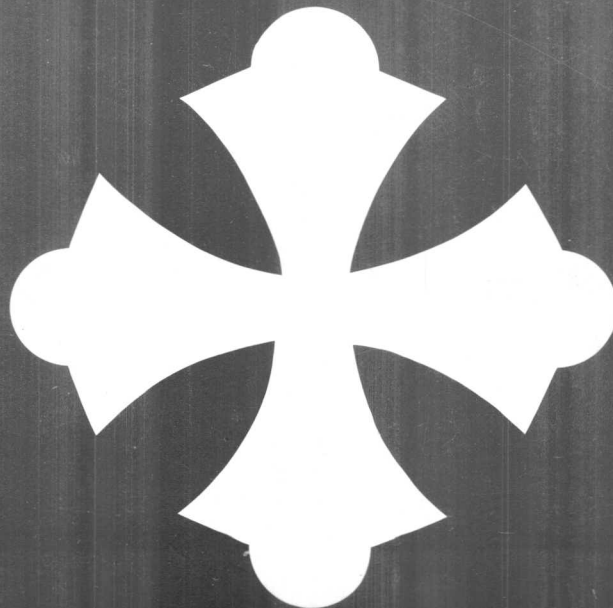


COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

Volume 2, Number 1 Spring 1981

- ★ **The Coptic Church Today**
Bishop Antonious Markos
- ★ **The Martyrdom of St. Peter,**
Archbishop of Alexandria
Dr. Getatchew Haile
- ★ **New Section:**
Currents in Coptic Church Studies



Society of Coptic Church Studies

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

From his mission field in Africa, *His Grace Bishop Antonious Markos* sent us the leading article of this issue. He introduced it saying,

"I hope for the success of the Journal, because it really expresses a new aspect dealt with in depth, research and a new vision. Since we started the mission work in Africa, this question has been recurring to me: ***Is The Coptic Church Today - A Shepherding or a Proclaiming Church?*** . . . After many centuries of pastoral service, did our church forget the proclaiming work? Is she only responsible for serving the Copts or also for proclaiming to the world the good news, with her tradition, spirituality and apostolicity?"

In "***The Martyrdom of St. Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria***", Dr. Getatchew Haile introduces and translates a rare manuscript that deals with the final days of this Pope. It is one of about 7,500 Ethiopian manuscripts that have been microfilmed by "Hill Monastic Manuscript Library," Collegeville, Minnesota. We thank Dr. Haile, who is cataloguer of Oriental Manuscripts at the Library, as well as the Society of the Bollandistes for allowing us to reproduce the article from "Analecta Bollandiana" (Tome 98 - Fasc. 1-2, 1980). We are happy to publish this important document in the United States, not only for the light it throws on the life and martyrdom of Pope Peter I, but also because it stresses various aspects of early Church life and hierarchy.

"***The Holy Fast and its Desirable Fruits***" is a summary of a sermon given by Fr. Matta El-Meskeen at St. Macarius Church in the Monastery named after the saint in the desert of Scetis. It is translated from Markos Monthly Review (April, 1973). This article is an invitation to take the spiritual life seriously during the Lent season. It discusses how to encounter ourselves and our Lord, during the wilderness pilgrimage with Him.

In "***A Spiritual Leader***", Father Tadros Malaty writes about his personal experience with a contemporary saint, who has been known to many of us, "***Father Bishoi Kamel***." It is no secret to say that Coptic Church Review is a fruit of his service. He planted its seed during his visits to the United States. With his inspiration, the Journal started; on the day of his first anniversary the first issue appeared; and although we can no more see him, yet we feel him working in the preparation of every issue. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The heavenly work of Father Bishoi is only in its beginning, and it is too early to predict its outcome. But during his short life on earth, he left a wealth of spiritually and theologically profound teaching, "and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

“Resurrection Witnesses in the Writings of the Church Fathers” is our article for Easter. With every Father looking at the biblical events of the Resurrection of Christ from a different angle, we are left with an immortal treasury of meditations and theological conclusions.

Currents in Coptic Church Studies

The appearance of Coptic Church Review one year ago was a breakthrough in the Patristic and Coptic studies available to the general reader in the English language. With the second volume, the Journal has started a new section, consisting of one or more articles in every issue, that reviews to the English speaking world the Coptic Church Studies available in other languages. In this issue the new section starts by presenting one of the important works of *His Holiness Pope Shenouda III*, “*Mark the Apostle*”; and “*Life of A Contemporary Saint: Father Abd-el-Messih of St. Macarius*,” written in Arabic by his spiritual son, *His Grace Bishop Mina of Girga*. Among the books to be presented in the forthcoming issues are:

- “Salvation in the Orthodox Concept” - by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.
- “Spiritual Values in the Doctrines and Rites of the Orthodox Church” - by His Grace Anba Gregorios - bishop for Higher Theological Studies in the Coptic Church.
- “The Crucified Jesus” - by Father Manasseh Youhanna.
- “Orthodox Life of Prayer” and “Eucharist and Liturgy” by Father Matta el-Meskeen.
- “The Seven Sacraments of the Church” - by the late Archdeacon Habib Guirgis.
- “The Didascalia” - a critical edition, introduced and commented on by Dr. William Soliman Kelada.

Editor

THE COPTIC CHURCH TODAY

A Shepherding or Proclaiming Church?

by His Grace Bishop Antonious Markos

"We thought that Egypt is in heaven and not on earth." Over ten million African Christians made this comment upon hearing the ancient, original, Apostolic Christianity which existed in Egypt since the first century.

"Saint Mark is our father and Alexandria is our mother." Over eleven million Ethiopian Christians presently believe and teach this, and they add, "Abba Salama is the revealer of the light." Abba Salama¹ was the first missionary Bishop to Ethiopia, ordained by Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, the twentieth successor of Saint Mark.

"We are thrilled to hear from your teaching that the Egypt mentioned in the Bible is a true land of our continent of Africa; we always thought that it was a heavenly, spiritual place." "Is it true that our Lord Jesus found refuge in our land of Africa? What a blessing!" Such is the reaction of Africans whom we visited in sixteen African countries in the last five years, while explaining to the majority of them for the first time in history about the existence of original African Christianity. And a vigorous clapping of hands from thousands gathered in church meetings around Lake Victoria, greets the realization that, "the Lord Jesus Christ while in Egypt during his childhood drank from your water, ate of your food, and found warmth and welcome among African Egyptians." A similar response is given by the inhabitants of the town of Kisumu on the shore of Lake Victoria when Coptic monks tell them how the river Nile receives its water from Lake Victoria. These Africans are also extremely interested in any information concerning the African Apostle and Evangelist, who wrote the first gospel. Saint Mark is heralded when the facts of his birth, evangelism, establishment of the first Christian church in Africa, and martyrdom are understood.

SAINT MARK THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

Saint Mark, a humble, self-denying Apostle, came to his birthplace, Egypt, and other areas of Africa to spread a gospel and establish a Church which could spread, grow deeper, proclaim, preach and shepherd the flock of Christ. Saint Mark's humble spirit spread in the Church and challenged the ages, perhaps explaining the African response, "Why did we not hear about the Church before, and why was it hidden?"

In obedience to his Master, this simple, meek Apostle came to Egypt without silver, gold or copper in his purse, and with worn-out sandals. "Freely ye have received; freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes nor yet staves . . ." (Mt. 10:8-10) While having his sandals mended, St. Mark performed his first healing miracle and preached the name and power of Christ the Lord to the cobbler working on his sandals. We give a similar answer today to those who ask if the Coptic Church converts people by offering gifts or material attractions, or promises of worldly things. Saint Mark's meekness and humble spirit made his sweet teaching the only attraction to his message, proven by the power of performed miracles, which was given to this meek servant by the Holy Spirit. Saint Mark worked very hard to proclaim the gospel of Christ, gaining millions of converts. He then turned to the task of shepherding his flock.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Saint Mark started with a proclaiming (Missionary) Church, and maintained his work with a shepherding church. To accomplish this feat he ordained the first Bishop of Alexandria, Anianus, three priests, and seven deacons. It must have taken him a long time to convert, baptize, teach, train and then ordain these shepherds of the flock. Does this mean that the Church, which continued after Saint Mark, became a shepherding church or did it continue to be a proclaiming church?

History differs in the date of the arrival of Saint Mark to Africa. Some date his arrival at 61 A.D., while others date it at 55 A.D. and 43 A.D. The writer agrees with the early date, (43 A.D.) because of the mission and work of St. Mark and the inability of his being able to perform it adequately in seven years, as his date of martyrdom is 68 A.D. St. Mark came into Africa knowing that the excellency of his power was of God, and not himself. He considered himself as an earthen vessel, who planted an active living seed in fertile soil. He stood alone facing all the religions, idols and philosophies which were prominent in Alexandria, and by God's grace and wisdom conquered all of them.

Many of these same ideologies are still in existence in present-day Africa, but the spiritual soil in Africa today is the spiritual African man who is waiting for the true seed to be planted in his heart, which will produce fruit, thirty, sixty and one hundred fold. We pray to our Almighty God that He may give His African servants the same Apostolic spirit which worked with Saint Mark and gave his ministry success against all idols and ideologies.

FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

Led by the Spirit of truth and comfort, St. Mark came to fulfill the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah, given nearly 750 years before his arrival in Alexandria. "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they

shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it." (Isaiah 19:19-21.)

A MISSIONARY CHURCH

Ever since the days of St. Mark, and continuing for the last twenty centuries the Egyptians remained true to their allegiance to Christ as Lord. The first Altar established by St. Mark multiplied into thousands of Altars, where sacrifices and oblations are still offered today as they have been offered over the centuries.

St. Mark came to reach those who were unreached, to proclaim the gospel among the Gentiles, strangers from the fold of Christ. Through twenty-five years of service he labored at his task, until his martyrdom in 68 A.D. The Church in Alexandria then took over his Apostleship and continued the missionary church to this present day. The spirit of St. Mark's missionary responsibility was continued by proclaiming the gospel, while simultaneously tending the flock of God. Many of the activities and achievements in the mission field of this church were hidden until they were discovered by modern day historians and scholars. A few examples of the accomplishments of the Church follow:

1. The Catechetical School established by St. Mark in Alexandria was one of the first schools to convert and teach non-Christians, and deepen their understanding of Christian doctrine.
2. An emphasis on mission work produced a quick spread of Christianity from Alexandria to all of Egypt.
3. The spread of Christianity to North Africa established the church in Pentapolis with millions of converts and produced St. Augustine, and Tertellian, who are well known in the universal Church.
4. The spreading of Christianity in Nubia where Christians, churches and monasteries existed until the 15th and 16th centuries.
5. The spreading of Christianity to Ethiopia revealed unexpected gains when many of the original Coptic manuscripts, which were lost, were discovered in Ethiopian translations.²
6. Coptic monks from St. Mina's Monastery preached Christianity in Ireland in the early centuries. While lecturing in Melbourne University on the history of the Coptic Church, and mentioning this part of its history, one of the attendants verified my statement by indicating that the town of Belimin, near Belfast, was named after the monks of St. Mina who lived, preached, and were buried in that town.

7. The Theban Legion recruited in Upper Egypt (Luxor) consisted of Christians. Emperor Augustus Maximian Hercluis in A.D. 287 brought this legion to the Rhone above Lake Geneva in Switzerland to fight against his enemies. When the leader of the legion, St. Maurice, and the 6,600 men in his legion were asked to offer sacrifices to the gods, they refused and proclaimed that they were the soldiers of Herclius, but also servants of the one true God. They acknowledged obedience and military service as a requirement, but would not renounce their Creator, Master and Savior. They further proclaimed that they would be obedient in all things not against His law, but must remain true to the first oath given to God. They continued to proclaim the gospel in Switzerland until they were all martyred by the king's soldiers. In remembrance to this Saint and his men, the town of Saint Maurice bears his name, and a portrait of three Egyptian young men, carrying their heads in their hands, can be seen today in the Grossmunster Abbey in Zurich. The same picture is carried on the stamp of Zurich County.
8. St. Verena, a young female nurse and native of Garagoz, who came with the Theban Legion, found herself alone after the martyrdom of the legion members. She meditated on the strange circumstances that brought her so far from her native land, and realized that God must have a mission for her teaching the people among whom she lived. She remained all her life in Switzerland, educating the people in the truths of Christian doctrine, while teaching them proper methods of health and hygiene. To this day an icon of this saint exists, showing her holding a water jug in one hand and a comb in the other.

The mission work done by Saint Verena has not been forgotten as till this day a church stands in her name in the town of Soleure, and the Benedictine monastery in Zurich is named after her.

A CHALLENGING QUESTION FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

Such examples are not given to indicate an emphasis upon the quantitative growth of the Church, but to show how seriously the early Fathers of the Church considered the mission of the Church, and the depth of spirit and commitment from its members.

By looking at the past history of the Coptic Church, we can plainly see the hand of God in its growth. The future of the Coptic Church is also in the hands of God. We can see a divine plan being prepared by God in which we are all tools and instruments to fulfill his wish, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:4)

Upon hearing of the establishment of the 21st Coptic church in the U.S.A., we must ask anew what is God's plan in the existence and growth of the Coptic Church in North America, and what are our duties towards the communities in which we live. Should our Church be a shepherding church, tending the flock only, or a missionary church, completing the work of Saint Mark, and earning the right to be called his sons and daughters? The same question can be asked of our nine churches in Australia, seven in Germany and those spreading in European cities, the Middle East, the Gulf, and in black Africa: Kenya, Zaire, and Nigeria. Our presence in all these countries should be a witness to the name of Christ, not only among our Coptic congregations, but also as a representation to the masses of the original, true, Apostolic Christianity designed by our Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Our Coptic monastery near Frankfort, Germany is frequently visited by Europeans, who come looking for the seekers of God among the Coptic monks and Christians living at the monastery. Such a witness to the world is even more vital in western countries, where churches preached their own name more than Christ, fell prey to modernized society, and lost contact with the needy soul of man. Man cannot easily find God in these parts of the world, for He cannot be found in materialism, lust, pleasure and desire.

Since the Coptic Church established a mission work in Africa five years ago, it has not planned a strategic plan for its work. The Church was struck by the incredible existence of Christianity in Africa, and sought guidance from God as to what sort of mission should be established. It had seen medical, social, educational, developmental, and many other kinds of missions; however, God revealed a way to be a spiritual and biblical mission by bringing people to Christ, not themselves, to a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly kingdom. The Lord gave the Church the steps and path of St. Mark, her father to follow.

The question remains in continual need of being asked today. Is the Coptic Church today, in this generation, a Shepherding Church only, or a Proclaiming Church? Or are both of these duties inseparable duties that the Church must carry together? If this is the true role of the Church, what then is the specific role of every Coptic Christian in fulfilling God's plan for the whole world?

Footnotes

1. Abba Salama is the name given by the Ethiopians to their missionary St. Frumentius, who was consecrated bishop by St. Athanasius the Great in 340 A.D.

2. One of these Ethiopian Manuscripts is translated in this issue of Coptic Church Review. More information is found in the previous issue (Volume 1, No. 4, p.158)

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. PETER ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA (EMML¹ 1763, ff. 79r-80v)

I. INTRODUCTION

Archbishop Peter [† 25 Nov. 311], described in Egypt and Ethiopia as « the last of the martyrs » — خاتم الشهداء and ተዓዛዒ ሰማዕቲ, respectively ² —, is best known in the two Churches for his hardline opposition to Arius and his heresy. The sources, however, are not always in agreement in some parts of the Acts of the saint. This story of his martyrdom preserved in the form of a homily — « Homily on Peter and Mark the Evangelist » — does not need a lengthy introduction. Its content, the main reason of its presentation here, is different from any of the Acts of the Archbishop so far known to me ³. The story of the martyrdom of the Archbishop as related by Severus of Ašmunayn ⁴, the authoritative historian of the Coptic Church in the tenth century, has hardly anything in

¹ Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa/Collegeville, Minnesota. EMML 1763 is a collection of homilies copied during the reign of the Ethiopian Emperor 'Amdä Šəyon [1314-1344] for the Monastery of Däbrä Ḥayq in central Ehtiopia. For more on this manuscript see my articles, « The Homily in Honour of St. Frumentius Bishop of Axum (EMML 1763, ff. 84^v-86^r) », *Anal. Boll.*, 97 (1979), pp. 309-318, and « Gädlä Maraḳos (B), EMML 1763, ff. 224^r-227^r » (forthcoming); and the fifth *Catalogue of EMML* (in preparation).

² See H. DELEHAYE, « Les martyrs d'Égypte », in *Anal. Boll.*, 40 (1922), p. 26 : Πέτρος ἀρχὴ ἀποστόλων, Πέτρος τέλος μαρτύρων.

³ I mean, for instance, Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VII, xxxii, 31; VIII, xiii, 7; IX, vi, 2; BHG 1502; 1502a (in *Anal. Boll.*, 83, 1965, pp. 162-177).

⁴ « History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria » edited and translated by B. T. A. EVERTS in *Patrologia Orientalis*, t. 1, pp. 383/[119] - 400/[136].

antiphonal chants is to praise the saint of the day by chanting hymns made of catch phrases taken from his Acts together with the assigned versicles from the Psalms of David, it is usually not possible to reconstruct a full account of a life of a saint from such a hymnody. However, information that can be checked against a *Daggʷa* or *Mäwaśə't* entry is normally credible; and some of such sentences in the entry for St. Peter I in the hymn books are traceable in this homily. It is also very important to note that the hymn that concludes the *Synaxary* entry for St. Peter I mentions the issue of Marmarica, an indication that these hymns do not draw their material from the *Synaxary*. They are apparently the salutations or *sälam* of the collection of hymns called *Arke* or *Arkä Šällus* incorporated into the *Synaxary* at a later time. Not all manuscripts have these salutations ¹¹.

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GETATCHEW HAILE

¹¹ The collection, which is not yet edited, is known also by other names: *Egzi'abher nägś(ä)* or simply *Nägś*. See W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London (1877), pp. 171-118.

TRANSLATION

By Dr. Getachew Haile

HOMILY ON PETER AND MARK THE EVANGELIST

The story in the Synodicon of the [Christian] law is like this : Mark the Evangelist came to Alexandria on the seventh year of the reign of Nero and appointed Anianus bishop ¹, twelve priests and seven deacons, and gave them this order :

« When the bishop of Alexandria dies, the priests shall come together and, in the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ, lay their hands on the one they have unanimously elected from among themselves ². They shall appoint a bishop like this while the corpse of the diseased bishop is still there. »

These instructions had been applied to those who were appointed bishop from among the priests from Anianus sequentially to the blessed Peter, the Archbishop ³ who redeemed the five hundred captives from Marmarica, that is, the sixteenth bishop ¹ of Alexandria. It was so arranged so that priests may not be appointed out of love of governorship or by a gift ; bishops were not appointed in all countries by partitioning [regions] either. But after the blessed Peter it was ordered unto the bishops that he who is appointed [on the line] from Anianus (who was the first after Mark the Evangelist, who was the light and teacher for all Egypt and the people of Ethiopia ⁴) be the head and

¹ Text : *eppis qoppas* ; elsewhere in the same MS, f. 225v : *pappas*. In the Ethiopian Church the rank of the *pappas* is higher than that of the *eppis qoppas*.

² Cf. Hugo DUENSING (ed. and tr.), « Der aethiopische Text der Kirchenordnung des Hippolyt », in *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, Philol.-histor. Kl. 3 32 (1946), p. 16. The linguistic problems in this article of the Synodicon have already been indicated by Duensing in his preface, p. 3. For a similar early history of the Church in Alexandria see Eutychius, the Melchite Patriarch of Alexandria, in *P.G.* 111, cols. 903 and 904.

³ Text : *liqā pappasat*.

⁴ There is a tradition in Ethiopia, apparently based on the *Sinodos*, that Mark came also to Ethiopia to teach :

leader of the religion of God and Our Saviour Jesus Christ for all the saints who are called in Egypt [and in Ethiopia?] ⁵ to the worship of God [and] to his service by the prayer of our father Mark the Evangelist. Anianus was set ⁶ upon the chair of Mark ; and the blessed Peter was Archbishop (and a martyr) in the succession of his bishopric because we learned religion from those who were appointed bishops from ⁷ the chair of Mark. During the term of office of this bishop, churches and graves and tombs — for the bishops, the saints and the martyrs — were built. The blessed Peter was the sixteenth bishop of Alexandria. He was in office for ten years and ordained fifty-five bishops. All the time of his bishophood was during the persecution. During the term of office of the blessed Peter, six hundred forty-two ⁸ [people] were martyred. The blessed Peter himself too was martyred on the 29th of *Hædar* ⁹. He rested where his hope was waiting for him. He departed from this world of suffering. Blessed are those who have fellowship with him, in commemorating him, and with all the conquerors and the persevering martyrs, for they crossed over from death to life ; these are the prophets and the Apostles. They are called by people the blessed and the saints.

The names of those whom he ordained bishops during the persecution are registered chronologically. It is necessary therefore that we now tell about the blessed Peter. He was an official all his life

ግደቆስ ወንጌላዊ [ወልደቶ ስሉጥ] ለኢየሱስ ክርስቶስ ጸደቀ፡ ወግብጽ፡ ወኖባ፡ ወምድራ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ኢክክ፡ ጳጳሪ፡ ህንጊጌ፡ ወከንጅ፡ ወዘየሽወዲ፡ ኢክክ፡ ባሕሊ፡ ኤርቶራ፡

* Mark the Evangelist [was assigned] to Alexandria, Egypt, Nubia, the land of Ethiopia up to the borders of India and Sind and its surroundings up to the Erithrean Sea », *Sinodos*, in the introduction of the section traditionally known by its *incipit* [*am-dəḥrā 'argā*] or *Decreta Apostolorum XXX*. My quotation is from the *Codex Borgianus Aethiopicus* 2, f. 57^r, S. GRÉBAUT et E. TISSERANT, *Codices aethiopici Vaticani et Borgiani, Barberiniani Orientalis* 2, *Rossianus* 856, Vatican (1935), p. 768, sub-entry 4.

⁵ This long sentence is apparently corrupted and what follows and what precedes it may not make much sense without these words in the square bracket whose Gəʿəz equivalent are wanting in the text.

⁶ Or « designated » or « appointed ».

⁷ Or « on ».

⁸ This is a conservative figure when compared to other sources where the martyrs were estimated to be more than six hundred sixty ; see for example *BHL* 6692 in *PL* 129, col. 696, lines 29-31, or *PG* 18, col. 459, line 9-10 ; Surius, *De probatis sanctorum historiis*, 6, p. 579, lines 22-23 ; SEVERUS, « History of the Patriarchs... », p. 393/[129] ; *Sām' zā-qəddus Pəfros*, *EMML* 1479, f. 184^v (the Gəʿəz text is not yet edited), and Paul DEVOS, « Une Passion grecque inédite de S. Pierre d'Alexandrie et sa traduction par Anastase le Bibliothécaire », in *Anal. Boll.*, 83 (1965), p. 167, § 7 (including n. 17).

⁹ *Hædar* is the corresponding month of *Ḥatūr* of the Egyptian calendar. In today's calendar it falls between November and December. See C. CONTI ROSSINI, *Tabelle comparative del calendario etiopico col calendario romano*, Rome (1948).

[starting] from his youth. He grew up in the law of Christianity, like Samuel, in the house of God under bishop Theonas. In being promoted, he was appointed archdeacon. And when Theonas went to his rest, all the priests and the deacons elected him unanimously and appointed him bishop because of the wonderful purity of his life. And he became worthy of his bishopric.

The story is like this : He was appointed bishop on the nineteenth year [of the reign] of Diocletian. Once, after he celebrated Easter, there happened the captivity of Marmarica and the deportation (?) ¹⁰ which took place by [the order of] Diocletian. While the captives of Marmarica were driven and deported (?) ¹⁰ through Alexandria, he redeemed five hundred captives of Marmarica and sent them to go back to their country. Having done this act of charity ¹¹, he set out after Easter to tour the land of Egypt ¹². Now there was a certain Tərfon, a priest who was sent from the Marmaricans, (who were left behind from the people with the blessed Peter), with many letters to beg for the redemption of the captives. Tərfon fell into the hand of the governor who took Marmarica captive. The governor trembled against it with anger saying, « Who is this Peter whom all these write this much ? » He cut off the head of Tərfon the priest ¹³ and sought for the blessed Peter who was teaching and straightening ¹⁴ the faith in hiding. He appeared to the public like a lamp after giving plenty of alms, covering the naked, and feeding the hungry until his faith shone like the sun. Having completed the good deeds of Our Lord Jesus Christ, he decided to give himself in the redemption of all people. He undid his cincture for them and submitted his neck to them ; he was martyred in front of all. The day of the blessed Peter, the Archbishop and the feeder with faith, entered into the book of life that will never perish [but] live for ever and in the world to come. Amen.

¹⁰ The word of the text is *yāhallaf*, « passes by », conjoined with *Mārmonaqe* « Marmarica », as if it, too, were a place name.

¹¹ Lit. « almsgiving ». It seems that the blessed Peter bought them their freedom and that is considered for him « almsgiving » by the author. This is also how the composer of the rhyming hymn for him for the *Dagg^{wa}* understood this particular deed of the Saint :

ገበጌ፡ ሕግድሱ፡ ተመሰሰ፡ ነመ፡ ሒቂ፡
 ዲዮ፡ መርሞንቂ፡ ቤዛው፡ በወርቂ፡
 ነመ፡ ነዋ፡ ባሕር፡ ይበዝላ፡ ይድቅ፡

The blessed Peter imitated his Master :
 He redeemed the captives of Marmarica, with his gold ;
 his righteousness was as plenty as the sand of the sea.

መድሐኑ፡ ድጋ፡, p. 111, col. 3.

¹² That the persecution had taken place after Easter can be suspected also in SEVERUS, « History of the Patriarchs... », p. [120]/390.

¹³ Or « the servant in the [Christian] law ».

¹⁴ This is probably a reference to the heresies of Arius and Meletius.

THE HOLY FAST AND ITS DESIRABLE FRUITS

Father Matta El-Meskeen

Lent is a period of seclusion and encounter with God, designed by the Church in likeness to the Lord Jesus when He returned from the river Jordan after His baptism and went alone in the wilderness in complete isolation from the world for forty days diligently praying against Satan, and abstaining from all food.

The Church in fact, offers us during this holy period the necessary and most suitable spiritual atmosphere through the readings, hymns and sermons to prepare us to enter such an inner seclusion and isolation of the heart from the world, so we can face —first ourselves then God.

How do we face ourselves:

It is very difficult for any person to face himself in an inner revealing manner, as long as he is living his routine daily life — eating to the full, speaking unceasingly, occupying himself with insignificant side matters such as amusements, newspapers, outings, sleeping and visiting. Thus minimizing all that is not of importance is a necessary factor in the Holy Fast, so that the opportunity for inner seclusion may become possible.

We will inevitably meet difficulties in the beginning to reduce food or speech, or visiting or sleep — but we should realize from the start that this difficulty occurs for two reasons:—

- (1) Habit — the overcoming of which is an easy task.
- (2) The soul's strong desire to evade seclusion for fear of encountering its sinful reality and its desire to continue taking pleasure in sin. This is a matter that demands a great deal of firmness, strictness and alertness to the poor and unreal excuses that will be constantly created by the soul so as to run away from seclusion and fasting.

If a man succeeds in overcoming his habits and in dealing firmly, seriously and alertly with the soul's excuses and evasions, thus managing to provide for himself opportunities for quietude, seclusion and prayer, then he will actually have succeeded in approaching the blessings of the Holy forty days and will be ready to reap the fruits. Two fruits of seclusion and self encounter are most important:—

1st Fruit: We discover the lack of a serious and proper view of our lives and the resulting evidence of delay, neglect, idleness, and evasion of opportunity for seclusion and prayer.

We shall ourselves realize without the help of any preacher how delay, neglect, laziness and evasion of seclusion, have distorted our lives and complicated many opportunities for our spiritual growth, causing us to fall in sin and dragging us downwards.

The most dangerous result of delay, neglect of prayer and spiritual idleness, which numb the heart and dull the intellect, is the unreal conviction that strikes man's thoughts and will, leading him to believe that he is unable to change, and that his efforts are of no avail. Such a reaction occurs because neglect and laziness sneak into every effort for change and destroy it.

Therefore, discovering the state of delay, neglect and idleness, at the beginning of the seclusion period, and facing and examining oneself, is one of the greatest results of seclusion and one of the most desirable fruits of the Holy Fast. It is like pulling out the poisonous root that constantly feeds the spiritual life with recklessness, despair, and loss of faith in itself and in God; and which also slowly stops man's efforts, as time goes on, till it leads him to despair. Despair to which neglect and idleness lead, is Satan's domain, where he thrives and roams around to eradicate all man's hope and salvation.

2nd Fruit: The second fruit is discovering the extent of error and deviation from the straight path directed towards the spiritual goal for which we live. Any deviation from the goal towards which we aim will complicate our journey and cause problems, disturbances and suspicions, capable of blocking our way in spite of apparant successes. The clearer the aim, the easier is the way to it; and the more we are honest and faithful in reaching our goal, the greater becomes our trust, hope, courage and strength.

We do not and cannot possess any true goal, save Christ himself, Christ is the goal for which we live and die as the prophet Isaiah says, "*The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee with my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea with my spirit within me will I see thee early.*" (Is. 26:8,9). If Christ is not clearly the goal of our lives in all honesty and fidelity of heart and will, then this world and our own personal egos will be our goal. Praise from others, and wealth will become more important than Christ. Then the journey will be crooked and disgraceful. I shall discover that my will is more important than God's will and my desire becomes my pride, strength and wealth! My spirit no more wishes to submit to God's servants or to dedicate myself to the salvation of others, but on the contrary, I subject everything to myself because Christ as a goal is no longer a priority.

Thus, when we discover the extent of error and deviation from the aim of our lives, we will have reaped the second fruit of seclusion which is a very dear and priceless fruit because it will convince us to change our life no matter how much

it will cost us. If it calls for it, we shall reject and renounce it with no regret, for its success is false and needs to be renounced just as St. Isaac renounced the great bishopric of Nineveh at the moment he discovered the loss of the goal; and fled to the depths of the wilderness in seclusion and isolation, thus becoming a salvation for himself and for hundreds of thousands of others through the ages.

How to encounter God:—

By merely discovering the true nature of ourselves and by being convinced of the deplorable state which we reached, we instantly approach God in bitter regret and sorrow with a readiness for a true repentance. We shall ourselves realize that the road that leads to God's presence is through this door—the door of regret and repentance. And thus, just as we left the presence of God through our spiritual ignorance, negligence and idleness, so we, by grace, return to God through the doors of regret and repentance during the period of seclusion. Then we shall encounter God while we are in a state of great shame like Adam and Eve when they heard the voice of God in their nakedness while the fruit of disobedience settled within them.

But God is never pleased with the nakedness of man. He calls us in the Book of Revelation to clothe us with the dress of His grace as He called Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis and clothed them with the coats of skin, "*I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.*" (Rev. 3:18) Thus, as our ignorance has led us to delay, dissolution and estrangement from God, so His grace clothes us when we repent and come back to Him.

The fruits of encounter with God in solitude are many, of which two are most important. *The first fruit* is the sincerity of the spiritual look at life, and a feeling of the great importance of salvation, with a constant activity that never cools, accompanied by consciousness, attention, care and great sensitivity for any deviation, dissolution, carelessness or uncleanness. This is one of the greatest fruits which we reap during our solitude and which will stay with us for the whole life as food for the way which supplies us with all the necessary energy for the travel.

This very desirable fruit which all the sons of God who have repented and have honestly and sincerely returned to Him enjoy, is not of our making. It is not a cooked fruit, but it is a grace which comes to us in the hand of God after we have been totally convinced that there is no hope or salvation for us unless God bestows on us this sincere look at the spiritual life, and gives us this spiritual activity and this attention, carefulness, scrupulousness and sensitivity against any deviation, dissolution or uncleanness of any type. In other words, the only criterion which makes us worthy of obtaining it is our honest confirmation of

the necessity of these matters, our strong desire to own it, and our warm and weeping petition for it. It is a fruit on the Tree of Life which is desired by truth. The honest desire for it lets it fall into our hands.

The second fruit is the fruit of God's love . . . In solitude, we lock ourselves in the field of God's love. When we face ourselves and discover our ungratefulness and ungodliness and then judge ourselves honestly and completely in the presence of God, and then regret in the dust and weep for the time of ignorance, and sincerely repent before God — then the windows of His divine love are opened for us, because He cannot bear to hold His love from those who return to Him from the far country. He wipes our tears with His hand and instead of the bitter grief, He anoints us with the ointment of gladness for salvation more than our neighbors; and while we tell Him about the amount of our ungratefulness, ungodliness and ignorance, He would have prepared for us a marriage feast. We speak in front of Him of our ungodliness, and He speaks to us of His faithfulness.

We suffer from the weight of our ingratitude while He groans from the greatness of His love. He thus continues to insist through His love to conquer our weakness so our tears of repentance are transformed into tears of joy with the delight of eternal salvation. Therefore, seclusion brings forth its greatest fruit which lasts forever—the fruit of Divine Love—the fuel of eternity—the fire which God cast on this world of difficulties to transform our hardships to eternal happiness in a mystery that no one but those who repent can comprehend.

The Holy Lent is a period when the spirit returns to its place of real rest, *"Return my soul to your place of rest,"* and during which time the Church continues through its tunes to call those lost in sin and tangles of error to wake up and be enlightened and return—because this is the period of repentance, a period of salvation and a time of acceptance—a period of light, not of darkness. The Church is the bride adorned by the Holy Spirit and within the Church gather those who return from the far country to eat and drink from the groom's surplus; to feast at the table of repentance and the mystery of salvation; to enjoy safety in Christ's restful arms; to unite with Him following in His steps wherever they go, receiving from Him words of love and loving Him alone—not their own lives—even unto death. Did not the Spirit say long ago that love is stronger than death? But who can understand and appreciate this but those who love!!

Christ entrusted the Church with all of His aspects and the Spirit in it takes all the aspects of Christ and gives us His Baptism, His Crucifixion and His Resurrection. During the Holy Lent the Church offers her children Christ's aspect of fasting and seclusion—the mystery of His isolation from the world and withdrawal from people and relatives, even the disciples and friends—the mystery of forsaking the world for the sake of the world—the mystery of abandoning all for the sake of all—the mystery of fasting and depriving the soul

and body for the sake of the salvation of every soul and body. During the forty days spent by Christ alone in the wilderness, He was not in need of seclusion for himself or fasting for himself, because it was written that He came back from the Jordan filled with the Holy Spirit and went to the wilderness alone. It is thus clear that when He was filled by the Holy Spirit—and there wasn't a time when he was not—he was not in need of a trip to the wilderness, or isolation or fasting or prayer, but rather it was the trip of all humanity in Him. Christ has taken man—every man with Him, in Him—has taken humanity into isolation from humanity itself and its world which caused it to sin, to offer it to God apart from the desires of the body and the eyes and the pride of life so that He passes through the human body a willful abstinence from food, drink, rest and every desire, in a desolate wilderness with no consolation in it for the body, until He awakens the soul to its true desire in God and gives it an eternal vision of God's heaven, its true home; and feeds it and gives it as a drink the consolation of immortality instead of earthly food.

Humanity has, through Christ, been given through the experience of seclusion, isolation, fasting and deprivation, as a necessary basic period in the spiritual life of man after baptism, a way necessary for reaching the Cross and the Resurrection.

The Church, during the Holy Lent delivers this same mystery, the mystery of seclusion, isolation, fasting and abstinence, the mystery which Christ completed and which became ours with all its blessings. The Spirit in the Holy Lent takes what Christ achieved in conquering Satan in battles of the lusts of the flesh and eyes and the pride of life, and gives us in order to complete an important and basic stature of the fulness of Christ in us, as a preparation for the greatest mystery—the mystery of the Cross and in preparation for the greatest filling—the filling of the Resurrection.

(Translated by Lily Soliman)

A SPIRITUAL LEADER FATHER BISHOI KAMEL ISHAK (December 6, 1931—March 21, 1979)

Father Tadros Y. Malaty

Reverend Father Bishoi Kamel Ishak is considered one of the greatest spiritual leaders in this century, not only in Egypt but among Copts all over the world.

It is difficult to depict his burning heart towards God's Kingdom, but I will briefly try to give an account of his life and his ministry. I was very close to him, as I had the honor to serve with him when he was a teacher in the Sunday schools, and afterwards when he was a priest.

Message from Above

Rev. Fr. Bishoi believed that he had received a message from God. He studied in the Faculty of Science and worked as a teacher; then he studied Sociology and Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts believing that these subjects would help him in teaching the children in Sunday schools. He devoted his life to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

He had a strong personality; he was decent, logical and effective especially towards the Christian youth. He was ordained as a priest on the second of December, 1959, at St. George Coptic Orthodox church in Sporting, Alexandria. He became a famous priest not only in Alexandria, but also throughout Egypt. By his spirituality and his good treatment he came to be loved by the Moslems as well.

Herewith, are some of his attitudes in his ministry: He was not interested in the church's financial status. He believed that his time was precious and must be used in preaching the Gospel, in which he was instructed. He built St. George church, and established five churches in Alexandria, one in Los Angeles and one in New Jersey.

He asked that some priests might be ordained to serve with him in the church. Some leaders in the Coptic and Protestant churches refused his idea, but his faith was strong, and he had confidence in his mission and love for everyone. Before he died, there were five priests in his church.

He established many churches near St. George Church, believing that the concentrated ministry is more successful. He encouraged many members to

worship God in the newly established churches. He never paid attention on being praised, honored or admired by others; he was a humble person.

In spite of his fame among all the Copts and Moslems, he was very modest, humble and broad-minded. He spoke cheerfully to all people, especially the poor. He knew how to deal with children, as if he was a child; and he was respected by the elders.

He was very attractive as a preacher because of his humility and modesty, and because he spoke the colloquial language.

He was very kind towards everybody, especially with his spiritual sons. He always gave hope to the sinners, and never despaired of the salvation of anyone believing that God Himself seeks our salvation.

His Fatherhood

It is too difficult to explain his fatherhood. He opened his heart to everyone he met. He felt his responsibility not only towards the people in church, but also to everyone who asked for his help. He had the pleasure to share in their suffering and their joy. Every man, woman, young man and child felt that he was his own father, who granted him all his attention and love.

In dealing with family problems he used to comfort everyone. He saved many persons who were about to leave Christianity due to sexual or financial pressures. He was a father to the orphans, widows and strangers. Many families secretly received a monthly support from him. He never went home with his wife to celebrate any feast alone. After the Divine Liturgy they used to visit the distressed families and sometimes came home with someone in need.

Father Bishoi and the Cross

The crucifixion was the centre of his mission. He wrote two books about the Cross. (*Under the Feet of the Cross*, and *I was Crucified with Christ*.)

He used to ask those who came for confession to contemplate on "Jesus' wounds". On his visits to some patients, he used to strengthen them by saying that they were participating in Jesus' sufferings.

He also used to say that our participation in Christ is deepened through the meditation on the Cross. Without having a holy meditation on the crucified Christ, you cannot say that you know Him. This shows that we have to spend some minutes daily to practice this meditation.

He used to encourage the patients who had been suffering from cancer, saying that this disease is the way to Paradise, because the sick person participates in the Lord's suffering. Fr. Bishoi also suffered from this sickness; he was always thanking God for this gift. The feast of the Holy Cross occurred three days before his departure. Although the doctors had forbidden him from speaking, he preached warmly about the Cross. His favorite icon was that of

St. Mary Magdalene kneeling before our crucified Lord. He used to keep this icon in front of him, and set his eyes on it before he died.

A Churchman

He was a true churchman. He loved the Church because he considered it as Christ's bride, and the mother of Christians. He loved her Holy Scriptures, her Sacraments, her hymns, her rituals, her saints and even her buildings. He loved the Holy Scripture, because he considered it as the book of the Church, and spent most of his time in reading, meditating and studying it. He also encouraged his spiritual sons to read it without ceasing.

He never separated any passage of the Holy Scripture from the Tradition of the Church, its liturgies and hymns.

He was interested in the Coptic language and taught it to the children. He used to pray the liturgies in Arabic to make all people understand it. He used to speak about Baptism and Chrism as the hidden fountain of gifts of the Holy Spirit. He uttered the words clearly in his prayers so that all people in the church might participate in worshipping God.

His love for the Church appeared most during his last few years when he started to stress on its lectionary in his sermons and his writing. He tried to discover what the Holy Spirit wanted to teach in every occasion.

Father Bishoi was eager to enjoy the blessing of the saints in his life and his ministry. He had many friends among the saints and the heavenly powers, especially the Holy Virgin St. Mary, the Archangel Michael, St. George, St. Mina, and St. Abraam of Fayoum.

His Writings

He wrote many books and articles; he encouraged many writers to publish their work at the church bookstore. Here are some of his books:

- ★ *Before the Foot of the Cross*
- ★ *I was Crucified with Christ*
- ★ *The Way Towards Life*
- ★ *New Birth through Water and Spirit*
- ★ *Why Christ was Incarnate*
- ★ *Meditations on the Eucharist*
- ★ *Meditations on the Psalms*
- ★ *I believe in One God*
- ★ *Pilgrimage to Canaan*
- ★ *Isaiah and the Pilgrimage of the Great Lent*
- ★ *The Holy Fasting Pilgrimage*
- ★ *Pilgrimage to Gethsemane*
- ★ *Pentecostal Pilgrimage*
- ★ *Daniel the Prophet, as a Friend of Angels*
- ★ *Passing over Through the Holy Blood*

Last Days

Although he spent his last two years fighting cancer, the smile never left his face. His house and his heart were always open for his congregation. Many admitted that they found comfort in their illness or trouble just by looking at their Father or hearing about his patience. When I heard these stories, I always remembered the words of St. Augustine, that a priest lying on his sick bed for thirty years may be more effective in his service than with all his preaching.

On the eve of the feast of the Holy Cross, he was visited by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. In the same night, his doctor advised him not to overburden himself by speaking, but his answer was, "I long to speak much about the cross. Do not hinder me from speaking about it. Our message is to make the power of the cross apparent to all."

In his last hours, he advised us about the service of the Lord. He blessed all those present one by one; then he asked in amazement, "What is this opening above us?" When he was asked, "Father, where is this?" He answered in a faint voice, "Heaven." The doors of heaven have finally been opened to accept the servant of the Lord.

RESURRECTION WITNESSES IN THE WRITINGS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

The Empty Tomb

'Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.' As in the womb of the Virgin Mary no one was conceived before Him, and no one after Him, so in this sepulchre there was no one buried before Him, and no one after Him.

St. Augustine

'And they parted from the sepulchre with fear and joy.' Why could this be? They had seen a thing amazing, and beyond expectation, a tomb empty, where they had before seen Him laid. Wherefore also He had led them to the sight, that they might become witnesses of both things, both of His tomb and of His Resurrection. For they considered that no man could have taken Him, when so many soldiers were sitting by, unless He raised up Himself.

St. John Chrysostom

And what mean also the napkins that were stuck on with myrrh; for Peter saw these lying. For if they had been disposed to steal, they would not have stolen the body naked, not because of dishonoring it only, but in order not to delay and lose time in stripping it.

St. John Chrysostom

The fact that Christ rose bare without the wrappings proves first that he should not be any more known according to the flesh; He became no more in need of food, drink, dress or clothes. When he was fulfilling His mission on earth, he submitted Himself wilfully to these things because He shared our nature. Second, it is a sign of the return of Adam to his original state, when he was naked in paradise, yet he felt no shame.

St. Severus of Antioch

He was dressed with glory from inside the tomb, and left in it the wrapping of the dead and their shape. No one rose in the new world with a dress, because those worthy of it are dressed with something else. The dress of glory is reserved for resurrection, and is given to those who reach it in good shape. The

dress of the earth, remains in the earth on the dust, while the body rises from corruption and is dressed in glory. Great is the glory in which the resurrected people are dressed, not in linen or wool are they dressed. Our Lord left His clothes in the tomb when he arose to show forth the economy of resurrection for those worthy of it.

St. James of Serugh

St. Peter and St. John

'And he (St. John) saw, and believed'. Here some, by not giving due attention, suppose that John believed that Jesus had risen again; but there is no indication of this from the words that follow. For what does he mean by immediately adding, *'For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead'?* He could not then have believed that He had risen again, when he did not know that it behooved Him to rise again. What then did he see? What was it that he believed? What but this, that he saw the sepulchre empty, and believed what the woman had said, that He had been taken away from the tomb?

St. Augustine

Peter and John believed because they saw not with the simple vision, but with the lofty apostolic understanding. In fact the tomb was full of light. Although it was still night, they could see well what was inside . . . for if, according to the Scripture, the just have the light all the time, how much more should the God of the just have it?

St. Severus of Antioch

St. Mary Magdalene

Then came Mary Magdalene, who unquestionably was surpassingly more ardent in her love than the other women who had ministered to the Lord; so that it was not unreasonable in John to make mention of her alone, leaving those others unnamed who, however, were along with her, as we gather from the reports given by others of the evangelists.

St. Augustine

'Then the disciples went away again unto their own. but Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping.' For while the men returned, the more gentle sex was fastened to the place by a stronger affection. And the eyes, which had sought the Lord and had not found Him, had now nothing else to do but weep, deeper in their sorrow that He had been taken away from the sepulchre than that He had been slain on the tree; seeing that in the case even of such a Master, when His living presence was withdrawn from their eyes, His remembrance also had ceased to remain. . . .

'And as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre.' Why she did so I know not. For she was not ignorant that He whom she sought was no longer there, since she had herself also carried word to the disciples that He had been taken from thence; while they, too, had come to the sepulchre, and had sought the Lord's body, not merely by looking, but also by entering, and had not found it. What then does it mean that as she wept she stooped down and looked again into the sepulchre? Was it that her grief was so excessive that she hardly thought she could believe either their eyes or her own? Or was it rather by some divine impulse that her mind led her to look within?

St. Augustine

Mary arose and the angel spoke to her, and he gave her the good news of the resurrection in a loud voice. While the angel was speaking to her, she turned herself. It is strange that she turned. Why did she stop her conversation with the angel and turn as it has been written? . . . Probably she heard the sound of His footsteps in the garden, and turned herself to see what sound it was. For, in this way His Father made Adam hear the sound amongst the trees where he was hidden. . . . Or maybe the angel beheld the Son coming and he worshipped Him. The angel saw Him, moved and bowed before Him. So Mary turned to see for whom the angel bowed down.

St. James of Serugh

Methinks that while she was speaking, Christ suddenly appearing behind her, struck the Angels with awe; and that they having beheld their Ruler, showed immediately by their bearing, their look, their movements, that they saw the Lord; and this drew the woman's attention, and caused her to turn herself backwards. To them then He appeared on this wise, but not so to the woman, in order not at the first sight to terrify her, but in a manner and ordinary form, as is clear from her supposing that He was the gardener.

St. John Chrysostom

Indeed it was necessary that the female sex should be the first to see the Lord and hear the first word from his mouth . . . for the woman was the first to listen to the guile of the serpent, and to look at the forbidden fruit . . . He wanted the woman to be the messenger of happiness and joy for man, as she was the cause of sorrow and weariness for Adam.

St. Severus of Antioch

"Why weapest thou?"

With this question, Christ wanted to put an end to her sorrows. It was appropriate that the Lord should restore us to joy in this way; because through the transgression of Adam all the world was condemned . . . and specifically the woman was told, *"In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children."* (Gen. 3:16) . . . It

was essential that the same mouth that pronounced the judgement should itself lift up the weight of the old curse. Here our Saviour Jesus Christ wipes the tears off the eyes of all women.

St. Cyril the Great

It was worthy of Him to appear in the form of a gardener. Our Lord wanted to appear like a gardener, because His Father planted with His hands the garden of Eden . . . When He rose as a gardener Mary saw Him and asked Him about our Lord, the Sweet Fruit . . . In Paradise He was the Tree of Life, and in the garden of Joseph, He appeared to the blessed woman. They kept the Sweet Fruit underground for three days, and when He arose, He appeared intact. He is the Tree, the Fruit, the Gardener and the Almighty.

St. James of Serugh

Probably she was not mistaken in thinking that He was the gardener, for in reality He planted the real eternal Paradise. In the garden of the tomb, as previously in Paradise, he is reforming the woman who misguided Adam the first gardener.

St. Severus of Antioch

The Strong One rose from the tomb with might and force, while Mary was speaking that people had taken Him as a weak man. O blessed woman, who can steal the Light, or hide the great sea without being seen? Who can steal the Sun and keep Him in his bosom and no one beholds? . . . Who can carry the Fire in his bosom, and take Him to a hidden place and does not become apparent? Fear not, for no one can steal the Mighty One.

St. James of Serugh

But how was it that this woman who had already turned herself back to see Jesus when she supposed Him to be the gardener and was actually talking with Him, is said to have again turned herself, in order to say unto Him, "Rabboni." But just because, when she then turned herself in body, she supposed Him to be what He was not, while now, when turned in heart, she recognized Him to be what He was.

St. Augustine

"Touch me not."

For Jesus was giving a lesson in faith to the woman, who had recognized Him as her Master, and called Him so in her reply; and this gardener was sowing in her heart, as in His own garden, the grain of mustard seed. What does this mean?

If, while standing on earth, He is not to be touched, how could He be touched by men when sitting in heaven? . . . Some sacred mystery must lie concealed in these words; and whether we discover it or utterly fail to do so, yet we ought to be in no doubt as to its actual existence. Accordingly, either the words, "*Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father,*" had this meaning, that by this woman the Church of the Gentiles was symbolized, which did not believe on Christ till He had actually ascended to the Father, or that in this way Christ wished himself to be believed on . . . to be touched spiritually, that He and the Father are one.

St. Augustine

This is an important type for the churches, for we prevent from approaching the Holy Table all those who believe in the Divinity of Christ and confess their faith (i.e. the catechumens) because they have not received the Holy Spirit who does not abide in those who have not received baptism. But when they become partakers of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing that can prevent them from touching Christ our Saviour. Therefore, the minister addresses all those who desire to partake of the Eucharist saying, "The Holy things for the Holy." By this he declares that communion in the mysteries is a gift for those who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

Mark how He Himself sends good tidings to His disciples by these women bringing to honor . . . that sex, which was most dishonored, and to good hopes; and healing that which was diseased.

St. John Chrysostom

Perchance some one of you would wish to be like them (the two Marys), to hold the feet of Jesus; ye can even now, and not His feet and His hands only, but even lay hold on that sacred head, receiving the awful mysteries with a pure conscience. But not here only, but also in that day ye shall see Him, coming with that unspeakable glory, and the multitude of the angels . . .

St. John Chrysostom

St. Thomas

"*Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.*" He saw and touched the man, and acknowledged the God whom he neither saw nor touched but by the means of what he saw and touched, he now put far away from him every doubt, and believed the other . . .

"Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed." Although it may be affirmed that the disciple dared not so to touch, for it is not written, "And Thomas touched Him." But whether it was by gazing only, or also by touching that he saw and believed, what follows rather proclaims and commends the faith of the Gentiles; *"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."*

St. Augustine

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Currents in Coptic Church Studies

Mark the Apostle Beholder of God, Evangelist, Saint and Martyr

By His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

First edition 1968, Second edition 1975, Cairo

This is a real encyclopedia about St. Mark, and we feel that we are doing injustice to the book by presenting it in this small space. This is not only because of the authority behind it, but mainly because of the innumerable biblical, historical, and liturgical references which are found in most of its pages; passing over them is not easy to defend.

Life and Martyrdom of St. Mark

Although there is no problem in getting the biography of St. Mark as written by dependable Coptic historians and other historians of the middle ages (Sawiris Ibn Al-Mukaffa, bishop of Ushmunain, 980 A.D.; Sawiris bishop of Nesteraouch; Ibn-Al-Salibi, 1149 A.D.; Abu-Salih the Armenian, 1208 A.D.; Abdul'l-Barakat Ibn-Kabar, 1324 A.D.), confusion arose from three sources:

1. Words of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (135 A.D.), who mentioned that St. Mark, 'had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers.' This statement of Papias was contradicted by Church Fathers in the same century, namely St. Clement of Alexandria and St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Eusebius himself who preserved the words of Papias for us, did not fail to mention how undependable a source Papias was.

2. Some modern biblical critics.

3. Some Roman Catholic historians who overemphasized the relation between St. Peter and St. Mark and, ignoring a lot of biblical evidence, made him a disciple and companion of St. Peter.

In this biography, His Holiness left no stone unturned in proving every point with references from the Scripture, the early Church Fathers, and Middle Age and modern Roman Catholic and Protestant authors.

St. Mark was born in a Levite family that lived in Cyrene, one of the five

cities of Libya which were known to the Greek as Pentapolis. His mother Mary was the sister of Barnabas, and herself one of the Marys who followed Christ. His father was the cousin of St. Peter. In his early age, his family moved to Palestine. About their house in Jerusalem, His Holiness writes,

‘There has never been a house more famous than the house of St. Mark: In it our Lord ate the Passover with His holy disciples, washed their feet, and gave them the covenant of His holy Body and Blood. In it the disciples were hidden before the Resurrection. In it the Holy Spirit descended upon them and they spoke in tongues. This great house became the first Christian church in the world. . . .’

St. Mark was one of the seventy apostles chosen by our Lord, a fact mentioned by the Church writers as early as Origen, but comes everywhere in the liturgy.

After Pentecost St. Mark preached the Gospel, accompanying St. Peter in Judea. Later he accompanied St. Paul and St. Barnabas in their first mission in Asia and then went with Barnabas to Cyprus. Though he also worked with St. Paul especially in Colosse (Col. 4:10) and Rome (2 Tim. 4:11), his main mission was in Africa. He started by Pentapolis and from there he reached Alexandria about 61 A.D. The rest of his life he spent in establishing its church, except for a two-year visit to Pentapolis and a visit to Rome in 67 at the request of St. Paul. On Easter day of the year 68, he was arrested by the pagan mob of Alexandria, dragged in its streets for two successive days till he received the crown of martyrdom. His feast day occurs on Barmuda 30 (May 8).

The Relics of St. Mark

The body of St. Mark was kept faithfully in Egypt by the Copts who have been indebted to the great Apostle for their faith. After the banishment of Pope Dioscorus in 451 A.D., it fell into the hands of the Malkite church. The head was returned to the Copts by the Arab leader Amr in 644 A.D., while the body remained with the Malkites till about 828 A.D. when it was stolen and carried to Venice, Italy. A part was returned to Egypt in 1968. The head of St. Mark was treasured by successive generations of the Copts though it had to be moved from place to place and was last seen by Pope Peter VI about 250 years ago. It is supposed to be still kept in the present Cathedral of St. Mark at Alexandria.

Fields of Activity of St. Mark

Separate chapters in the book deal with different activities of St. Mark in serving the Church of Christ, namely:

1. *Foundation of the See of St. Mark at Alexandria*, where the apostolic succession continued without interruption till the present Pope Shenouda III.
2. *Establishment of the Theological School of Alexandria*. Its first Director, Justus, was chosen by St. Mark, and later became the 6th patriarch of Alexandria.
3. *Liturgy of St. Mark*. It is one of the oldest liturgies and is still used in the Church.
4. *The Gospel of St. Mark*. This long chapter (23 pages) gives a good introduction to the study of the gospel, with special emphasis on refuting the theories saying that St. Mark was not really the evangelist but only an interpreter of St. Peter or that he depended only on him for writing the Gospel.

The Coptic Church and St. Mark

St. Mark is valued and venerated greatly in the Coptic Church. Many of its churches have been named after him. Of its 117 popes, 19 have been named after his first Hebrew name, John, and 8 after his Latin name, Mark. His icons decorate many churches. His name is mentioned in practically every prayer of the Church, either with a doxology or for asking his blessing or intercession.

CURRENTS IN COPTIC CHURCH STUDIES

Life Of A Contemporary Saint Father Abd-el-Messih of Saint Macarius

By Bishop Mina, Bishop of Girga; Cairo, 1979

This book contains a lot of strange and difficult to grasp incidents which might make the reader dismiss the whole tale as fictitious were it not for several facts:

1. The author, Bishop Mina, knew the saint for years and had him as his spiritual director and confessor. He stated that he “used to observe him carefully in order to acquire something of his virtue”.
2. In spite of that, he did not speak much about his own experience; actually he stood short of mentioning certain private experiences with him and we even feel that he withheld much of his teaching and spiritual dialogues. Instead, he mentioned only the incidents which he could prove from eye witnesses whom he contacted directly. Some of these have been alive when the book was written.
3. The author tried hard to be accurate in all his statements and the dates he mentioned. When this was impossible, like getting the birth-date of the saint, he stated how he reached an approximate date.

Father Abd-el-Messih was born about 1892 of a Christian family in the village of “Abu-Shehata” in the province of Minya in upper Egypt. As a child he never went to school; however, somehow he learned to read. From his youth he was a great help to his father who had a big cattle farm. He had an insistent call to the monastic life and he left his home several times for the Monastery of Abba-Samuel at Calamoun only to be forced back by his father. Everytime the son returned from the monastery, many of the father’s cattle died suddenly in a mysterious manner.

At the Monastery of St. Macarius

The saint was finally free to respond to his call in 1914, when his father got another son, through the prayers of his elder son. He went to the monastery of St. Macarius, at Wadi-el-Natrun (the old Scetis) where he was consecrated as

a monk and given his name “Abd-el-Messih of St. Macarius”. His fellow monks admired in him his complete silence, quiet and obedience to the elders. He was always seen reading, by day or night. He learned several books of the Scripture by heart; and he had an encyclopedic knowledge of Church history, doctrines and rites. He had as a spiritual director a pious and learned monk, Father Abd-el-Messih Salib of Baramous. At times he used to remain in his cell for weeks without leaving it. He had a rope attached to the ceiling of his cell which he, imitating the desert father St. Bishoi, used to tie around his waist when he stood for whole nights of prayer. He new the Divine Office by heart, and he used no book to sing most of the Church hymns in a sweet angelic voice.

During his life in the monastery he used to eat only the crumbs that fell from the table, which he used to soak in water with some vegetable. He ate only once a day, and that was at night. He followed this regimen all his life even when he later lived in the outside world and had to be invited to many houses. He hid his virtue by appearing to eat early in the day.

His stay in the desert was not limited to the Monastery of St. Macarius. At some periods he lived in the monasteries of Our Lady Al-Baramous and Our Lady Al-Syrian.

The Holy Fool: a witness to the world.

Father Abd-el-Messih was not called to be a monk in the monastery. Instead he was led to lead a pilgrim life in the world, and the fame of his sanctity soon started to spread outside the monastery, to which he immediately responded by imitating the “holy fools”. Such way of saintly life is extremely rare in the Coptic Church, although we have examples in the lives of Saint Anna Simon (6th century), Saint Ruais and Saint Mark (14th century). Pope Yoannis XIX sent for Father Abd-el-Messih when he heard about him. He was thinking that he was fit to be a bishop; but, by behaving in an undue manner, the saint was able to change the mind of the pope.

The saint was then advised by his spiritual director to leave the monastery, in order to serve the Lord in this strange fashion. He went to several places and finally settled in the village of Al-Manahra near his birth place. There a Christian family gave him a room in their house, but he later had a cell of his own which was a small brick hut, without any painting. This hut still exists at Al-Manahra, and still reminds the people of the saint who lived among them. Many of them have strange tales to tell about the miracles of the saint. He had a way of covering his miracles by what appeared to be foolish words or deeds. Bishop Mina mentions many stories about the sick who were healed by his prayers. Many a time he asked a sick woman whether she would marry him when she got healed. Once an epileptic girl was brought to him from Luxor, hundreds of miles away. The saint said to those around him, “I am addicted to

cigarettes” and he asked for a cigarette. He took it and put it with the flame end inside his mouth. Then he gave it to the sick girl to smoke. After that, with everyone laughing and astonished, he said to the family, “The girl is healthy. Go away from here!” The epileptic fits never returned to the girl since that incident in 1958. Bishop Mina had the trouble of asking her father personally about her when they met in 1977. At that time she was in good health and had a family of her own.

During the thirty years the saint lived at Al-Manahra, the people never saw him attending anyone by his death bed. Whenever he was called to visit a sick man, he used to respond only if he knew that he was going to be healed. Sometimes he had the fore-knowledge of the death of a man, and in such cases he always refused even to enter his house. Instead, he used to take his black umbrella, put it on his shoulder and leave the village. This was a bad omen that the villagers knew well.

Beside the sick who were healed by the saint or by the touch of his clothes, the villagers have all types of strange stories to tell. One such story is related by L. B. Khalil, who assured the bishop that they had a dead duck which the saint brought back to life. Others saw him kill an apparently rabid dog by a word. The family members with whom he lived mentioned how they found by experience that every snake that touched the door of his room died at once. There was a lot of these in the garden and the house but they were cleared during his stay. People in a nearby village remember how they were saved from a deadly epidemic through the prayers of the saint when he visited them. Once he stood in front of a house in the city of Samalout, asked its owners for a cup of water, recited some prayers and then sprinkled the water over the house. Nobody understood the meaning of all this, till the next day when a fire broke out in a neighboring yard, but the house was not touched.

Among the countless incidents that proved the foreknowledge of Father Abd-el-Messih, Bishop Mina gave some examples which he had experienced personally or has met first hand witnesses. Many a time he foretold the birth of a child or its sex, a thing which is very important for the villagers. Once he visited the house of a cotton merchant without being expected. He met his wife and advised her to tell her husband to sell all the cotton he had. The man did as he was told and he was saved from a catastrophe because after two weeks the cotton market collapsed. Friends of the saint from Samalout mentioned how he foretold the fall of their house. Strangely enough when the house fell, only the room where Father Abd-el-Messih stayed did not fall.

The saint also knew about the choice of Pope Kyrillos for the patriarchate long before anybody thought about him. He told the author that he would become a bishop. He told a merchant in Samalout about the banishment of King Farouk two weeks before the 1952 revolution.

Pope Kyrillos and the Saint

When Pope Kyrillos came in 1959, he started by visiting most churches in his See. He intended to visit Al-Manahra only to meet the man of God. He entered the church accompanied by the Bishop of Beni Suef, Anba Athanasius. When the pope was inside the altar to offer a thanksgiving prayer, Father Abd-el-Messih came to greet him. But the bishop tried to prevent him with harsh words which were heard by all. He advised him that a meeting with the pope was not in his best interests for he had already ordered all monks to return to their monasteries. The saint took no heed of the words of the bishop and proceeded to see the pope. When the pope saw him, he bowed down and kept kissing his hand. When he was leaving the church, his holiness addressed the saint saying, "Pray for me, Father Abd-el-Messih."

After the pope left, Father Abd-el-Messih was seen standing by the Ibrahimiya.¹ He took a stone in his hand and threw it into the water while he said, "Athanasius, how did you dare to insult me in front of the people? I am going to hit you." At the same time, the bishop who was away from the village, was hit by a stone on his forehead. In the same day, when he and the Pope, reached the neighboring city Matay, he struck a big tree in the church yard which he did not see. He fell down and was raised up by his attendants. The pope then spoke, "Did you see what Father Abd-el-Messih has done for you?" The bishop then knew his mistake and sent for the saint asking for his forgiveness.

His Life at Al Manahra

Father Abd-el-Messih lived a poor life. He had only the clothes which he wore. If he washed any piece of his dress, he had to wait till it dried. Although his dress was of the kind which nobody cares to take if he found in the street, yet some people including the author kept pieces of his clothes as a blessing. The money which people gave to him, he used to give to the poor, again hiding his almsgiving with his foolish way. The cantor of St. Mary Church at Al-Manahra admitted that when he was in need of money, the saint used to call him and ask him to cross a little canal and search for unknown people. After he did, finding nobody, the saint gave him his wages. He used to play with orphan children, and then give them what he called "their wages."

Heavenly Light

Although Father Abd-el-Messih was a priest, yet he seldom offered the Eucharist. In the one occasion he officiated in St. Mary Church at Al-Manahra, he lifted up his eyes during the Epiclesis and stood silent for about five minutes. A flashing light came from the Offering and filled all the altar. The saint was weeping and striking his chest while everybody was taken with awe. At the end of the liturgy he told the people, "I am angry with the Virgin because she has betrayed my secret. Search for another priest to serve you."

Several people also witnessed that they saw the saint shining with heavenly light. Mariam, in whose house the saint lived for a time, saw him in his room standing and shining light was surrounding him.

A Moslem woman told the bishop that she once was passing by the hut of the saint and she looked through an opening in its wall. She saw the saint asleep, but his face was shining like a lamp and his fingers like ten candles. Later he closed that opening because, he said, snakes and frogs entered through it.

Examples of this heavenly witness are not lacking in the book. But the greatest witness was Pope Kyrillos himself. In 1957 he told Bishop Mina (both were monks at that time) "I was a disciple of Father Abd-el-Messih when he was in the Monastery of Al-Baramous . . . Once I was passing by his cell about midnight. I heard many sweet voices singing the Daily Office inside it. When I looked through the door panes to see what was happening, I saw a sparkling light which left me amazed. Full of curiosity, I knocked at the door. At once the light disappeared. Then Father Abd-el-Messih opened the door. He was wiping his eyes and looked like one trying to conquer sleep. He spoke as if in anger rebuking me for disturbing him . . . I had to apologize and ask his forgiveness. But my curiosity was not satisfied. So I hid behind a tree in front of his cell to see who were the strange monks inside. When the bell of the monastery rang at 2 a.m. for the Office, he left his cell alone to go to the church. Then I entered the cell, but found nobody inside, only the mat on which he slept. For several nights I watched his cell, and most of the time heard the same voices, and saw the same sparkling light."

Levitation

More than once the saint went from place to place in no time. An Ethiopian monk said that once on his way to the monastery he saw him flying like a bird in the sky. When he came down and the monk told him what he saw, he became angry and left. The monk reached the monastery of Al-Syrian after a five hour walk, to discover that Father Abd-el-Messih had already been there for five hours! Other people left him in Al-Manahra and went by car to Samalout to find him there. A priest mentioned how a harlot took him once to her room in the third floor of a building. She was stronger than him and tried to overpower him and let him lie with her in bed. The saint, finding no way out, threw himself out of the window. He came to no harm. The woman then repented and her life changed.

"Marriage" of the Saint

On Palm Sunday of 1963, the saint started to say to everybody, "I am going to be crowned and happy on Easter." Many thought that he was speaking about some fancy marriage as he used to do. But when he kept repeating the same words during the Holy Week, some began to understand what he meant.

On Easter Day, April 14, 1963, he finally left this earthly life to be crowned in paradise.

This may look like an incredible story, but it really happened in the twentieth century. If a proof is lacking, Bishop Mina proved that he has been a true disciple of a true saint. In 1977, following the examples of St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Ammonius of Damanhur and St. Isaac of Nineveh, he left his episcopate with its glories and troubles to lead the solitary life in the village of Al-Manahra, where his spiritual director once lived.

Footnote

1. Al-Ibrahimia is a big canal that starts from the Nile in Upper Egypt and passes by the village where the saint lived. It is the most important source of irrigation for most of the lands in Assiut and Minya.

BOOK REVIEWS

Translation of the Works of Father Matta El-Meskeen

The Monastery of St. Macarius at Scetis, which dates back to the fourth century, is now undertaking the translation of the works of Father Matta El-Meskeen into English as well as other languages. These works cover a span of some thirty years and number about seventy books in addition to hundreds of articles in various periodicals.

Father Matta El-Meskeen, the spiritual director and father of the monastery, has been acknowledged by *Time* as one of the “living saints.”¹ None other than those who have had the good fortune of reading his books and articles and hearing his sermons in Arabic can estimate the spiritual wealth they contain. As an ascetic who lived for decades in the desert, mostly in seclusion, he gives us in his works the fruits of a life lived with God. The deep mystic and ascetic elements in his works are only reminiscent of the old Desert Fathers. His works deal with sundry aspects of biblical, patristic, liturgical, theological and spiritual themes—all offered in a modern language and in a way applicable to our present day life and society. In all these he proves to be the scholar who is well learned in the traditional aspects as well as possessing an awareness of the most recent scholarship. “He is our contemporary incarnation of the patristic spirit . . . because within his theology the patristic and the contemporary meet.”² However, the value of the writings of Father Matta does not originate from his learning (although this is difficult to surpass) but in giving a material he lived and meditated on for years. He handles the word of God with reverence and deep spiritual insight. The Coptic Church has faithfully kept and practiced its liturgies for more than fifteen hundred years. But much of their texts and words were dead and meaningless to our ears till Father Matta found in them tremendous spiritual and theological significances.

It will take time till we see his major works in English (*The Orthodox Life of Prayer, Coptic Monasticism in the Age of St. Macarius, Eucharist and Liturgy, St. Athanasius the Apostolic: His Life and Theology.*) Each of these books contains about 800 pages. But the project of translating the main articles has already begun. During the last year, the press of St. Macarius’ monastery has published eleven booklets in English. For the sake of this review, I have classified them into three groups:

First: *Theological Articles*

1. *The Mystery of the Cross.* (12 pp., 50 cents)

This article deals with the redemptive action of our Lord and its effect on us, both on our daily life here on earth, and on our future resurrection for eternal life. Although the economy of salvation includes the whole Paschal Mystery (mainly our Lord's death and resurrection) which has become effective in every believer through the action of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, the emphasis here is on the 'Cross' as a climax which was basic for the whole mystery,

'... the triumph which was won over sin, death and Satan was not merely by enduring suffering but by accepting death so that the resurrection might be accomplished' (Page 9)

In order to redeem us, Christ had to share our humanity,

'Incarnation is responsible for the gift of redemption, that is the restoration of union between man and God' (Page 4)

Consequent to the death and resurrection of Christ,

'the Holy Ghost . . . was poured on humanity, and eternal life was thus transmitted to man across incarnation and the cross, then death and resurrection" (Page 4)

There were two types of sufferings accepted by Christ:

1. The natural sufferings which befell Him through accepting the form of a servant; like hunger, thirst, grief, insult, fatigue, pain.
2. The sufferings of His redemptive death on the Cross. These included an earthly aspect, caused by the wickedness and violence he suffered from people scouraging, nailing, bleeding and dying) and a heavenly aspect overflowing with divine love to fulfill the purpose of incarnation (bearing of sins, curse of the cross, forsaking by the Father).

Consequently Christ's sufferings have a dual effect on humanity:

1. In relation to our daily life. 'He endured all sufferings and trials like us in order to remove the curse (of Adam's fall) from our effort, toil, sweat and pain and transform them into a communion of love with God in Christ! (Page 9) 'Because Christ annihilated the power of sin which is the cause of the curse by His atonement on the Cross, he took off the element of curse pervading the sufferings and daily troubles. . . . Thus toil and pain for every man who lives in the redemption . . . is a sharing of life with Christ.' (Page 10).
2. Eternal Salvation. Through the cross Christ eradicated sin, overcame death, and reconciled the fallen humanity with the Father. All this is bestowed on us when we unite with Him in the Eucharist. His resurrection becomes eternal life for us.

2. ***Our Need for Christ.*** (8 pp., 50 cents)

In this deeply mystical article Father Matta carries the theology of Incarnation to the daily life of the Christian and his role as a witness to Christ. Human nature comprises two contradictory worlds, the physical and the spiritual. 'Christ in His full humanity and full divinity . . . reconciled the human reality . . . with spiritual ideals, or rather with God Himself.' (Page 2) When the 'Person of Christ' enters our life, it will be natural and easy to obey His commandments. No one is able to declare or interpret Christ, but when we receive Him with all our being, then He will speak and act within us. Our Christianity is not liked by people because our deeds and words are devoid of the spirit of Christ. A witness for Christ should not present himself, or seek his own glory, but should receive from Christ and give to the others. Christ is the sole need of our life.

3. ***One Christ & One Catholic Church*** (8 pp., 50 cents)

This article deals with two characteristics of the Church, its oneness and its catholicity. It dismisses the claim of any single church, Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant, that it is the One Catholic Church, as being sectarian, fanatic and narrow minded. The Church is One because it is the Body of the One Christ. It is Catholic because it is capable of gathering all mankind and unifying it within a single sonship to God. The fault in the Church's schism lies not in the nature of the Church, but in the nature of man's ability to conceive and grasp the nature of Christ and the Church.

This article, written by a Coptic Orthodox theologian and originally published in an Eastern Orthodox magazine, is a step in the ongoing ecumenical dialogue. The view of a divided Church is accepted now by many theologians in various churches, but this does not mean that it is the official teaching of any of their churches. Another weak point in the article is the lack of references to the other two characteristics of the Church—apostolicity and holiness. However, a small article cannot contain the whole teaching of Father Matta about the Church.³

Second: *Articles Dealing With Spiritual Life*

1. ***Repentance*** (24 pp., \$1.00)

This is a long meditation on the love of Christ and His power to save sinners,

'Jesus Christ came to the world to save sinners! The sinner—yes, the sinner who is but a quantity of filth mixed with lusts, evil, vanity and the painful experience of wantonness. . . . The sinner who feels within himself a total deprivation of all that is holy, pure and solemn . . .; the sinner who in his own eyes is in utter darkness, severed from the hope of salvation, from the light of life and from the communion of saints, is

himself the friend whom Jesus invited to dinner, the one who was asked to come out from behind the hedges—the one asked to be a partner in his wedding and an heir to God.’ (Pages 3,4)

The penitent who is powerless against sin is likened to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers, or to Jonah in the belly of the fish. But it is Christ who,

“comes to him personally where he fell . . . washing and dressing his wound by His own wound . . . pours upon him the oil of His compassion and of His life, carries him on the arms of His mercy, offers him a ride to the inn of His Church, and asks His angels to serve him.” (Page 11)
 ‘Nothing is asked of the sinner but to stretch out his hand like the woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8:43), and touch the garment of the Saviour, and he will then realize how the power of the Lord comes forth to abide in him.’ (Page 13)

Although this message may be taken as one directed to sinners and penitents to encourage them in their way back to Christ, we find that Father Matta does not exclude anyone from the spirit of repentance. Even,

‘when saints perceived the honor pertaining to repentance and remorse. . . they snatched it for their own, and subdued themselves craftily and shrewdly to the severe disciplines of repentance.’ (Page 2)

We need the power of repentance through our whole spiritual life in our persistent strife so that,

‘Grace might be a guide to the movement of the conscience, curbing the action of the flesh, controlling the birth of thoughts, guiding asceticism, mingling itself with austerity and sweetening regret. . . . It is not merely the forgiveness of sin which is the whole action of Grace within man . . . but to withhold sin from the organs, that its power might cease to exist and its law might vanish from our nature. . . .’ (Page 24)

2. *The Experience of God in a Monk's Life.* (12 pp., 50 cents)

In this article Father Matta describes his actual ascetic experience as a monk responding to God's call for exodus from the world,

‘By the experience of God in a monk's life we mean simply the Christian experience in its integrity. . . . I have found out among the people living in the world that many possess an inner Christian life stronger and deeper than mine, but rarely did I find among them any who possesses my experience of God in others with all its force, nay, with all its violence and depth. I acquired this experience in my monastic life as an immediate result of the life of solitude, privacy, prayer, and deep meditation in the Old and New Testaments as well as the lives of the early Fathers of monasticism’. (Pages 1 & 2)

The exodus of Abraham from Ur in response to God's call, *not knowing where to go* was the anticipation of the response of every man returning to God. But in the life of the monk, his total and physical renunciation of the world is more likened to the forty days in which Christ retired in the wilderness after His Baptism,

'The Holy Forty Days have therefore become a state of the new man, inherited from Christ perfect and victorious as it is, like Baptism, Crucifixion or Resurrection. Monasticism took it eagerly and turned it into a whole life (the Forty Days of life.)' (Page 8)

After a monk succeeds in his inward solitude and grows in his life with Christ, he realizes his responsibility towards other people. However, this does not mean that he has to abandon his call to the contemplative life,

'But even after he has achieved full maturity in this exodus and solitude, and acquired the full measure of this state of Christ in such a unique and superb experience, a monk need not do more than stay in readiness to give and sacrifice without leaving his post, for the call to work does not require moving to the world or coming down to people. If he is well aware of his fulness in Christ, a monk can draw the world to him and uplift people to his level without budging from the place of his retirement.' (Page 11)

By concluding the article with this statement, Father Matta is probably emphasizing the real spirit of Coptic Monasticism, the spirit of the Desert Fathers.

Third: *Articles Dealing With The Church Feasts*

These are:

- (1) *The Original Calendar of the Coptic Church* (16 pp., 50 cents)
- (2) *Epiphany* (8 pp., 50 cents)
- (3) *Resurrection and Redemption in the Orthodox Concept* (10 pp., 50 cents)
- (4) *Ascension & Pentecost* (16 pp., 50 cents)
- (5) *The Martyrdom of the Two Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul* (12 pp., 50 cents)
- (6) *The Assumption of the Body of Virgin Mary* (50 cents)

We hope to review these in the next issue of Coptic Church Review.

Footnotes:

1. TIME, Vol 106, No. 26, December 29, 1975.
2. Dr. O. Wintermute, in *Coptic Church Review*, Vol 1, No. 3, p. 139.
3. One of the earliest books by Father Matta El-Meskeen, 'The Immortal Church' (published in Cairo, 1959), dealt with the subject in more detail.

To obtain any or all of the booklets of Father Matta El-Meskeen, orders may be sent to:

Monastery of St. Macarius
P.O. Box 2780
Cairo, Egypt.

Prices include mail (books are sent by registered air mail, immediately after payment is received.) Checks and bank orders are to be directed to the account of:

MARKOS REVIEW
P.O. Box 31
Shoubra, Cairo, Egypt

BOOK NOTICES

THE COPTS AND CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

By Aziz S. Atiya. 38 pp. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, Utah; 1979. \$4.00

history of the Middle Ages and of the Eastern Churches. He is the founder of the Institute of Coptic Studies at Cairo and, since he came to the United States in 1955, has occupied the professorship of history of various universities. He is a member of a number of societies and academies and, although he has passed his 80th birthday, he is still very active in editing and compiling the monumental *Coptic Encyclopedia*. He has been distinguished for his scholarship on the Crusades, but his most important work on Church history is *A History of Eastern Christianity* (1968).

'*The Copts and Christian Civilization*' gives a bird's eye view of the role the Coptic Church played in the spread of Christianity, and in the development of its spirituality, theology and art. Christian theology was studied in the school of Alexandria in the second and third centuries. The Coptic Fathers led the ecumenical movement in the fourth and fifth centuries, while on the spiritual level monasticism in Egypt attracted to it from everywhere all who wanted to worship the Lord in solitude. With its later introduction into Europe, monasticism became the sole custodian of culture and Christian civilization in the Dark Ages. Professor Atiya elaborated upon the early missionary endeavor of the Coptic Church in Africa and Europe.

In its conclusion, the book tried to ponder on the miracle of the survival of this most ancient Christianity. He attributed it to its profound spirituality, blood of its martyrs, the racial consciousness of the Copts of their remote ancestry from Ancient Egypt and the tolerance of some of their rulers. Although it mentioned the Coptic music as a contribution to the Christian art, nothing is mentioned about the liturgy of the Coptic Church which was the sole instructor of its sons, and keeper of the faith through long and dark ages. The history, structure and theology of the liturgies of the Eucharist, sacramental liturgies and the Daily Office in the Coptic Church need more emphasis and study.

SONGS OF HEAVEN

By Robert E. Coleman. Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, N.J.; 1980. 160 p. \$6.95 (Hard cover)

We received this book that deals with the Songs in the Book of Revelation, written by an Evangelical scholar. It develops an aspect of the Revelation which is often overlooked. Revelation is the book of worship in the New Testament. With extensive research in scholarly commentaries, examining the Greek text, and the many references to the Old Testament, and including many footnotes with ample bibliography, the author did much. However, although he was aware that the Revelation songs 'have characteristics of the earliest liturgical hymns' (p. 18) and that 'all the songs about the throne involve corporate worship' (p. 141), yet when commenting on the songs, he dealt mainly with private worship and newer hymns, ignoring completely the relationship between the book of Revelation and the early Church liturgies. He failed to see in the multitude washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb (P. 81, Rev. 7:14), a clear reference to Baptism; nor did he find a relationship between the Eucharist and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (P. 141-147, Rev. 19:6-9) or the closing verses of the Revelation. In spite of this, the book makes good spiritual reading, study and meditation, because, in the words of the author, 'After all, these hymns are sung in the Presence of the King, and we have every right to join the celebration.'

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