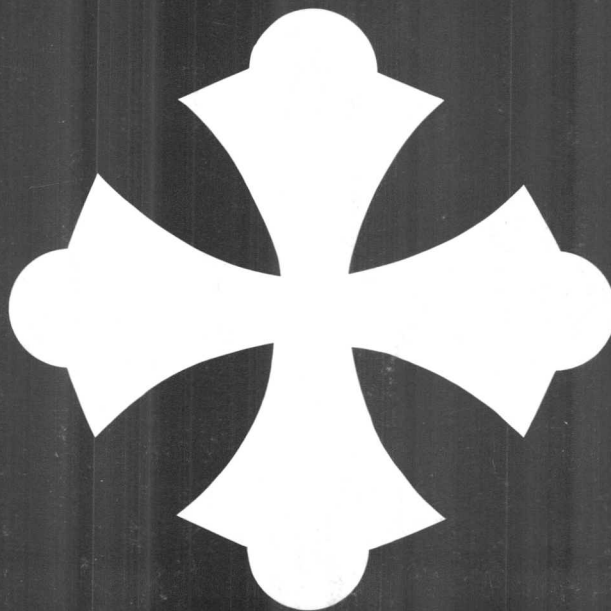


COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

Volume 3, Number 1Spring 1982

- *The Cry of A Persecuted Church*
- *The Journey of Lent*
- *Jesus the Crucified*



Society of Coptic Church Studies

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

It was with the tears of its sons, with the blood of its martyrs and with the sufferings of its confessors that the Coptic Church celebrated Christmas and Epiphany this year. Now is the season of Lent and the Holy Week is approaching. Still the Church has no other alternative but to follow her Saviour in the way of the Cross.

The Message of Lent was written by **Bishop Wissa** in 1981 for his congregation of Al-Balyana. Suffering for his faith in an Egyptian prison, he cannot send any message this year. But we greet him among the others who “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

In ***the Journey of Lent***, the late **Father Bishoi Kamel** comments on the gospel readings for the Sundays of Lent. Lent is a journey to the bosom of the Father which starts by the private prayer of the children of God, and ends with them ruling in His kingdom. Father Bishoi is considered one of the greatest spiritual leaders of this century. He served in Alexandria, Egypt and the USA (1959-1979). This article is translated from St. Mark Monthly Review, March, 1976.

The article on ***Holy Thursday***, by **Father Matta el-Meskeen**, also translated from St. Mark Monthly Review, March, 1980, discusses the “anamnesis” (i.e. the re-calling or making present) in the Last Supper and in the Eucharist of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

Life of the Desert Father ***Saint Macarius the Great*** is the content of a lecture given by **Father Tadros Malaty** at St. Mary the Virgin Coptic Church of Melbourne, Australia in 1978. St. Macarius is commemorated in the Coptic Church on April 5. We have heard nothing from or about Fr. Tadros since his arrest last September when the Egyptian government declared its persecution against the Coptic Church.

The Brethren of the Lord is a biblical and historical study of the relatives of our Lord who were mentioned in Scripture.

Currents in Coptic Church Studies

This section which the Journal started last year has proved valuable in transmitting to the English speaking world works by Coptic Church theologians in other languages. Since these works have not been translated or published in English yet, we try to give a comprehensive summary in our review.

In this issue the section presents *Jesus the Crucified* by the late **Father Manasseh Youhanna** (1899-1930). The author was ordained a priest in Mal-lawi, a city of Upper Egypt, in 1925. During his very short life, and in spite of his various pastoral activities which included also the editing of a church magazine, "The Paradise", he wrote a number of books, all in Arabic, on biblical studies, spiritual meditations, theological and doctrinal themes and historical subjects. Twelve of these have been published, mostly after his death. His most important work is "History of the Coptic Church", his most popular one is "Jesus the Crucified". He died on May 16, 1930. In our review of this 287 page book we have tried to keep the meditation style of the author; the editorial comments are given in the footnotes.

Editor

THE CRY OF A PERSECUTED CHURCH

From the Encyclical Letter of St. Athanasius the Great

When St. Athanasius was exiled and deposed at least he was free to write to his people and to other churches. His successor Pope Shenouda III is now deposed and exiled by the Egyptian government. From the time he had gone to the desert of Wadi-el-Natroun six months ago, three letters carrying his name were circulated with governmental consent. However, their authenticity and the circumstances of their writing is a matter for the history to decide. The fact is that Pope Shenouda does not enjoy the freedom which St. Athanasius enjoyed to write what he wants. Since we cannot hear the voice of our present Pope, we have instead the voice of St. Athanasius, not the militant Athanasius of the fourth century, but the triumphant Athanasius writing now to the churches throughout the world about the events in his church, while he appeals on her behalf to the heavenly Judge and High Priest. The Letter is adapted from the translation of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

To his fellow-ministers in every place, beloved lords, Athanasius sends health in the Lord.

Our sufferings have been dreadful beyond endurance, and it is impossible to describe them in suitable terms; but in order that the dreadful nature of the events which have taken place may be more readily apprehended, I have thought it good to remind you of a history out of the Scriptures. It happened that a certain Levite (Judg. 19:22-30) was injured in the person of his wife; and, when he considered the exceeding greatness of the pollution, being astounded at the outrage which had been committed against him, he divided his wife's body, as the Holy Scripture relates in the Book of Judges, and sent a part of it to every tribe in Israel, in order that it might be understood that an injury like this pertained not to himself only, but extended to all alike; and that, if the people sympathised with him in his sufferings, they might avenge him; or if they neglected to do so, might bear the disgrace of being considered thenceforth as themselves guilty of the wrong. . . . So every tribe of Israel was moved, and all came together against the offenders, as though they had themselves

been the sufferers; and at last the perpetrators of this iniquity were destroyed in war, and became a curse in the mouths of all: for the assembled people considered not their kindred blood, but regarded only the crime they had committed. You know the history, brethren, and the particular account of the circumstances given in Scripture. I will not therefore describe them more in detail, since I write to persons acquainted with them, and as I am anxious to represent to your piety our present circumstances, which are even worse than those to which I have referred. For my object in reminding you of this history is this, that you may compare those ancient transactions with what has happened to us now, and perceiving how much these last exceed the other in cruelty, may be filled with greater indignation on account of them, than were the people of old against those offenders. ***For the treatment we have undergone surpasses the bitterness of any persecution; and the calamity of the Levite was but small, when compared with the enormities which have now been committed against the Church;*** or rather such deeds as these were never before heard of in the whole world, or the like experienced by any one. For in that case it was but a single woman that was injured, and one Levite who suffered wrong; ***now the whole Church is injured, the priesthood insulted, and worst of all, piety is persecuted by impiety.*** On that occasion the tribes were astounded, each at the sight of part of the body of one woman; but ***now the members of the whole Church are seen divided from one another,*** and are sent abroad some to you, and some to others, bringing word of the insults and injustice which they have suffered. Be ye therefore also moved, I beseech you, considering that these wrongs are done unto you no less than unto us; and ***let every one lend his aid, as feeling that he is himself a sufferer, lest shortly ecclesiastical Canons, and the faith of the church be corrupted. For both are in danger, unless God shall speedily by your hands amend what has been done amiss, and the Church be avenged on her enemies.*** For our Canons and our forms were not given to the churches at the present day, but were wisely and safely transmitted to us from our forefathers. Neither had our faith its beginning at this time, but it came down to us from the Lord through His disciples. That therefore ***the ordinances which have been preserved in the churches from old time until now, may not be lost in our days,*** and the trust which has been committed to us required at our hands; rouse yourselves, brethren, as being stewards of the mysteries of God, and seeing them now seized upon by others.

Now the outrages which have been committed against us and against the Church are these. . . . On a sudden the Prefect of Egypt puts forth a public letter, bearing the form of an edict, and declaring that one Gregory from Cappadocia was coming to be my successor from the court. This announcement confounded every one, for such a proceeding was entirely novel, and now heard of for the first time. The people however assembled still more

constantly in the churches, for they very well knew that neither they themselves, nor any Bishop or Presbyter, nor in short any one had ever complained against me. . . .

The people, therefore, were justly indignant and exclaimed against the proceeding, calling the rest of the magistrates and the whole city to witness, that this novel and iniquitous attempt was now made against the Church, not on the ground of any charge brought against me by ecclesiastical persons, but through the wanton assault of the Arian heretics. For even if there had been any complaint generally prevailing against me, it ought to have been according to the ecclesiastical Canons, and the direction of Paul, when the people were “gathered together, and the spirit” of them that ordain, “with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 5:4), all things ought to have been enquired into and transacted canonically, in the presence of thos among the laity and clergy who demanded the change; and not that a person brought from a distance . . . , as if making a traffic of the title of Bishop, should with the patronage and strong arm of heathen magistrates, thrust himself upon those who neither asked for nor desired his presence, nor indeed knew anything of what had been done. ***Such proceedings tend to the dissolution of all the ecclesiastical Canons, and compel the heathen to blaspheme, and to suspect that our appointments are not made according to a divine rule, but as a result of corrupt trade and patronage.***

MESSAGE OF LENT

His Grace Bishop Wissa

Jesus Christ is the Bread of life who has been offered unto death for our salvation. Christ has fasted on our behalf with a great mystery—to sanctify us in His fast. He is able to fill our hungry souls with love so we are cured from pride, spite and hatred, and He is able to grant us a pure fast free from all evil.

The prophet David invites us to fast with a humble and contrite spirit, and in doing this he does not give orders or set laws, but follows a practical method as Christ has himself fasted to teach us how to fast. The truth of the matter is that we are in dire need of this useful exercise which is beneficial to our lives and which grants us peace, security, restraint and a good preparation to create harmony between the soul and the body. With the weakening of the flesh, the passions are weakened and the instincts are quietened, and the spirit is strengthened and revived, and we behave in a manner worthy of us as children of God. He who worships God, let him do so in Spirit and truth. Thus, fasting not only has many benefits, but it is one of the pillars of worship, without which our spiritual life does not and will not be in order.

Look at the holy prophet who comprehended the importance of fasting and says in his Psalm “I humbled my soul with fasting.” (Ps. 35:13); and in another place he says, “I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting.” (Ps. 69:10). This is the method of fasting followed by David the Prophet and King who had his cares, all the affairs of the kingdom, his journeys, wars, pursuits, also his large family; and who, in spite of all this, humbled and chastened his soul with fasting, and “my knees are weak through fasting.” (Ps. 109:24)

Fasting is not an ordinance but it is an exercise that is desirable, useful and necessary to every soul, without which it is impossible to reach the lowest level of devoutness, piety and holiness without all of which no one can obtain salvation. It is imperative to have a regular strife and victory over the body and its passions. For this, the Lord God planned this method since the creation of Adam the first man. All generations, individuals as well as groups, fasted until our fathers the Apostles started their missions and preached fasting, and the Holy Church followed that profound spiritual exercise in teaching that the sin of gluttony is the most dangerous of all lusts in our lives.

We thus fast to proclaim to the Lord that there is a hunger that cannot be satisfied with materialistic things, and there is a thirst for Him that is not

quenched by earthly water. We fast to prepare ourselves to be filled with the Bread of life that came down from heaven. Therefore, we suppress our love for gluttony and greed, and avoid the love of wealth and power, because they trample and defeat all love of righteousness. We also cast away from us the vain love of glory so that with contrition and humility, our souls unite with God and we obtain the blessing which through our Lord's own mouth is for the poor in spirit for they shall see God and for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled with the heavenly Manna.

Let us fast then, dear brother, from all evil in purity and righteousness and let us approach the holy Sacrifice and partake of it with gratitude.

The Journey of Lent

Blessed Father Bishoi Kamel

The Church has a strong program during this fast put by the Fathers through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which became to the soul a source of survival and spiritual filling, and to the Church a source of communal repentance and deep fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ in His fast. . . For Christ fasted for us and with us—and certainly He is a partner with each fasting soul.

The monks used to take this opportunity of the holy fast to leave their monasteries to the wilderness in solitude and in the fullness of the company of the Lord Jesus and the fellowship of His Holy Spirit. At the end of Lent they returned to their monasteries (as was recorded for us in the tale of St. Mary the Egyptian and her meeting with St. Zosima the priest).

In addition, the Church considered the great lent a dedication program for the teaching of catechumens who were admitted to the faith, and who at Easter were baptized in the name of the Trinity—that is they were buried and resurrected with Christ. The procession which the Church conducts, these days for the newly baptized baby was in the past the procession of Resurrection which the catechumens experienced at their baptism and resurrection in the Lord at Easter.

These days the Church as a body practices absolute abstention, daily liturgies, the life of repentance and contrition before God. We can find through meditation on the Sunday readings a strong spiritual program for every soul, which may be titled, “*The Journey to the Bosom of the Father*”.

The journey starts in a frank and clear invitation in the gospel of the preparation Sunday for the entry into the closet for a dialogue with the Father.

1. *Preparation Sunday* (Matt. 6:1-8)

“When thou prayest enter into thy closet, . . . shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret. . . .” Also if thou givest alms or fastest that also should be to the Father in secret. . . .

The Point of Departure of the Journey

The Church declares to us that the closet is the point of departure of the journey of Lent. If it does not start at the closet then the journey of our fast has

deviated from its true course. The fact that the Church starts the fast by directing us to the closet means that the fast is not only related to the flesh but it is related more to the spirit and to Kingdom of God (The life of prayer page 545). The week of preparation is the week of the closet.

Close your Door:

The journey starts after closing the door—the door that looks at the world. Then there opens before us another door that faces heaven, “Our father who art in heaven”, “I looked, and, behold a door was opened in heaven” (Rev. 4:1) “Fasting is not a fetter or a prison to the senses but a soaring with them without hindrance towards contemplation of God” (Life of Prayer p. 545)

Pray to your Father:

The Church has set a standard to the level of faith of the catechumens before they are allowed to receive the Sacrament of Baptism. The standard is that the church continues teaching the catechumens about the Lord’s prayer, which starts with “Our Father . . .”, and at the moment they perceive and comprehend the paternity of God to them, they are entitled to receive the Sacrament of Baptism.

Your Father Who Sees in Secret:

This is the secret of the prayer of the closet which the Church perceived, and so allotted to it the deepest of prayers like the prayer of the wise virgins awaiting the coming of the bridegroom, and the prayer of the fallen woman at feet of the Lord Jesus (Prayer of the closet of “Matins”). Where in the closet we discover our sins . . . and we hold the feet of the Lord to free our feet from the prodigal road, and we taste the love of God, and learn contrition, and thus the goal of the journey of our fast becomes the withdrawal of the soul into itself (in secret) where the Lord purifies it with His blood and dedicates her a temple for Him and adorns her with His talents so that she may participate with the wise virgins in the meeting of the Bridegroom.

Since the journey is with the soul, it should be done in secret. The secret relationship between the human soul and Christ, is an invisible relationship that begins in the chamber. So fasting is accompanied by a reduction in talking and visits and by concentrating on spiritual readings and attending the Divine Liturgy.

Brother, our Heavenly Father is calling you to a holy participation with Him in secret, through which you may start your fast, your prayers, and your almsgivings. So beware of negligence.

Practice: The practice in the week of preparation is the prayer of the chamber and the worship in secret which will continue with us all through and after the period of fasting.

2. ***Surrender of life to the Heavenly Father:*** (Matt. 6:24-34)

The gospel of the first Sunday of Lent calls for the surrender of life to the Father. "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat . . . nor yet for the body, what ye shall put on. . . . Take no thought for the morrow." The reason for not worrying is that "your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Matt. 6:32).

The Practice of this week is a call to a secure life in the care of the Father and the carrying out of what comes in the verse, "Take no thought for the morrow", physically, mentally and spiritually.

The Christian commandment is full of risks but its assurance is the care of the Father. The woman who gave the two mites was risking her meal, and during the fast, Satan rages his war by convincing us that we are risking the necessities of the body and causes us to worry about our health, and likewise in charity there is a risk of wealth.

In this week we experience the complete surrender to the care of the Father and to His commandment.

3. ***Why does God forget us if he is our Father?*** (Matt. 4:1-10)

The gospel of the Second Sunday deals with the temptation of doubting God's paternity to us, "If you are the son of God—why does He leave you hungry? Why does God allow the presence of disease, failure and the death of our beloved?"

Practice: It is our duty this week to examine our faith in the love of the Father who gave His Son for us—our faith that should surpass all temptations and emotions—faith in the Father—a faith that fortifies us against the temptation of the Adversary, the hardships of this world and the sufferings and desires of the body.

4. ***Repentance in the Father's bosom*** (Luke 15:11-32)

Repentance in Christianity is different from any other repentance; it is the return of the son to his Father and the Father falling on the neck of His son to embrace him and kiss him (Luke 15:20). This is the gospel of the third Sunday.

The Father's paternity to us is not because of our righteousness, but because of His paternity to his children, especially the sinners.

The Father's paternity for us challenges all our sins, our failures, our betrayal of His love and our mistreatment of His name.

Practice: Brother, do not permit this week to go by without a true repentance and resorting to the Father's embrace. . . . Examine this in your chamber and taste the Father's embrace and His kisses which are reserved only for those who repent. This is the week of repentance in the Father's bosom, the repentance of the whole Church . . . the communal repentance.

5. ***Worship of the Father in Spirit and in Truth*** (John 4:1-42)

The next step after repentance is worship of the Father Who accepted and loved me and cleansed me from my sins and put me in His bosom. Contrition of the spirit and submission to the Father and the love of frequent prostrations in worship are the expressions of our love for Him who opened His arms for us sinners and kissed us. This is the end of the road of repentance in the Father's bosom, and this is the sweetest fruit of the chamber and which the Father gives us in secret.

The Church, inspired by the Spirit, stresses in the period of Lent the use of prostrations during private prayers and in the Divine Liturgy (At the "Offering of Incense" after the readings of the prophets).

Practice of this week, is the worship of the Father in truth and in Spirit "for the Father seeketh such to worship him". (John 4:23)

6. ***Bethesda and Baptism*** (John 5:1-18)

The Gospel of the fifth Sunday talks about Bethesda which symbolizes Baptism. We, the crowds of Christians, were beside it sick, lame, blind and paralyzed; suffering every spiritual sickness. The angel which moves the water symbolizes the Holy Spirit which comes down on the water of Baptism.

This is our share in Christ: those who are baptized have everlasting hope in the Father even if they have been sick for 38 years.

The practice of this week is to hope and never to despair—Baptism has given us the grace of sonship and children are never disappointed in their hopes in the love of the Father.

7. ***Sonship is a spiritual enlightenment*** (John 9:1-41)

The last Sunday in Lent is the Sunday of Baptism, during which is read the Gospel of the man born blind.

a. "I was blind and now I see." This is our everlasting experience as children of the Heavenly Father. We were blind and He opened our sight so we beheld miracles of His laws and we saw what the prophets longed to see, and He gave us understanding of the Scriptures.

b. Baptism means—washing (in the pool of Siloam), so we become pure. Repentance is a continuous washing, so we may see clearly.

Repentance is a continuation of Baptism and it is the means through which we can see Christ clearly all our life. Lasting repentance cleans our heart, renews the intellect, protects the contrite soul in the obedience of the Father, and through repentance, we can discover all the graces and secrets of the Heavenly Father.

8. ***The Kingdom of the beloved Son*** (Matt. 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-48; John 12:12-19)

This week begins with the entrance of Christ to rule Jerusalem, riding on an ass and ends by Him ruling from the Cross on Calvary where He draws all to Him—all the children to rule with Him in the Kingdom of His Father.

(Translated by Mrs. Lily H. Soliman)

Holy Thursday

Father Matta El-Meskeen

A summary of a sermon delivered on Holy Thursday of 1979 in the church of St. Macarius in the desert of Scete.

I have been talking to you the last few days, and since the start of the Holy Week about Christ's serene vision of His passion throughout the entire Bible; from the start to the conclusion. During the wedding of Cana of Galilee and amongst the mirth of the celebration, He disclosed to his mother that His hour was not yet then. Within the glory of Transfiguration and the glory of His presence in the midst of the lit cloud the two great prophets Moses and Elijah were talking to him about His exodus that was bound to be fulfilled with death. We would not be mistaken if we say that Christ's discourse about His passion either symbolically or illustrated by stories, through indirect teaching or emphatic declaration does not just fill the Bible, it is the entire Bible, as we have elaborated previously.

However, on this day, Christ gives us a wonderful vivid image of His viewing of His passion. He has already revealed His passion and death, revealing its time limit "after three days" or "in a little while", and its definite place saying that outside Jerusalem no prophet will die!! We have seen also that he has accurately described the characters of His murderers and crucifiers, the High Priests, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the elders of the people and the gentiles, as well as the preceding incidents of passion on the Cross, including the very accurate account of scourging, beating, slapping, spitting, and insulting.

However, on this Last Supper, Christ reveals His passion and death in their eternal depth that transcends time, place and matter, revealing for the first time in history how the eternal can be made present at the level of time, place and matter, and how the historic and the material can rise to enter into the paths of eternity!!

When Christ said to his disciples as He was holding the cup of wine mixed with water in His hand, "Take drink of it all of you, this is my blood which is shed for you and for many", He was not actually fortelling the incident of His bloodshed on the Cross, as he used to teach before, but He was then presenting

the same incident, dripping with blood, from beyond the future. The wonder of wonders was to give them to drink this blood in its mysterious form that surpasses the senses and goes beyond time, which is the same blood He intended to shed on the Cross for them. How can we drink of it or taste it unless we close our eyes to grasp by faith that which can neither be tasted nor seen, the eternal, and timeless?

Christ here reveals the deep concept of His passion, death and bloodshed in a manner that completely transcends the limitations of pain and the nature of blood that rots. Here, Christ abruptly excels the time-bound incident whether it was offered to the disciples in its past form as a prophecy or the one coming on the Cross which their downcast mentality could imagine as an unjustified penalty. Christ tried to hand to His disciples the mystery of His death, even the mystery of His life through the cup of supper, when the disciples completely failed to understand the value and the mystery of His passion through explanation and prophecy. In His knowledge that we are all liable to this deficiency, Christ started to reveal this same mystery so openly, bare of time and of logic, and to hand it in its living essence to His disciples and consequently to the whole world, "for you and for many." We take it to ourselves so it may settle in our innermost soul, if not possible in our minds, as an act of death and life that works in our decay to raise us alive for God.

In other words, if the disciples failed to perceive through the clear teachings of Christ that the Lord's passion, His death and bloodshed constitute inevitable resurrection and life, there is no way other than to accept the essence of His death on a mystical level that surpasses materialistic and historical incidents, so it is changed in them into resurrection and life that also excels the physical and historical levels.

This is what Christ actually accomplished in the Last Supper. He gave them the Sacrament of His death, His resurrection and His life in the broken bread and mixed wine so that the Cross in all its power might dwell in them and in their depth till it is time for the intellect to be enlightened " . . . thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." (John 13:7), when the concept of redemption is awakened in man to associate the timely with the everlasting and the prophecy with fulfillment, the material and the divine; and to discover this supremely divine mystery which is intermingled inside time, prophecy and physical fulfillment altogether.

Is not this the same inevitable direct consequence of the divine mystery of incarnation when He faces passion and death? In other words the appearance of God in the flesh necessitates the declaration of the mystery of resurrection if He faces death.

Is not this the same direct consequence of the indwelling of the fullness of the Godhead in the flesh, or the result of the union between the Eternal and the historic? Death and Sheol may be conquered and a new live path may be

opened amidst the darkness of the world, a holy path through the world possibly to God's heart through this blood which is shed.

I would like here to remind you that to perceive the Lord's passion, His death and His resurrection in the Sacrament of the broken bread and the poured blood is never on the level of the logical perception we have used to apply for comparing prophecies to incidents and incidents to prophecies, which proved right away the truth of both incident and prophecy and warmed up our hearts, and we considered this in itself the essence and miracle of the Bible, i.e. the revelation of the divine truth in the Bible.

However, we here face in the Sacrament of the Last Supper the sudden declaration of Christ as He holds the cup in His hand, we do face Him declaring that this is actually His blood, the blood shed on the Cross before it is shed. Here is a defiance of logic, reason and perception altogether.

Therefore, in the Last Supper, Christ declares His death and the shedding of His blood and resurrection in a completely new way, far different from any didactic logic we are familiar with. Christ here cancels and transcends the future time. He takes the evident and bare incident as it awaits Him with its blood on the Cross, takes it from beyond the future and makes it present with its vivid and active reality in the present in front of His disciples, "This is my blood which is shed". It is in the same way that we exactly represent it from beyond the past, with its living reality which is always present.

In this same capacity of cancelling time limitation, presenting an incident bare of its periodic time concept, He exalts his passion and presents his poured blood on the Cross to the disciples in its everlasting divine essence as an active work of redemption, beyond time, prior to time and after time. It forgives past, present and future sins, "to be given for the remission of sins".

Christ's revelation of His passion was highly exalted to exceed the viewing of future incidents, the incidents which, whenever He wanted to reveal to His disciples, they became exceedingly sad. The dread of the Cross as a curse and a penalty was great enough to render the wonderful act of redemption hollow of its magnificent divine concept. Therefore, He here stopped short of revealing His passion as a future event; He no longer expressed His view of passion as something that would shortly be fulfilled. Beside the fact that this scared the disciples and constituted a pressure on them to the extent that their hearts were filled with sorrow, they completely failed to perceive the mystery of redemption and salvation concealed in His passion implicitly or explicitly.

The question that causes one to wonder now is how can the disciples fail to comprehend Christ that much?

Nevertheless, this is the fact of the inevitable contrast for which Christ came. Everything that pertains to Christ, specially His passion and death, is not on the intellectual logical level; because how can passion bring forth joy or death bring forth life?

Originally and fundamentally, Christ is not subject to time. All His supreme actions are above the level of rules that subdued man's intellect and emotions, and specifically man's slavery to sin and death. Hence, the major message Christ came to complete for man, is to divert his humiliating submission to sin and his utter servitude to death to the acceptance of the freedom of the children of God, and to the acceptance of life by his will through the belief in Christ's blood for the remission of sins in which justification and redemption are accomplished; consequently, the inevitable transfer from death to life is fulfilled.

However, it is important to refer here to the "agape" as the chosen form in which Christ entrusted the mystery of His passion and death, as we have pointed out before to Christ's persistence on talking about His passion and death in a delightful atmosphere as we have seen Him when Mary poured out the expensive alabaster jar of perfume or on the conclusion of the wonderful Transfiguration journey, or as they proceeded on the way to Jerusalem while they sang the psalms of ascents in complete rapture and joy, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Here also we find Christ choosing the occasion of the Supper that was regarded among the happiest occasions in the life of the Jewish people; He chooses it and selects the two most holy incidents, the start of supper by breaking the bread of blessing, and its conclusion with giving out the cup of blessing. The disciples' excessive traditional happiness for Passover was expressed by Christ as well, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you." (Luke 22:15) In this joyful atmosphere of the celebration of Passover, i.e. Salvation, Christ suddenly started to proclaim His bloodshed and the torture of His body!! through eating and drinking!!

Is not this a very valid reference to the depth of joy emanating from the pain that will reach its climax when the world perceives the mystery of the new Passover?

Does not the revealing of bloodshed here proclaim the penetrating power and the effective joyous transfer not from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of Canaan; but the miraculous transfer from death to life that will prevail the whole world?

Christ donating the mystery of His passion and death in the Last Supper that was concluded by praise presents a vivid expression of the significance of the Sacrament of the Eucharist in our life.

(Translated by Mrs. Nabila Banout)

St. Macarius of Egypt

Father Tadros Y. Malaty

St. Macarius the Great (c.300—c.390 A.D.) was the founder of monasticism at the desert of Scete. He started his ascetic career in a village, moved to another village to escape enrollment in the clergy. There he was falsely blamed for the pregnancy of a girl; when he was cleared, he fled and came to Scete.

He was greatly influenced by St. Antony the Great and visited him at least twice.

Socrates called him “the chosen vessel”¹, and Palladius stated that “he was counted worthy to possess such great discernment that he was called the ‘aged youth’²”. He received the grace of healing and forecasting the future.

At an advanced age he was exiled to an island of the Nile by the Arian Bishop Lucius, who felt authorized to do so by an edict of Emperor Valens. He died shortly after his return to the desert.

Now, I will give more details of St. Macarius’ life and character.

Early Life

Macarius, the young man, who was beloved of the priests and the people of his village, was ordained a Reader (Aghnustus). His parents obliged him to marry, as they hoped that he would be ordained a priest. After the wedding feast had been performed he seemed ill and asked his father that he might be allowed to accompany the camel-drivers who used to bring natron from Wadi-el-Natroun. . . .

As God saw his sincere desire for celibacy and asceticism, He sent him a Cherub, who appeared to him in a vision while he was sleeping at Wadi-el-Natroun. “God tells you,” said the Cherub, “that He grants you and your (spiritual) children all this mountain, that you may devote all your time for worshipping. Many leaders will come forth in this wilderness. Awake, and remember what I have said; if you will live perfectly I will appear to you and declare God’s words for you. . . .”

It is said that the Cherub accompanied St. Macarius all his life.

On his return to his village he found his virgin wife sick with a fever, then she died.

St. Marcarius the Anchorite

According to the advice of a recluse, St. Macarius dwelt in a hut far from the village, practicing his ascetic career for about ten years.

When he was forty years old he was unwillingly ordained a priest.³ Shortly he moved to another village as he felt unworthy of priesthood and of the honor his people had for him.

According to some texts, it seems that he fled before the ordination. He was ordained afterwards in Scete.

Again he left the second village, escaping to the desert of Scete. He himself related the cause of leaving this village,

"It happened that a virgin in the village became pregnant. They asked her who was to blame. She said, 'The anchorite!' Then they came to seize me, led me to the village and hung pots black with soot and various other things round my neck and led me through the village in all directions, beating me and saying, 'This monk has defiled our virgin,' and they beat me almost to death. The man who served me was walking behind me, full of shame, for they covered him with insults too. The girl's parents said, 'Do not let him go till he has given a pledge that he will keep her.' I spoke to my servant and he vouched for me. Going to my cell, I gave him all the baskets I had, saying, 'Sell them, and give my wife something to eat.' Then I said to myself, 'Macarius, you have found yourself a wife; you must work harder in order to keep her.' So I worked night and day and sent my work to her. But when the time came for the wretch to give birth, she remained in labor many days. Finally she admitted, 'I know the cause of this; it is because I slandered the anchorite, and accused him unjustly; it is not he who is to blame, but such and such a young man.' Then the man who served me came to me full of joy saying, 'The woman could not give birth until she had said, 'The anchorite had nothing to do with it, but I have lied about him.' The whole village wants to come here solemnly and apologize to you.' But when I heard this for fear people would disturb me, I fled here to Scete."⁴

Monasteries of Scete

Macarius' original settlement is thought to have been somewhere in the region of the surviving Monastery of 'Dier-El-Baramous' (Monastery of the Roman brothers)⁵ towards the western end of the valley.⁶

As numbers increased, he seems to have moved to a slightly higher ground beyond a low ridge at the eastern end, near the monastery that now bears his name.

By Cassian's time there were four congregations or "Ecclesiae" in Scete,⁷ of which the third is now represented by the twin monasteries of St. Bishoi and the 'Syrians' (Monastery of the Virgin Mary), while the fourth, that of St. John the Short, has been deserted for a number of centuries, its site is known.⁸

His Solitude:

St. Macarius who eagerly desired the eremitic life, chose Scete because it was far from the country. He believed that the desert was the most suitable place for monasticism.

This idea can be clearly seen through his conversation with Abbot Pambo and the brethren at the Mountain of Nitria. As he was seized with a desire to go and to see what lay in the desert, he fought it for five years then went and found an oasis with a lake and island in the midst, and the animals of the desert came to drink there. In the midst of these animals he saw two naked men. His body trembled, for he believed they were spirits. Seeing him shaking, they said to him, "Do not be afraid, for we are men". Then he said to them, "Where do you come from, and how did you come to this desert?" They replied, "We came forty years ago from a monastery, having agreed with each other to remain here. One of us is an Egyptian and the other a Libyan". . . . Then he asked them: "How can I become a monk?" They replied, "Except a man renounce all things of this world, he cannot be a monk". He said, "But I am weak, and I cannot do as you do". So they said to him, "If you cannot do as we do, sit in your cell and weep for your sins". He asked, "Are you not frozen in winter nor your bodies burnt in summer?" They replied, "It is God who has made this way of life for us. We do not freeze in winter and the summer does not harm us".⁹ He concluded this story, saying: "So I told you that I have not yet become a monk; but I have seen monks. . . . Forgive me, my brethren".

St. Macarius assured that the desert of Scete would lose its quality for monasticism when it would be civilized. "When you see a cell built close to the Marsh, know that the desolation of Scete is near; but when you see trees, know that it is at the doors; and when you see children, take up your sheep-skin, and go away".

Even in the desert of Scete, St. Macarius used to flee from the crowd of people. Palladius tells us that he made a tunnel running under the ground from his cell for half a mile and finished it off at the end with a cave, and if ever a crowd of people troubled him, he would leave his cell secretly and go away to the cave and no one would find him. One of his zealous disciples said that he used to recite twenty-four prayers on his way to the cave and twenty-four as he returned."¹⁰

When Abbot Isaiah questioned him saying: "Give me a word", he answered, "Flee from men". Abbot Isaiah said to him, "What does it mean to flee from men?" The Saint replied, "It means to sit in your cell and weep for your sins".

Abba Aio also questioned him, "Give me a word". Abba Macarius said to him: "Flee from men, stay in your cell, weep for your sins, do not take pleasure in the conversation of men, and you will be saved". Again he gave a counsel to the brethren of Scete when he dismissed the assembly, "Flee my brothers". One of them asked him, "Where could we flee to beyond this desert?" He laid his finger upon his lips, saying, "Flee that".

When Abba Moses complained that many brothers visited him, saying “I should like to live in quiet prayer and the brethren do not let me”, the old man replied, “I see that you are a sensitive man and incapable of sending a brother away. If you want to live in peace, go to the interior desert, to Petra, and there you will be at peace”. And so he found peace.

Man of Love:

Saint Macarius discovered the true concept of anchorism—that it was not merely an isolation from men, but a sincere desire for unity with God, the lover of men. The true hermit flees bodily from men but practically he loves everybody.

Saint Macarius, the successful leader of hundreds of ascetics, could have created a community of love through himself as an example and through his preaching. The “History of the Monks of Egypt” translated by Rufinus of Aquileia mentions a strange story: “They tell that once a certain brother brought a bunch of grapes to the holy Macarius, but he who for love’s sake thought not on his own things but on the things of others, carried it to a brother who was sick, and the sick man gave thanks to God for the kindness of his brother, but he too thinking more of his neighbor than of himself, brought it to another, and he again to another. Finally, the same bunch of grapes was carried around all the cells, scattered as they were far over the desert, and no one knowing who first had sent it, it was brought at last to the first giver. But the holy Macarius was thankful that he had seen in the brethren such abstinence and such loving kindness and did himself reach after sterner discipline of the life of the spirit”.¹¹

This spirit of love and kindness is a natural reflection of Saint Macarius’ love towards men, for it is said that “he became a god on earth, because just as God protects the world and bears the sins of men so would Abba Macarius cover the faults which he saw or heard as though he did not see or hear them.

I refer here to some practical examples of his loving-kindness:

A. Once some brethren told him that Saint Macarius of Alexandria excommunicated two brothers of Scete for they had fallen into sin. He said, “It is not the brothers who are excommunicated; it is Macarius,” (for he loved him). Hearing that he had been excommunicated by the old man, Abba Macarius fled to the marsh. Then Abba Macarius the Great went out and found him eaten up by mosquitoes. He said to him, “So you have excommunicated some brothers; and yet they live apart in the village. I myself have excommunicated you and like a pretty young girl to the utmost privacy of her chamber, you have fled here. I have summoned the two brothers, and have learnt from them what happened, and I have told them nothing has happened. Examine yourself, then, my brother, and see if you have not been the sport of

the demons, for you have lacked perception in this matter. But repent of your fault". Then the other asked him, "Please give me a penance". Faced with his humility, the old man said, "Go, fast for three weeks, eating only once a week". For it was his usual custom to fast for the whole week.

B. When St. Macarius was in Egypt¹² a thief went into his cell when he was away. Macarius came back to his cell and found the thief loading his things onto a camel. So Macarius went into the cell, picked up his things and helped the thief load them onto the camel. The thief then began to beat the camel to make it get up but in vain. Seeing that it did not get up, the saint went inside his cell, found a small hoe there, picked it up and put it onto the camel saying, "Brother, the camel wants to have this". Then he kicked it, saying, "Get up". At once the camel got up and went forward a little, because of his command. Then it lay down again and refused to get up until it was completely unloaded; and then it set off.

C. Abbot Peter said this about Saint Macarius: "One day he came to the cell of an anchorite who happened to be ill, and he asked him if he would take something to eat, though his cell was stripped bare. When the other asked for some fresh bread, that wonderful man did not hesitate, but went as far as Alexandria to fetch some for the sick man. The astonishing thing is that no one knew about it".

D. He also said, that when Abba Macarius received all the brethren in simplicity, some of them asked him why he mixed with them like this. He replied, "For twelve years I have served the Lord, so that he might grant me this gift, and now do you advise me to give it up?"

His Asceticism

"He was said to be in a continual ecstasy and to spend a far longer time with God than with earthly things".¹³

Socrates, the Church historian, relates, "Going on one occasion to the holy father Macarius about mid-day, and being overcome with the heat and thirst, I begged for some water to drink: "Content yourself with the shade", was his reply, "for many who are now journeying by land, or sailing on the deep, are deprived even of this". Later discussing with him the subject of abstinence, "Take courage my son," said he: "for twenty years I have neither eaten, drunk, nor slept to satiety; my bread has always been weighed, my water measured, and what little sleep I have had has been stolen by reclining myself against a wall."¹⁴

The following stories are mentioned in the "Apophthegmata Patrum" concerning his asceticism.¹⁵

1. Some Fathers questioned Saint Macarius the Egyptian, "Why is it that whether you eat, or whether you fast, your body is always emaciated?" He answered, "The wood that is used to poke the vine branches when they are

burning ends by being entirely burnt up by the fire; in the same way, man purifies his soul in the fear of God, and the fear of God burns up his body".

2. The brethren came one day to St. Marcarius at Scete and they found nothing in his cell except stagnant water. So they said to him "Abba, come up to the village, and we will get some clean water for you". The old man said to them, "Brothers, do you know such and such bakery in the village?" and they said that they did. The old man said to them, "I know it, too. Do you know such and such field, where the river runs?" They said "Yes". The old man said to them, "I know it too. So when I want to, I can go there myself, without your help".

3. When Saint Macarius visited the brethren, he laid this rule upon himself: If there was wine, he would drink some for the brethren's sake, but for each cup of wine he would drink no water for a day. And the brethren, eager to give him some pleasure, would bring him wine. And the old man would take it joyously, to torment himself thereafter. But his disciple knowing the reason said to the brethren: "For God's sake do not give it to him, for he brings unto his body torments thereafter in his cell". When they heard that, they did not offer him wine anymore.

Struggling Against Devils

The "Apophthegmata Patrum" refer frequently to Saint Macarius' conflicts with the devils:

1. When Abba Macarius was returning from the marsh to his cell one day carrying some palm leaves, he met the devil on the road with a scythe. He tried hard to strike at Macarius, but in vain, and he said to him, "What is your power, Macarius, that makes me powerless against you? All that you do, I do, too; you fast, so do I; you keep vigil, and I do not sleep at all; in one thing only you beat me" Abba Macarius asked what that was. He said, "Your humility. Because of that I am powerless against you".

2. On one occasion lodging in the deserted pagan temple at Terenouthis, and using a mummy for his pillow, the demons tried to play pranks on him, calling out as though addressing a woman: "So and so, come to the bath with us". Another devil replied from the mummy. "I cannot come, I have got a stranger on top of me". The old man, unperturbed, began to beat the mummy, saying: "Awake and go into the darkness, if you can." Then the demons fled away ashamed crying out: "You have conquered us".

3. St. Macarius, wishing to comfort the brethren, told them that the devil would escape from their place (the desert of Scete). He gave the following story:

'A mother came here with a son, possessed with a devil, who said to his mother, "Get up, woman, let us go away from here". She replied, "I cannot walk away further" and the little child said to her, "I will carry you myself". I wondered at the devil's tricks and how eager he was to make them flee.'

With the Pagans

St. Macarius and his monks were in contact with the Christians and pagans who lived in the surrounding villages. Collectors of natron would come with their camels from Terenuthis, and act as middlemen for the anchorites' produce of rope, baskets and mats. The monks of Scete would also go at harvest-time and hire themselves out to work in the fields. They might also, from time to time, take their wares up to market in the Delta.

The "Apophthegmata Patrum" stated how he gained some pagans to the true faith. Once he was going up to Nitria from Scete. His disciple, walking ahead, met a pagan priest and cried out, "Oh, oh, demon, where are you running?" The priest turned and hit him with a club and left him half dead, then went on with the club and met Macarius, who just said, "Greetings, greetings you weary man." The pagan in amazement asked, "What good do you see in me, that you talk to me like that?" "I saw you toiling," said the old man, "and don't you know that you are toiling in vain?" The priest said, "And I was pricked to the heart at your greeting, and knew that you are on God's side. But another bad monk met me and insulted me, and I beat him to death." Taking Macarius by the feet, he said, "I will not let you go unless you make me a monk." They then went to the place where the brother was and carried him to the church. The people were astonished to see the pagan priest with Macarius. Through him many pagans knew Christ.

His Miracles

1. Palladius states that, "A report was prevalent concerning him that he raised a dead man, in order to persuade a heretic who did not acknowledge that there was a bodily resurrection. And this report was current in the desert."¹⁶

2. St. Sisoës said, "When I was at Scete with Macarius, we went up, seven of us, to bring in the harvest. Now a widow cried out behind us and would not stop weeping." The saint asked the owner of the field about her and he answered, "Her husband received a deposit in trust from someone and he died suddenly without saying where he had hidden it, and the owner of the deposit wants to take her and her children and make slaves of them." The saint said to him, "Tell her to come to us, when we take our midday rest." The woman came, and the old man said to her, "Why are you weeping all the time like this?" She replied, "My husband who had received a deposit on trust from someone, has died and he did not say where he had put it." The old man said to her, "Come, show me where you have buried him." Taking the brethren with him, he went with her. When they had come to the place, the old man said to her, "Go away to your house." While the brethren prayed, the old man asked the dead man, "Where have you put the deposit?" The corpse replied, "It is hidden in the house, at the foot of the bed." The saint said, "Rest again, until the day of resurrection." When they

saw this, the brethren were filled with fear and threw themselves at his feet. But the old man said to them, "It is not for my sake that this has happened, for I am nothing, but it is because of the widow and the orphans that God has performed this miracle."

3. One day when St. Macarius was going up from Scete with a load of baskets, he sat down, overcome with weariness and began to say to himself, "My God, you know very well that I cannot go any further," and immediately he found himself at the river.

4. A man of Egypt had a paralyzed son. He brought him to the cell of St. Macarius, and put him down at the door weeping and went a good distance away. The saint stooped down and saw the child, and said to him, "Who brought you here?" He replied, "My father threw me down here and went away." Then the old man said to him, "Get up, and go back to him." The child was cured on the spot; he got up and rejoined his father and they returned home.

St. Macarius and the Two Women

St. Macarius lifted up his eyes towards heavens, talking to his God: "I wonder if there exists among all people anybody who loves you as I do? Is there anyone who fasts, prays and serves you as I do?"

In such arrogance, St. Macarius who surpassed many others in his spiritual gifts, and who converted the rough wilderness into another heaven, decorated with glittering stars that lit the entire world, had been tried by the devil.

However, God the lover of mankind, did not wish to leave him in his thoughts, so it was revealed to him to go to a certain house in the city. There he could learn a lesson in humility.

St. Macarius was thinking who could be that hermit who lived in town, and superseded him in spirituality. To his surprise a lady answered the door. She knelt down before him, and called another lady. The two women brought some water to wash his feet, and some food for him to eat but he said "I won't let you wash my feet or touch your food, until you tell me your story. I came to you by a divine revelation, bearing the difficulties of travelling, so do not hide anything from me."

One of the women answered "Father, we are not sisters, but we are both married to two brothers. We longed for virginity, but God's will did not permit us. We pray and fast together, and follow the word of God, and help each other. We have a common living, sometimes I breast feed her child and she does the same to mine. Whatever we have at home is never mine or hers, we just fulfill our needs and give the rest to the poor."

Soon St. Macarius got the message, he left the women beating his chest saying,

"Woe to me, woe to me, I have no love as those two women have. The love of the laymen superseded the asceticism of monks!"

His Sayings

We include here some of his famous sayings mentioned in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*:

- If in desiring to rebuke anyone you are yourself moved to anger, you satisfy your own passion; in saving another do not lose yourself.
- St. Macarius was asked: "How ought we to pray?" He said, "There is no need at all to make long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one's hands and say, Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy upon me. And if the conflict grows fiercer say, Lord, help me. Because He knows very well what we need, He shows us His mercy."
- Do not sleep in the cell of a brother who has a bad reputation.
- If we keep remembering the wrongs which men have done us, we destroy the power of the remembrance of God. But if we remind ourselves of the evil deeds of the demons, we shall be invulnerable.
- Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved.
- One day St. Macarius was going down to Egypt with some brethren. They heard a boy saying to his mother, "Mother, there is a rich man who likes me, but I detest him; and on the other hand, there is a poor man who hates me, and I love him." Hearing these words, St. Macarius marveled. So the brethren said to him: "What is this saying, Father, that makes you marvel?" The Saint said to them, "Truly, our Lord is rich and loves us, and we do not listen to him; while our enemy the devil is poor and hates us, but we love his impurity."
- St. Paphnutius, the disciple of St. Macarius, repeated this saying of his master, "When I was small with other children, they used to go and steal little figs. As they were running away, they dropped one of the figs, and I picked it up and ate it. Every time I remember this, I sit down and weep."
- If slander has become to you the same as praise, poverty as riches, deprivation as abundance, you will not die. Indeed it is impossible for anyone who firmly believes and who labors with devotion, to fall into the impurity of the passions and be deceived by the demons.

His Writings¹⁷

Neither Palladius nor Rufinus know of any literary works of Macarius, but later authors attribute a number of writings to him, sayings, letters, prayers, homilies and treatises.

Until this day no answer could be given to the question: who was the real author of the famous fifty "Spiritual Homilies" attributed to him?

L. Villecourt was the first to discover in them traces of Messalianism. The Messalians, whose name is derived from the Syriac "Mesallein" (praying men), arose in the second half of the fourth century at Edessa and near

Mesopotamia and were condemned in 431 by the Council of Ephesus. Under the protection of a great name, their works were preserved as the homilies of Macarius the Egyptian, an attribution made as early as A.D. 534, the date of the Syriac MS add 12175 in the British Museum. This hypothesis is however challenged by modern scholars. These homilies have had a pre-eminent position in the history of early Christian mysticism and have proved a source of inspiration to modern mystics.

Footnotes and References

1. Socrates : H.E. 4:23.
2. Palladius : Hist. Laus. 17:2.
3. Sozomen : H.E.3:14.
4. Benedicta Ward : The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. P. 105, 106.
5. The two Roman brothers : Maximus & Domedius.
6. Evelyn White : History of the Monasteries of Nitria and of Scete, ch.7.
7. Cassian's Collectione 10:2.
8. Chitty : The Desert a City. P. 35.
9. This story illustrates the belief that the monastic life dated back long before St. Macarius' generation.
10. Palladius : His Laus. 17:10.
11. Waddell : The Desert Fathers. P. 57.
12. This means that it happened before his going to the Scete.
13. His. Laus.17:5.
14. Socrates : 4:23.
15. Benedicta, p. 110f; Waddell, p. 71.
16. His. Laus. 17:11.
17. Quasten : Patrology, Vol. 3. P. 162-168.

THE BRETHREN OF THE LORD

Rodolph Yanney, M.D.

Reference has been made in the New Testament to brothers and sisters of our Lord. But who are these? Three main answers have been given.

(1) *They are blood-brothers of Christ.* This contradicts the early tradition of the perpetual virginity of St. Mary. Proponents of this theory, mainly Fundamental Protestants, trace its origin to an obscure statement by Tertullian (3rd century); it was fully developed by Helvidius (4th century)¹ whose work has been lost. It is to be noted that both were heretics—Tertullian a Montanist and Helvidius a follower of Arius.²

The Anglican author Bernard comments on this interpretation, “It is difficult to understand how the doctrine of the Virginity of Mary could have grown up early in the second century if her four acknowledged sons were prominent Christians, and one of them bishop of Jerusalem”.³

(2) *They are step-brothers of Christ,* sons of St. Joseph by a previous marriage. This theory was advocated by St. Epiphanius, but has been supported before him by Origen, Eusebius, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Ambrose.⁴ It found its way also to the Coptic Synaxarion.⁵ Origen, the earliest of these Church Fathers states how it reached him,

“*Is not His mother called Mary? And His brethren, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?*” (Matt. 13:55, 56) They thought then that He was the son of Joseph and Mary. But some say, basing it on a tradition in the *Gospel according to Peter*, as it is entitled, or “*The Book of James*”, that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honour of Mary in virginity to the end, so that that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word . . . might not know intercourse with a man after that the Holy Ghost came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first-fruit among men of the purity which consists in chastity, and Mary among women; for it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first-fruit of virginity.”⁶

From this we see that Origen did not commit himself to the acceptance of this tradition. He mentioned that some used it to prove the ever virginity of St.

Mary, which he believed without it. Eusebius considers the "*Gospel of Peter*" a heretic forgery.⁷ *The Book of James* (also called the "*Protevangelium*") is an apocryphal story about the birth of Christ; it dates from the middle of the second century. Although it was referred to by some of the Fathers, it was never accepted as a canonical gospel.

(3) *They are cousins of Christ*. This is more consistent with the biblical accounts, and was stated by the second century Church historian Hegessipus. It was propounded by St. Jerome and St. Augustine and was accepted by Martin Luther.⁸ Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, the sixteenth century Reformers, believed in the perpetual virginity of St. Mary.⁹

Actually the New Testament text leaves little room for doubt about the identity of our Lord's brethren, because it gives their names, the name of their father (who is not St. Joseph), and the name of their mother (who is not Virgin Mary).

Their Names

The Bible mentions the names of James, Joseph (or Joses), Simon and Judas as our Lord's brothers and it speaks about "sisters", but we do not have their names.

"... is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, **James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas?** And his sisters are they not all with us? (Matt 13:55, 56) "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of **James, and Joses, and Judas and Simon?** And are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3)

"But other of the apostles saw I none, save **James** the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19)

"**Jude**, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of **James** . . ." (Jude 1:1)

Their Mother

Among the women standing near the Cross, the Synoptic gospels mention "Mary the mother of James and Joseph (or Joses)" (Matt. 27:56 & Mark 15:40. Cp. Luke 24:10), while St. John calls her "Mary the wife of Cleophas" (John 19:25) The identification of this Mary with her two sons (which means that they were well known in the early Church for which the gospels were written) and the similar variation that occurs in the name of Joseph (Matthew)/ Joses (Mark)¹⁰ that appears in the respective listing of the brothers (Matt. 13:55 & Mark 6:3) are enough evidence that Mary the wife of Cleophas is the mother of the "brethren" of Christ.

Some commentators tried to read in the gospel of St. John that Mary of Cleophas was the sister of Virgin Mary, "*But there was standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister (Mary of Cleophas), and Mary Magdalene.*" (John 19:25)¹¹ This view was accepted by some of the Church

Fathers¹² and it is grammatically possible (in this case there were three women by the Cross). According to this the “brethren” of Christ are his cousins from their mother’s side. But it is highly unlikely that Virgin Mary would have a sister also named Mary. Actually the sentence structure of John 19:25 favors four women, and “his mother’s sister” would not be Mary of Cleophas, but Salome (the mother of the sons of Zebedee) as stated by the other Evangelists. (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40)¹³

Their Father

Since the “other Mary” by the Cross is their mother, then her husband “Cleophas” or “Clopas” (RSV) is their father. But who is Cleophas? The name has been (and probably erroneously) identified with two other names in the New Testament.

(1) *Cleopas*, the disciple of Emmaus (Luke 24:18). This is a Greek name (a contraction of Cleopatros) and should never be confused with the Aramaic name Cleophas.¹⁴

(2) *Alphaeus*, the father of James, one of the twelve disciples. (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) With a variant pronunciation of the Hebrew root, Alphaeus and Cleophas become the same word. This view, accepted by some scholars¹⁵, goes back to St. John Chrysostom¹⁶. Accordingly, James the less (one of the twelve), and Judas (or Jude or Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus) are the same brethren of the Lord mentioned before. With this also James the Less becomes the same James who became the first bishop of Jerusalem. (Acts 12:17; 15:6-20; 21:18; Gal. 1:18, 19; 2:12)

However, this interpretation can hardly stand now. The Bible keeps a clear distinction between James of Alphaeus and the brothers of Christ. (Acts 1:13 & 14) Early Church Tradition, including the Didascalia¹⁷, and modern biblical scholars¹⁸ do not accept it.

The confusion of names now over, we are now where we started. Cleophas (Clopas) was only mentioned once in the whole New Testament. (John 19:25) We have to go outside the Scripture for further information. Hegessipus, a Church historian who wrote early in the second century and whose work has been lost except for fragments in Eusebius, gives us an important clue. Eusebius was discussing the election of the Jerusalem bishop after the Jews had killed St. James,

“After the martyrdom of James, . . . the rest of the apostles and disciples of the Lord who were still alive gathered (in Jerusalem) . . . together with the kinsmen of the Lord—for most of them also were still living. They discussed who they choose as a worthy successor of James. All agreed that Simon son of Clopas, mentioned in the gospel, was a fit person to occupy the see of Jerusalem. It was said that he was a *cousin* of the Saviour, for Hegessipus says that *Clopas was Joseph’s brother*”.¹⁹

Conclusion

The brethren of the Lord (James, Joseph or Joses, Simon and Judas or Jude) were then his cousins because their father Clopas was the brother of St. Joseph who was considered the legal father of Christ. (Matt. 13:55, Luke 2:48; 3:23, John 1:45; 6:42)

Why does Scripture call them “adelphai”?

Neither Hebrew nor Aramaic possesses a word for cousin, the term brother (*ah* in Hebrew; *aha* in Aramaic) is used to cover relatives of varying degrees (brother, half-brother, cousin, brother-in-law). In the Greek Old Testament, the word *adelphos* (brother) is used to cover all those relations. Abraham said to Lot his nephew, “*Since we are brothers.*” (Gen. 13:8, see also Gen. 14:14-16) Laban called his nephew Jacob his brother (Gen. 29:15). After the death of Nadab and Abihu, Moses said to their cousins, the sons of Oziel, “*Lift up the bodies of your brethren*”. (Levit. 10:4)

In the New Testament we find that Philip is called the *adelphos* of Herod, while he was his step-brother. (Mark 6:17-18) Thus the term *adelphai* used in describing the cousins of the Lord reflects a Hebrew/ Aramaic background. The villagers of Nazareth who asked the question in Mark 6:3 spoke Aramaic.

James

Although mentioned by name only once in the gospels (Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3), Christ appeared to James personally after the Resurrection (I Cor. 15:7), and soon after Pentecost he assumed the leadership of the Jerusalem Church. St. Clement of Alexandria says that Peter, James and John, the three disciples most honored by the Lord, chose James, the Lord's brother to be the bishop of Jerusalem.²⁰ The authority he enjoyed there is manifest in the Book of Acts (Acts 12:17; 15:6-20; 21:18) and in the Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1:18, 19; 2:12) as well as in the tone of his epistle in the New Testament. At the time of the apostolic council of Jerusalem (about 50 A.D.; Acts 15), he was, along with Peter and John one of the three “pillars”. His holy life earned him the surname of “the Just.” He used to kneel constantly in his frequent prayers, to the degree that his knees became as hard as a camel's. The Jews respected him and many were led to Christ through his testimony.²¹

After the death of Festus in 62 A.D., the high priest Annas II used the vacancy before the arrival of his successor to strike against the Christians and he had St. James stoned.²² Hegessipus described his martyrdom in more detail. He was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple, then stoned and finally beaten over the head with a fuller's club. He died while he was asking the Lord to forgive his murderers.²³ The esteem for him continued even after his death. Both Christians and Jews attributed the afflictions that fell on the Jews in the following years partly to the murder of the just man. The liturgy named after

St. James, extant in a Greek and Syriac form, is considered by some the oldest liturgy.

Joseph (Joses)

Nothing is known about him except his name that came in Scripture.

Simon

After the death of his brother James, Simon was chosen to lead the church of Jerusalem. During the Jewish war, he managed to leave Jerusalem with his flock and stayed at Pella. According to Hegessipus, he was crucified during the persecution of Trajan at the age of 120.²⁴ He was the last of the Apostles to survive and his death (109 A.D.) put an end to the Apostolic Age.

Jude (Judas)

This Jude mentioned among the Lord's brethren, should not be confused with the disciple of the same name (Luke 6:16), who was mentioned after the Last Supper (John 14:22). Jude, the Lord's brother is the author of the New Testament Epistle of Jude. He is considered one of the seventy apostles, and the Coptic Synaxarion mentions that he suffered martyrdom in Mesopotamia after preaching to Abgar king of Edessa.²⁵ Hegessippus stated that two of his grandsons were among the Church leaders during the reigns of the Roman emperors Domitian and Trajan²⁶ (81-117 A.D.)

References and Notes

1. H. E. Jacobs. In: The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) Vol. 1, 1979; 551.
2. W. A. Jurgens: The Faith of our Fathers, Vol. II, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1979; 190.
3. Bernard, J. H.: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John (Clark, Edinburgh, 1928; Vol. 1; 85 and cited by the Anchor Bible, Vol. 29, page 112).
4. ISBE. Op. Cit.; 551.
5. Coptic Synaxarion (Arabic) under Abib. 26 (Commemoration of St. Joseph) The Synaxarion here mentions that St. Joseph had a former marriage before his betrothal to Virgin Mary, and mentions the names of his four sons. However we find that this is contradicted under Abib 9 when it mentions that one of those sons, Simon, was actually the son of Clopas—the brother of St. Joseph. The Synaxarion is of value as a historical reference, but does not carry the authority of the Church.
6. Origen's Commentary on Matthew, Book X, 17. (ANF, Vol. X; 424).
7. Eusebius: Church History: III: 25:6. A part of this book was found in Akhmim in 1886.

8. ISBE. Op Cit.; 551.
9. Max Thurian: *Mary Mother of the Lord Figure of the Church*, The Faith Press, London, 1963; 39.
10. Some scholars argue for the identity of the names in Mark 15:40 & 6:30 on the basis of the same variants in the two Marcan/ Matthean sets of names (R. E. Brown; et al: *Mary in the New Testament*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978; 70).
11. For a detailed discussion of the number and identity of the women standing by the Cross see R. Brown in the Anchor Bible, Vol. 29A, pages 904-906.
12. St. Augustine says, "The blood relations of the Virgin Mary used to be called the Lord's brethren. . . . for, as in the sepulchre, where the Lord's body was laid, neither before nor after did any dead lie; so, likewise, Mary's womb, neither before nor after conceived anything mortal." (On the gospel of St. John XXVIII:3)
13. Brown, R: Op. Cit.
14. ISBE, Op. Cit.; 723.
15. Ibid; 100.
16. Ibid; 100.
17. Didascalia (Introduction, 1; 33:12, 16, 18 & 22)
18. Brown, R. et al: *Mary in the New Testament*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978; 71.
19. Eusebius: *Church History* (HE): III: 11.
20. Euseb: HE: II: 1.
21. Euseb: HE: II: 23.
22. Josephus: *Ant.*: XX: 9.
23. Euseb: HE: II: 23.
24. Ibid: III: 11, 32.
25. Coptic Synaxarion: Bawunah 25 (July 2). Eusebius (HE: I:13) mentions the name of Thaddaeus (one of the seventy apostles according to him) as the missionary of Edessa.
26. Euseb: HE: III: 20.

CURRENTS IN COPTIC CHURCH STUDIES

Jesus The Crucified

By Father Manasseh Youhanna

The Garden of Tears

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death"
(Matt. 26:38)

In the garden of Gethsemane the New Adam worked for the redemption of mankind. "As compared to the garden of Eden, the first was filled with all elements of comfort and joy, while the second had all signs of sorrow and distress; a fertile garden and a barren one; a garden where the creature rested, and one where the Creator toiled; a garden where the misery of humanity started, and one where the fountains of happiness erupted for the benefit of man; a garden where we fell, and one where we rose up; a garden where Adam was condemned, and one where Jesus paid his debt."

Christ's prayer, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39), does not mean that He wanted to avoid the Cross. He expected it all His life (Ps. 38:17), and repeatedly foretold it (Mark 10:32; Matt. 20:18-22; Luke 18:31-33), and voluntarily offered His life, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10:18) The main reason for His broken heart was that while He knew no sin, He was made sin for us. (2 Cor. 5:21). "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," while, "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Is. 53:6, 9). He was the High Priest Who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, . . . who is holy harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, . . . who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God." (Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 9:14) If the sins of one nation "have grown up into the heavens" (Ezra 9:6), and if the sins of one man were "greater than could be borne (Gen. 4:13; Ps. 38:4), how heavy then was the burden carried by that, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24), and who "is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

The prophets had predicted the inner anguish of Christ in the garden, "My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. . . . The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow." (Ps. 55:4: 116:3).

"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:44) St. James of Serugh comments, "A good sign is the sweat for a sick man, for it is followed by recovery. The sweat of the Son of God fell down while He was laboring to save the servant from the bottom of the abyss. Adam had been lying sick with the great death, and Christ came, sweated and gave him relief. Through the sweat of the Lord, the sick servant was restored to health. Adam had eaten his bread by the sweat of his face. (Gen. 3:19) But this sweat which was mixed with sin could not heal him. Then came He Who is without sin, and by one sweating, He delivered him from his sin."

Arrest and Trial

"Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound him." (John 18:12)

". . . by his stripes ye were healed." (1 Pet. 2:24)

Isaiah described Him saying, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth . . . I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (Is. 53:7; 50:6) St. James of Serugh says, "The clay held the rod of judgement against its Creator. The Judge of all rulers was condemned while He was silent . . . Truth was humiliated and error stood up. Sin was raised and the Righteousness was beaten. The wounded tried the Physician who came to fetch them."

For our sake Christ became "a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." (Ps. 22:6) As described by the Prophet Isaiah, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." (Is. 1:6) "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. but he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Is. 53:2-5)

Pilate did not want to bear the consequences when he found Him innocent. So, "he took water and washed his hands before the multitude saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person." (Matt. 27:24) Yet, he ordered Him

to be crucified. Many wash themselves with the waters of repentance, then through their return to sin, "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:6)

"And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head (Matt. 27:29). The earth would not bring forth thorns before sin entered into the world. but after the fall God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake . . . Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." (Gen. 3:17, 18) Humanity suffered from two thorns, sin and death, "O death where is thy sting? . . . The sting of death is sin . . . But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 15:55-57) But it is strange that this creation for which the Son of God came, is the same creation which crowned Him with thorns. St. James of Serugh says, "He came to uproot the thorns from the earth. He carried the curse of the earth through the crown which they put upon His head. Like a mighty man, He carried the burden of the whole world: Sins, iniquities, sufferings, pains, strokes—all were platted with the crown and put upon His head in order He may carry. Through His crown of thorns, He abolished the curse of Adam and put an end to the curse of the earth which had killed generations while it remained. Through His crown of thorns, He demolished the kingdom of Satan who through tyranny had become a god of creation."

"My faithful Saviour, it is about You that David spoke addressing Your Father, "Thou crowned him with glory and honour." (Ps. 8:5) How then do I see You now crowned with the crown of thorns? How can man, whom You have crowned with every good thing and every blessing, pay You back with this terrible crown? . . . It is I who really have caused for You all this distress by my sins and iniquities. It is I who have planted on Your holy head these sharp thorns, with my impure thoughts, and my pride . . . My sins are the thorns which prick Your holy head and penetrate it."

Way of the Cross

"And he bearing his cross went forth." (John 19:17)

"You became so wearied when You went to seek one soul that You sat down by the well of Jacob (John 4:6). Now while You are seeking all souls, why do you not sit down for rest after the long travels, strikes and scourges . . . ? If unable to share Your labors, grant me at least to weep in bitter repentance for my sins, because You have fallen under their weight . . .

"Isaac, led by a kind father, carried for a short distance the wood above which he was due to be sacrificed. But Christ carried His Cross a long way, led by merciless people who were insulting Him, kicking Him and slapping Him on the face . . . , worn away by a sleepless night, with all the body wounded from head to foot . . .

“Grant me, my God, to have mercy upon my soul before I pity Your crucifixion, for You carried the Cross while innocent, but I, without a cross, fall under the weight of my sins. St. John Chrysostom says, ‘Why did Christ allow Simon of Cyrene to assist Him in carrying the Cross, although He suffered alone? The Saviour wanted to teach us that His holy Cross is insufficient for salvation without our cross. Thus if we desire to be saved, we should follow Christ carrying the cross patiently and in obedience to His divine will till death’ . . . St. Augustine says, ‘The desire to remove your cross which your Saviour has put upon your shoulders is a proof that you have never started to become a Christian.’ ”

Jesus Alone

“I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me.” (Is. 63:3)

On the Mount of Transfiguration Christ appeared with Moses and Elijah who were speaking about His exodus. But when the disciples asked for their stay, “Jesus was found alone” (Luke 9:36), a sign that He would be alone in the work of redemption upon the Mount of Calvary.

St. Thomas the Apostle said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16); and St. Peter promised, “Though I should die with thee, yet I will not deny thee” (Matt. 26:35) but Christ said, “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone.” (John 16:32)

Christ healed many people and showed kindness to many others, but none stood by Him during His trial or during His suffering. The Psalmist had seen this, “. . . I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” (Ps. 69:20) “Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and roaring lion . . . For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me . . .” (Ps. 22:12-16)

“Job was visited by his friends during his afflictions. (Job. 2:11) Naaman was comforted by Elisha for his leprosy. (2 Kings 5) Daniel was visited by an angel in the lions’ den. But Christ found no judge that might justify Him, no angels that might console Him, no friends that might comfort Him, and no physician that might treat Him.”

“Who comforts You, O Second Adam Who have been sent from the Paradise of Jerusalem to the barren mountain of Moriah. Who relieves You O Joseph who have been sold, O afflicted Job, O persecuted Daniel, O oppressed Isaiah, O saddened Elijah? We fear that by drawing near the bed of Your torment, we may increase Your pain through our sins which have caused You all this trouble. It is not suitable for the initiator of misery to comfort and to console the victim of his actions. But blessed are You O Son. Have comfort in

the fruits which the tree of Your Cross bears. Have comfort in saving the world. Have comfort O Noah, for by passing through the sea of pain, You will soon be saved, and save the sinners in the Ark of Your Holy Church. Have comfort O Joseph, for You will come out of the prison of oppression to rule Your Father's Kingdom forever. Have comfort O Job, for Your calamity has declared Your glory. Have comfort O Daniel, for You will rise from Your den to the throne of Your majesty."

Jesus Wounded in the House of His Friends.

*"And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands?
Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of
my friends." (Zech. 13:6)*

It is terrible to be wounded by somebody whom one loves. Yet this is what actually happened to Christ in His last day on earth.

(1) *The Creation* which He had clothed with glory, ridiculed Him and stripped Him off His clothes. The earth which He had made brought forth thorns for His head and wood for His Cross. He fed the people in the wilderness, gave them wine to drink at Cana, healed their sick, raised their dead. In return they fed Him with scoff; in his thirst they gave him myrrh and vinegar; they wounded His head and bruised His body. Finally they put to death the Physician that came to heal them.

(2) *The Jewish Nation*, His own people, asked for His crucifixion. St. James of Serugh says, "The Jewish nation disrespected His Father and hated him since she was at Sinai. When the Son took flesh for her salvation, she caught Him, delivered Him to the Cross, and stood there to dance, smile, ridicule and mock. Come Moses! Behold what the bride which you brought out of Egypt is now doing for her holy Bridegroom. Behold the feast which she has prepared for Him. She brought the myrrh, mixed the vinegar, caught the spear. Instead of the manna she gave the vinegar. He changed the bitter water for her into living water, but she instead put for him the myrrh in the fresh water. The chosen vine has brought forth wild grapes (Is. 5:1-7)"

(3) *Judas*, His disciple, sold Him and delivered Him with a kiss (Matt. 26:49; Luke 22:48).

(4) *Peter*, His most zealous disciple, denied and renounced Him

(5) *All the disciples* forsook Him and fled (Mark 14:50-52).

However this is not mere history, for Christ rose from the dead with the marks of the nails in His hands, and the wound of the spear in His side. This is meant to be a sign for us, who are His friends, that He has been wounded because of our sins, a sign that will remain till the last day when, "They shall

look on him whom they pierced" (John 19:37), and when "he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." (Rev. 1:7)

Jesus Crucified.

"Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2)

"And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day (Amos 8:9)

Our Lord was taken to Golgotha, outside Jerusalem. "For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." (Heb. 13:11, 12) The mount of Calvary has been referred to in the Old Testament, "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense." (Songs 4:6); "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." (Mic. 4:2). It is the paradise of delight containing the Cross which has as its symbol the Tree of Life in the paradise of Eden.

On the Cross Christ underwent both physical and mental sufferings, especially from enduring the shame of the Cross and the curse of the law. "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13; Deut. 21:23). "The shame of my face has covered me." (Ps. 44:15); "Because of thy sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered me" (Ps 69:7); "Know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke." (Jer. 15:15). "He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: his is filled full with reproach." (Lam. 3:30)

Yet the Cross was the triumph and glory of Christ: "Now is the Son of Man glorified." (John 13:31) "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." (Col. 2:14, 15) "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." (Songs 3:11)

"Oh, Crucified, who are looking from the heights of Calvary, . . . You are, on the Cross, more glorious and dignified than one thousand kings upon one thousand thrones in one thousand kingdoms. Even, in the agony of death, You are more powerful than one thousand leaders of one thousand armies in one thousand battles. With Your sorrows, You are more joyous than spring with its flowers. With Your sufferings, You are more quiet than the angels in heaven. Among Your lashers You are more resolute than the mountain of rock. The wreath of thorns upon Your head is more sublime and beautiful than the crown

of kings. The nails piercing Your hands are greater than the sceptre of Jupiter. The drops of blood upon Your feet are more dazzling than the necklace of Ishtar."¹

Nature bore witness of the Crucified; "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." (Mark 15:33) "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose." (Matt. 27:51, 52) St. James of Serugh says, "Light fled and night came at midday to cover the King who was stripped by the crucifiers. The sun closed its eyes in order not to look at its creator uncovered. The land of the dead heard the voice, its foundations were shaken, and it set her inhabitants free. His voice rose up and put out all light; and He descended into Hades and raised the dead from corruption. He split the temple curtain in order that all might know that the High Priest has died."

No doubt the darkness was a sign of the dark night in which our Saviour was struggling with the powers of darkness while He was carrying the sins of all. The renting of the veil meant that, "he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity." (Eph. 2:14, 15)

Christ Speaks Upon the Cross

Christ spoke seven times upon the Cross; the first three were words of love and blessing, and the last four explained His redemptive sacrifice.

(1) *A Wonderful Forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)*

He was the High Priest Who while offering Himself defended the sinner. St. Augustine says, "He prayed for those who caused Him to suffer, remembering that they did not put Him to death, but He died for them." "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." (Songs 8:7)

(2) *An Amazing Justification: "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:43)*

It is strange that the Apostle Peter denied his Lord, while the thief declared his faith in public. The two disciples of Emmaus said, "we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" (Luke 24:21), and the thief cried in hope, "Remember me." St. James of Serugh says, "He is the Judge and His judgement appeared on Calvary. He had the sheep stand at His right hand,² and the goats at His left."

(3) *A Wonderful Care: "Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!" (John 19:26, 27)*

(4) *A Strange Abandonment: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." (Matt. 27:46)*

This cry declared the atonement, the offering of the Son as a sacrifice of sin. Christ did not cry because of the suffering he endured from men, nor because he was left alone and betrayed by His friends, but only when the Father hid His face from Him while He was carrying our sins on the Cross.

(5) *A Strange Need: "I thirst" (John 19:28)*

It is strange that our Lord "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand." (Is. 40:12); and Who "bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds" (Job 26:8), and Who made water come out of the rock, and Who is the source of the living water (John 4:10; Jer. 2:13); may say, "I thirst." St. Augustine says, "The thirst of Christ on the Cross was not only a bodily thirst, but also He was thirsty for the salvation of men." He was thirsty for the faithful to let their bellies flow with living water (John 7:38) He is always calling, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." (Rev. 21:6). "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17)

(6) *A Wonderful Triumph. "It is finished" (John 19:30)*

St. Augustine says, "This word was a fulfilment of the prophecies (Ps. 22:31), as if Christ wanted to say, 'What the prophet had written about me, whether alive or dead has been finished.' Also the power of the devils over men has been put to an end, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." (John 12:31) The act of redemption has been fulfilled.³ The fugitive can now return home, since the High Priest has died. (Numbers 35:9-34) The leper has been declared clean and free by the High Priest after he was sprinkled upon by the blood of the sacrifice (Lev. 14:1-8) "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Heb. 9:12)

(7) *A Wonderful Death: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)*

The darkness in which Christ has felt that he was forsaken by the Father is now over. Instead, He entrusts His spirit, in full faith and perfect hope, to the Father Who can ransom from the power of the grave, and redeem from death (Hosea 13:14) Christ "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." (Heb. 5:7)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). After Christ gave up His spirit, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear.

Immediately blood and water flowed out. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. (Zech. 13:1) St. James of Serugh says, "God placed at the door of Paradise the Cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24) Christ came to enter into Paradise through His Cross. On hearing, the watchman took a spear and pierced Him with it. He received the spear on His side and opened the door for all to enter. His side was opened so that the sinners may enter through it into heaven. Water and blood flowed out of it: A new well has been opened on Calvary."

Meaning of the Cross

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8; see also John 3:16 and I John 4:10)

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13)

If the Cross is the sign of God's love for us, it should be our only glory (Gal. 6:14), and our only way, which starts by our death with Christ in Baptism (Rom. 6:4, 8) and continues throughout our life. St. Thomas a Kempis says,

"Lord Jesus, . . . I have received the cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it, yea I will bear it until death, as Thou hast laid it upon me. The life of a religious man is indeed a cross, but it is a cross which leads to Paradise. We have now started, it is unfit for us to go back, nor may we leave the road."

Notes

1. Khalil Gibran: The Crucified
2. It is an old tradition of the Church that the blessed thief was the one at the right of our Lord. This comes often in the liturgy of Good Friday.
3. In saying that redemption was fulfilled on the Cross the author here betrays an element alien to Orthodox theology and an effect of Western scholastic theology. The Patristic and Orthodox teaching, as well as the biblical, combine death, resurrection and ascension. For further discussion of this subject see Coptic Church Review Vol. II, No. 2 P. 81, 82 and No. 4 P. 167-174.

Special note: All quotations for which there are no reference are mostly words of the author directly translated from Arabic.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Lives of the Desert Fathers

By Benedicta Ward SLG and Norman Russel. London: Mowbray. USA: Cistercian Publications, 1981, Pp. 181.

In the year 394 A.D. seven monks from Jerusalem set on a perilous journey through the Egyptian deserts from Lycopolis (now Assiut) down the Nile to the Mediterranean in order to visit the monastic communities and meet face to face with the Desert Fathers whose fame had already swept the world by that early date. When they returned home one of them described their journey and the angelic people they had met in "*The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*" which has been considered one of the rare sources of information about early Coptic Monasticism.

In *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* we have the Greek text of *The Historia Monachorum* translated into English and published for the first time.

In addition the authors compared the original text to the two available ancient versions and included in their book all additional material in these versions. The Latin version of *The Historia* was translated a few years after its original writing by Rufinus who possibly included in his free translation material from his own trip to Egypt. The Syriac version has reached us in *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers* compiled by the Nestorian monk Ananisho who visited Scete in the seventh century.

In the *Historia Monachorum*, the reader is taken at once to that world where men "while dwelling on earth, they live as true citizens of heaven. . . . Their number is past counting. . . . For there is no town or village in Egypt and the Thebaid which is not surrounded by hermitages as if by walls." Some of the Fathers we meet here are known from other sources, but not a few have the *Historia Monachorum* as their main or their only source. Among these are the Saints Elias, Theon, Helle, and Apelles.

The introduction of the book is written by Sister Benedicta Ward SLG who is well known for her modern translation of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* in her two books, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, and *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*. This five-chapter introduction is one of the finest monographs I have ever seen that deal with the Desert Fathers. Chapter I deals with early monastic sources and it describes the successive visits to Egypt in the second

half of the fourth century by other monastic writers and saints. These are Sts. Basil the Great, Rufinus, Melania, Jerome, Palladius and Cassian. Chapter II describes the social background of fourth century Egypt and how the author of the *Historia Monachorum* puts the monks "in their situations among pagans, farmers, Romans, merchants, soldiers, civil servants and their families . . ."

Chapter III discusses the monastic patterns in Egypt. While some lived in walled monasteries, others had separate cells, or were wandering hermits. The writer of the *Historia Monachorum* comments on the daily life of the Egyptian monks, about their food, their sleep and their clothing. He gives a vivid description of St. Apollo's monastery of Bawit, where "one could see (the monks) looking like a real army of angels, drawn up in perfect order, robed in white . . ." He describes their all night vigils, "I saw them with my own eyes begin their hymns in the evenings and not stop singing until the morning." He stresses the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the fourth century Egyptian monks, even among the hermits. While it was a weekly service in all monasteries, the monks of Bawit had a daily Eucharist.

Chapter IV deals with the inner spirituality of the desert. For the Coptic monks asceticism was not an aim in itself, but what was stressed was a life of repentance and a continuous struggle against the passions. They manifested the joy of a life in Christ. St. John of Lycopolis had "a bright smiling face." St. Didymus was a man of "charming countenance." St. Apollo used to say, "Those who are going to inherit the kingdom of heaven must not be despondent about their salvation. . . . We who have been considered worthy of so great a hope, how shall we not rejoice without ceasing?"

The Historia Monachorum emphasized the miraculous elements probably much more than any other eye witness record of ancient monasticism. In her last chapter, Sister Benedicta introduces this subject to the modern sceptical reader in a scientific way without ever denying the historicity of the accounts themselves. For her the stories reflect a life of "Adam restored to paradise" and of "human nature redeemed in Christ." However what was important for the monk was "not the performance of wonderful works, but the purity of love."

The Lives of the Desert Fathers may make a good source for the historian; it may give some information and pleasure for the casual reader. But the spiritual man will never forget the people he meets in it. His inner ears will continue echoing the words of Rufinus which he wrote after visiting the monks in Nitria, "Nowhere have I seen love flourish so greatly, nowhere such quick compassion, such eager hospitality. And nowhere Have I seen such meditation upon Holy Scripture, or a better understanding of it or such discipline of sacred learning. You might well think that each of them was an expert in the wisdom of God."

BOOK NOTICES

THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

By Leonhard Goppelt; Translated by John Alsup. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981. Pp. 292. Cloth, \$15.95.

Volume 1, just translated from the German, deals with the life and ministry of Christ, in its theological significance. The book follows modern New Testament scholarship without parting from traditional doctrines. It answers many of the questions raised by liberal Bible Criticism. Although themes like Salvation are approached from the Evangelical Protestant point of view, it is significant that the book has a positive approach toward the role of the Sacraments in Christian life.

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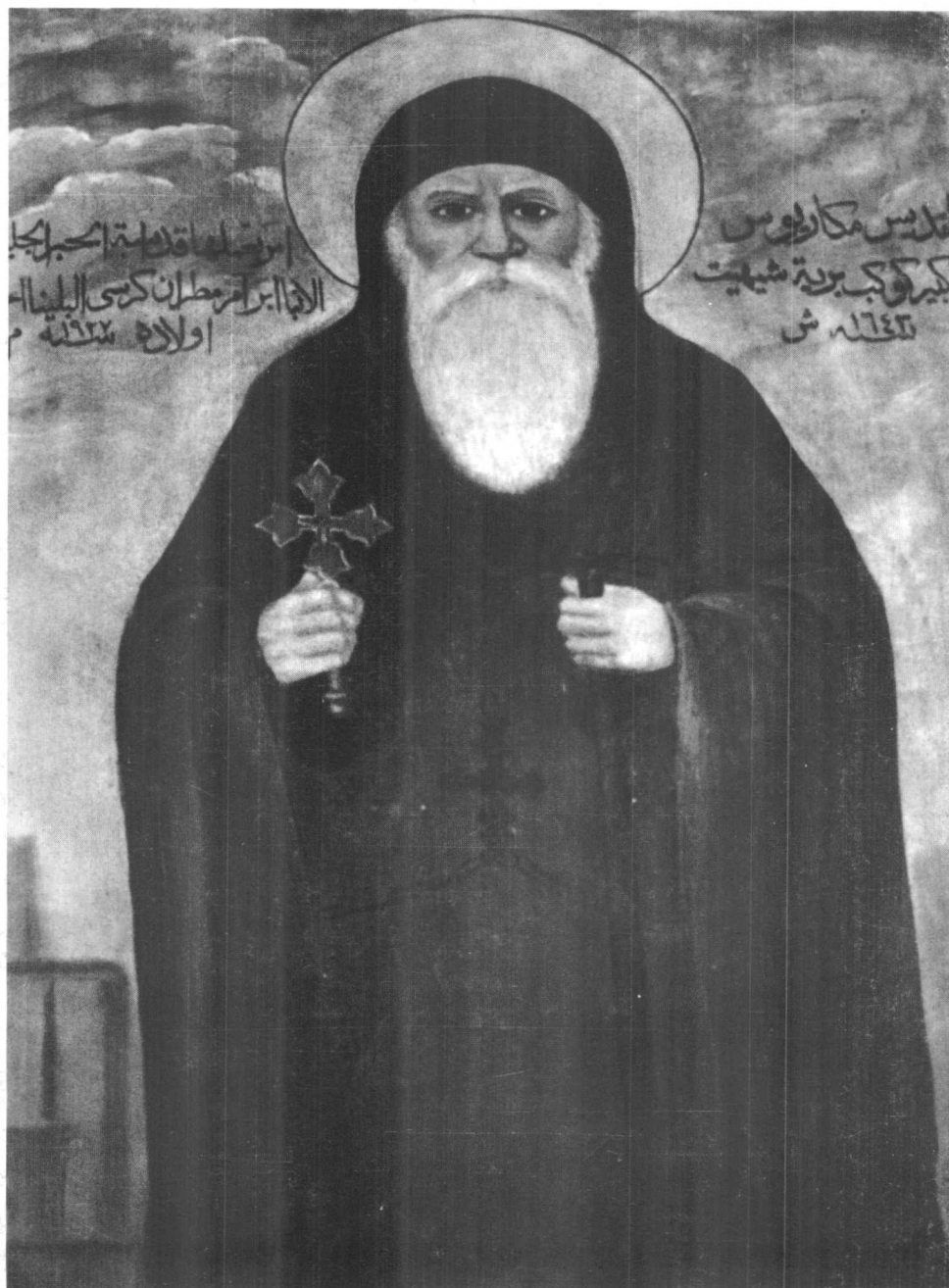
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