary into the Temple*