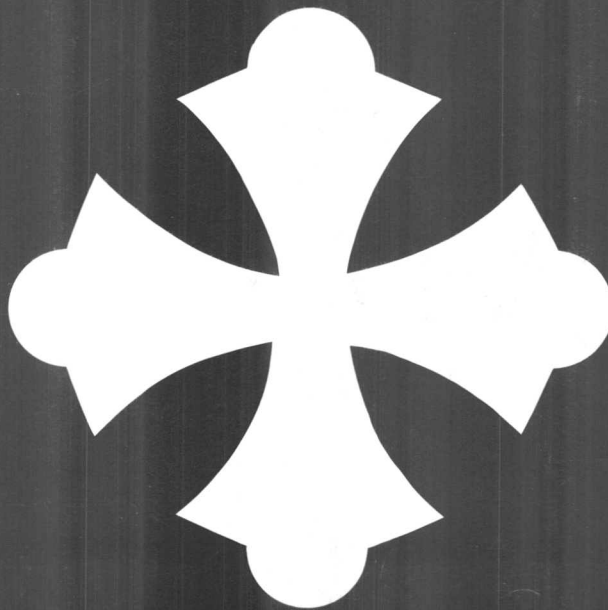


COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

Volume 3, Number 2 Summer 1982

- *Saint Mary In The Writings Of The Church Fathers*
- *Saint Augustine In Search Of God*
- *A New Martyr: St. George The Egyptian*



Society of Coptic Church Studies

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The love which the Coptic Church has for the Blessed Virgin Mary is manifest in all its liturgies and prayers and in the various Marian feasts, the greatest of which is the feast of the Assumption of her body. In the Coptic calendar this feast comes on Masari 16 (August 22), and it follows the 15-day fast named after her.

Although the emphasis on the Virgin in Christian theology started in the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), the earlier Fathers were not silent in this matter as some may think. In this issue ***an anthology of the writings dealing with St. Mary in the first four centuries*** is given. The article on ***St. Mary's Virginity*** is taken from the book *St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept*, by **Father Tadros Malaty**. (A review of the book appeared in the *Journal*, Volume 1, No. 2). ***The Feast of the Assumption of the Body of St. Mary*** by **Father Matta el-Meskeen** has been translated from *St. Mark Monthly Review* (September 1978).

In this issue there are three articles about St. Augustine of Hippo. **Esmat Gabriel**, the member of our Editorial Board who is known to the readers from his previous article, *St. Clement of Alexandria* (Vol. 1, No. 1), describes ***Augustine's philosophical search for God*** till he came to Christianity. In ***The Practical Method***, **Fayez Bashir**, who serves as a deacon in the Coptic Church of Washington, D.C., deals with the spiritual problems which faced Augustine after he believed in Christ, till he really met Him and experienced Him in his life. ***The Story of Monica and Her Son Augustine***, in the *Book Reviews* section, deals with the biographical data of both saints. St. Augustine has his feast day on August 28 in the West. He has no feast day in the Coptic calendar. Although highly regarded in the West, St. Augustine has been regarded with some reserve in the Orthodox churches because of his teaching about predestination.

On June 26, the Coptic Church commemorates the martyrdom of **St. George the Egyptian** who suffered for his faith in the tenth century. In this issue we have an account of his life, summarized from the Arabic Manuscript found in his church at Besat-el-Nassara and published in Alexandria (Egypt) in 1969. According to the manuscript, the biography of the saint was originally written by a monk from the monastery of St. Macarius named Mina who was a contemporary of the saint and witnessed his sufferings.

Voyage to Canaan, by the late **Father Bishoi Kamel** (1931-1979) is actually a spiritual commentary on the Book of Exodus. It was published in Arabic as a series of articles in *St. Mark Monthly Review* in 1974 and 1975. A short review appears here in the section of *Currents in Coptic Church Studies*.

Editor

SAINT MARY IN THE WRITINGS OF THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

Saint Mary the Virgin

The virginity of Mary, her giving birth, and also the death of the Lord, were hidden from the prince of this world. Those three mysteries loudly proclaimed, but wrought in the silence of God.

*St. Ignatius of Antioch
(Letter to the Ephesians; 18:2)*

He was born of a holy Virgin without the seed of man.

*Artides of Athens
(Apology; 15)*

The power of God coming upon the Virgin, overshadowed her, and caused her to conceive while still a Virgin.

*St. Justin the Martyr
(First Apology; 33)*

Let those who deny that the Son is from the Father by nature and proper to His essence, deny also that He took true human flesh from the Ever-Virgin Mary; for in neither case would it have been of profit to us men, whether the Word were not true and naturally Son of God, or the flesh which He assumed were not true.

*St. Athanasius the Great
(Discourses against the Arians; 2:70)*

Saint Mary and Eve

He became man through the Virgin, that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same way it had originated. For Eve, an undefiled virgin, conceived the word of the serpent and brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary, filled with faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced to her the glad tidings that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her and the Most High would overshadow her, and that therefore the Holy One born would be the Son of God.

*St. Justin the Martyr
(Dialogue with Trypho the Jew; 100)*

Just as Eve, while wife of Adam, was still a virgin . . . and became by her disobedience the cause of death of herself and of the whole human race; so Mary too, espoused yet a virgin, became by her obedience the cause of salvation of both herself and the whole human race. The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosened by Mary's obedience. For what the Virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened through faith. . . .

For as Eve was seduced by the word of an angel to leave God, . . . so Mary by the word of an angel received the good news that she would bear God. Whereas Eve had disobeyed God, Mary was persuaded to obey God, that the Virgin Mary may become the Advocate of the Virgin Eve.

St. Irenaeus
(*Against Heresies*; 3:31:1 & 5:19:1)

For into Eve, as yet a virgin, the word of the devil had crept, to erect an edifice of death; but through a virgin, the Word of God was introduced to set up a structure of life. What had been lost by one sex, was by the same sex restored and saved.

Tertullian
(*The Flesh of Christ*; 17:5)

Let Eve, our first mother, now hear and come to me. Let her lift up her head that was bent low under the garden's shame. Let her uncover her face and give thanks to you, because you have taken away her confusion.

Let her hear the voice of perfect peace, because her daughter had paid her debt.

St. Ephraem the Syrian
(*Hymns on Blessed Mary*; 19:19:20)

God's Eden is Mary;
in her there is no serpent that harms,
no Eve that kills,
but from her springs the Tree of Life that restores
the exiles of Eden.

St. Ephraem the Syrian
(*Hymns of the Annunciation*; 3:30)

Eve the mother of all living became the wellspring of death to all living. But Mary budded forth a new shoot from Eve the ancient vine; and new life dwelt in her.

St. Ephraem the Syrian
(*Homily on our Lord*; 3)

Saint Mary The Mother of God (Theotokos)

(Our Lord) bore a true body, derived from Mary the Mother of God.

*Pope Alexander of Alexandria
(Encyclical letter)*

The Word incomprehensibly and eternally begotten of the Father . . . is He that is born in time of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

*St. Athanasius the Great
(Incarnation of the Word: 8)*

The Archangel Gabriel bears witness, bringing good tidings to Mary. The Virgin Mother of God bears witness (concerning Christ.)

*St. Cyril of Jerusalem
(Catechetical Lectures; 10:19)*

The Virgin became a Mother with her virginity preserved . . . and the servant and work of His Wisdom became the Mother of God.

*St. Ephraem the Syrian
(Songs of Praise; 1:20)*

Saint Mary and Christ

To Thy Mother, Lord, no man knew what name to give. Should he call her Virgin, her Child stood there; and married no man knew her to be! For she was alone Thy Mother; along with all Thy Sister . . .; along with chaste women Thy betrothed. With everything Thou adorned her, Thou the ornament of Thy Mother.

*St. Ephraem the Syrian
(Hymns of Nativity; 8)*

(The Virgin Mother to her Child)

How shall I call Thee a stranger to us, Who art from us? Should I call Thee Son? Should I call Thee Brother? Husband should I call Thee? Lord should I call Thee, O Child that didst give Thy Mother a second birth from the waters?

For I am Thy sister, of the house of David the Father of us both. Again I am Thy Mother because of Thy Conception, and Thy Bride am I because of Thy sanctification, Thy handmaid and Thy daughter, from the Blood and Water, wherewith Thou hast purchased me and baptized me.

*St. Ephraem the Syrian
(Hymns of Nativity; 11)*

Blessed art thou Mary, that thy name is great and exalted because of thy Child! Thou canst tell then how long, and where He dwelt in thee, the great One in small room. Blessed is thy mouth that praised and enquired not, and thy tongue that glorified and questioned not!

*St. Ephraem the Syrian
(Hymns of Nativity; 18)*

VIRGINITY OF SAINT MARY

Father Tadros Y. Malaty

Aaron's rod, in fact, is Mary. It is a type of her virginity. She conceived and bore the Son of the Most High, the Word, without human seed.

Theotokia¹ of Sunday.

Biblical Reality

The virginity of St. Mary is not a matter of her own private life, but rather a “biblical reality”, which belongs with our faith in Jesus Christ. For when the Word of God was incarnated, He was not particular about the kind of place where He would be cradled, or the clothes He would wear, or the food He would eat; but He was definitely very particular about the Virgin who was to be His mother.²

The prophet Isaiah gives us a prophetic sign of the Virginal Birth.

“Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel.”

Here the text refers to St. Mary the virgin mother of Emmanuel, directly and literally. It is very accurate, describes St. Mary's state as being virgin and engaged at the same time. For the Hebrew term used for “virgin” is “*almah*” and not “*betulah*” nor “*issa*”. The word “*almah*” means a virgin maiden who may be engaged, while “*betulah*” means a virgin who is not engaged. The word *issa* means a married lady.

If the Scripture uses the word “*issa*” it does not signify an extraordinary miracle about to be performed by God. (Isaiah 7:10, 11), for the married woman can conceive and bear a son. If it uses the word “*betulah*”, it does not describe the state of St. Mary, who was engaged to St. Joseph. But it uses the word “*almah*”, which fits her state accurately, as a virgin and engaged to St. Joseph who protected her and became a faithful witness of her chastity, leaving no chance for any doubts or suspicion.

It is worth noting that this word “*almah*” is etymologically used in this sentence to mean the continuation of the state of virginity, and for this reason it has been translated “the virgin”, and not “a virgin”, to describe the Emmanuel's mother as the virgin even after her child's birth.

Another prophet confirms St. Mary's perpetual virginity, as he says:

*"When he brought me back the way of the outward sanctuary which looked towards the east,
it was shut.
Then the Lord said to me:
This gate shall be shut,
it shall not be opened,
and no man shall pass through it,
because the Lord, the God of Israel,
has entered by it,
therefore it shall be shut.
It is for the prince;
the prince himself shall sit in it. . . ."*

Ezk. 44: 1-3.

This sealed eastern gate is a figure of St. Mary's perpetual virginity³. For the Lord alone entered her womb, and this gate was never opened to another; its seals were not broken.

In this effect the Coptic Church sings the following hymn:

*"Ezekiel witnessed and told us:
I have seen an eastern gate.
The Lord, the Saviour entered it,
and it remains shut as it was before⁴."*

One of the titles given to the Virgin Mary in the Byzantine rite is: "Hail! O unique gate, through which only the Word passed!⁵"

Virginity & Christology

The Virginal Birth which happened once, never to be repeated, is a proof of our faith in Jesus Christ, that He is not of this world, but from on high, the Son of God. This is what the angel Gabriel proclaimed to St. Mary herself when she asked him: "How can this come about, *since I do not know man?!*", "the Holy Spirit will come upon you", the angel answered, "and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and so the Child will be called *Son of God*" Luke 1:34, 35. Subsequently, this Virginal Birth formed a principal element in all the creeds of the Early Church, not because it says something about St. Mary, but rather because it reveals the Person and Nature of Jesus Christ.

For example, the Creed of St. Hippolytus (c. 215) states:

*"Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary . . . ?"*⁶

This argument was used also by the early Christian apologists, such as St. Justin and Athenagoras, in their defence on behalf of Christianity.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (m. 110 A.D.), preached this Virginal Birth as one of the great Christological (dealing with Christ) mysteries, which were loudly proclaimed to the world in his time:

“The virginity of Mary,
her childbirth,
and also the death of the Lord,

these were hidden from the prince of the world. Three mysteries loudly proclaimed but wrought in the stillness of God⁷.

In brief, this doctrine “the Virginal Birth” in fact is the outward sign of the mystery of Incarnation. For it affirms that Jesus Christ who is the real son of a real mother, was not conceived of human seed, but of the Holy Spirit. Although the Son of Man, He has no hereditary sin, but stands at the Head of a new human race⁸.

Virginity & Our Salvation

1. God comes to us, born of a virgin and conceived not of human seed. He unites Himself with us (humanity), not because of our human efforts or merits, but rather as a divine grace bestowed on us. It is the free gift of love which only comes from God.

In other words, St. Mary’s virginity is, therefore, a sign of man’s poverty and his inability to work out his own salvation; to bring into being One who can save him⁹.

2. St. Mary’s virginity does not mean that we have to be passive in our spiritual life. For God did not force *Himself* in St. Mary’s womb, nor did she conceive Him unwillingly, but played an active role. God asked her to accept! The Divine Incarnation was realized by the free grace of God, but she herself humbly accepted obedience.

3. Jesus Christ was born of the “*Virgin*”, the archetype of the New Church, to declare the *heavenly nature* of the Kingdom which made its appearance with Christ, for virginity is the law of the heavens, while marriage occurs only in the present world.

Marriage with its effect—“the procreation of children”—ensures the continuity of human life on earth; for the succession of new generations. But in heaven, no one dies, subsequently there is no need of marriage or bringing forth children for the continuity of the heavenly kingdom. . . . Virginity is the state of all the creatures there.

Now, St. Mary’s virginity at the Incarnation of God’s Son, means establishing the heavenly kingdom among the human race. People of God are called to new life; they have to practice the heavenly life (virginity) in their hearts, minds and souls, through their fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, the Virgin Bridegroom. This is the nature of the Church in the New Testament, of which the Virgin Mary is the first and ideal member.

Virginal Birth & Spiritual Birth

In the Coptic Church the Lord's Nativity (Christmas) is correlated with His Baptism (Epiphany), and in the early centuries these two Lord's feasts were celebrated in one day. For at Christmas the Lord took on what was ours, i.e., our humanity, while at his Epiphany the church hidden in Jesus Christ received what was His own, i.e., His relation to the Father. He became Son of Man, and we became sons of God.

This reality is declared in the following Church hymn:

He took what was ours,
and bestowed on us what was His own;
may we praise Him and glorify Him. . . ."

This correlation between the Lord's Virginal Birth according to the flesh and our spiritual birth, is paralleled by the divine Incarnation, in the holy womb of the virgin. For, there, the Lord took His body, which "mystically" is the Church united with Him. There the bride (Church) is created to be united with Her Divine Bridegroom.

To this effect Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 429) says¹⁰:

"The holy Mary . . . is the workshop of the union of natures,
the market place of the salutary exchange,
the bridal chamber wherein the Word espoused flesh.

To this effect I excerpt some quotations from the sayings of the Fathers:

- Chastely Christ opened the chaste womb, so that thence man also might similarly be reborn.

St. Irenaeus¹¹

- Those who proclaimed Him Emmanuel, born of the Virgin, (Isa. 7: 14) proclaimed also the union of the Word of God to His handiwork,
because the Word will become flesh,
and the Son of God will become the Son of Man,
the Pure One opening purely that pure womb,
which generates men into God. . . .

St. Irenaeus¹²

- Christ opened the silent, spotless and fruitful womb of the Holy Church, for the birth of God's people.

St. Ambrose¹³

- Your divine birth, O Lord, gave birth to all creatures. . . .
Mankind gave birth to You in the body;
and You gave birth to mankind in spirit. . . .
Praise to You, who became a Child,
to make all things new!

St. Ephram the Syrian¹⁴

- As Christ appropriated a body taken from a woman and was engendered by her according to the flesh,
He recapitulated in Himself the generation of man.
St. Cyril of Alexandria¹⁵
- We affirm that the Only Begotten Son. . . .
became man (oikonomia). . . .
so that, born of a woman according to the flesh, He might recapitulate in Himself the human race. . . .
and by the flesh united to Him, He might incorporate all in Himself. . . .
St. Cyril of Alexandria¹⁶
- From on high came the divine Word, and in your (St. Mary's) holy womb reformed Adam (new creation in Christ).
St. Gregory the Wonder-Worker¹⁷
- The Son of God has become the Son of David; do not doubt that you, a son of Adam, may become the son of God.
If God had stooped to such an extreme depth, He has not done so in vain, but to raise us to a sublime height.
He was born of flesh that you might be born again according to the spirit!
He was born of a woman that you might become a child of God.
St. John Chrysostom¹⁸
- The Son of God made Himself man, that we might welcome Him as a member of our own family, and despite our sins we might be born again to hope. . .
- We have fled far away from our Teacher, leaving behind the grace He offered us; and what does this Master in His mercy?
He pursues the fugitive to bring him back,
He approaches him not clothed in majesty but with a lowly aspect adopted in Mary's womb, and in that guise becomes his familiar and his friend, making Himself a servant with us that we may become masters with Him.
Theodosius of Ancyra¹⁹

St. Mary's Virginity & Spiritual Virginity

In the Old Testament a virgin, without hope of marriage and motherhood, was in the same position as the childless woman, a sad state and a sign of God's wrath.

In the New Testament, the Virgin, for the first and last time, gave birth to the Messiah, i.e., her virginity is no longer a matter of shame since it has

become fruitful by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Virginity became a sign of the intimacy between God and man. For this reason St. Paul calls the Church “Christ’s Virgin”. And in the book of Revelation the unnumbered crowd of God’s elect are represented by 144,000 virgins who “follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes” (14: 4, 5).

On this account, virginity is correlated with sanctity, but not in the way that every virgin is considered as a holy one, and every holy person must be a virgin, lest we devalue the Christian marriage which is holy. What we mean is that the literal virginity is merely a sign of the spiritual one. Virginity—in its essence—is the total consecration to God and permanent union with Him in Jesus Christ. It is a virginity of soul, heart, mind, senses and desires, which Christians can receive by the Holy Spirit who sanctifies our bodies, souls and spirits, preparing us for the eternal wedding feast.

- (Virginity) is honoured not for itself, but because it is dedicated to God.
St. Augustine²⁰
- (Virginity) is a necessary door to a holier life. . . .
It is the channel which draws down the Deity to share man’s state,
it creates wings for man’s desire to rise to heavenly things,
and it is a bond of union between the Divine and the human, but its
mediation bringing into harmony these existences so widely divided. . .
- It has been proven as well that this union of the soul with the incorruptible Deity can be accomplished in no other way than by attaining the greatest possible purity—a state which, being like God, will enable one to grasp that state of virginity which reflects the purity of God like a mirror in which one’s own image becomes moulded with beauty at the touch and sight of the Archetype of all beauty. . . .
St. Gregory of Nyssa²¹
- (*Sermon on Christmas Day*)
On this day the virginal birth is celebrated by the virgin church. . . .
The virginity which Christ desires in the heart of the Church He assured first in the body of Mary.
But the Church can only be virginal if she has a spouse,
to whom she can give herself entirely, and He is the Virgin’s Son.
St. Augustine²²
- Your virginity should be something spiritual.
There cannot be many in the Church who are physically virgins,
but spiritually everyone of the faithful should be a virgin. . . .
Watch therefore, watch o my soul, and guard your own virginity.

- Christ's mother is a virgin,
and likewise is His bride, the Church. . . .

St. Ambrose²³

- Your example is now the life of Mary, from which shines forth, as from a mirror, all the beauty of Chastity and the pattern of every virtue. . . .

St. Ambrose²⁴

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FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BODY OF THE VIRGIN MARY INTO HEAVEN

Father Matta El-Meskeen

The feast of the assumption of the body of the Virgin Mary into heaven, is a feast established by the Church to honor the person of the Virgin Mother of Him who sits in the highest on the right hand of God the Father. It is thus not by stealth that the Church enthrones her in our hearts but because she ascended to be on the right of her son's throne according to the Tradition of the Church as the Psalm says, "... upon thy right hand did stand the queen ..." (Ps. 45:9).

The feasts of the Virgin Mary, dear friends, are traditional feasts in the Church and when we say traditional we mean that they have not been mentioned in the Holy Bible, but the Church has preserved them as a spiritual legacy from the Fathers of the early ages.

From the spiritual and theological concepts, Tradition is not only one of many acts in the early Church, or one of many customs practiced by the early Fathers, but Tradition is first and foremost a spiritual experience lived by pious, spiritual individuals to whom many are witnesses, and whose descendants and later generations have preserved as a result of living this experience and being convinced by it. Thus, when the Church strongly adheres to Tradition it preserves for the coming generations spiritual experiences of the past generations; and the spiritual experiences of the saints always carry within them a spiritual thought, behavior and revelation.

Tradition nourishes our lives with spiritual experiences from which we can draw to ourselves, through faith, the same thought, the same conduct and revelation which the saints lived through. For this, the Church, by presenting those feasts in an official manner, reaffirms that she insists and wishes us to share those experiences so that we may be lifted to the level of the one spiritual thought of the first Fathers, and to the living relationship with the souls of the saints who have been perfected in glory.

Every honor the Church bestows, either through praises or feasts, on the souls of the saints who have departed, is in fact a strengthening of strong living ties between the parts of the one Body for the one Head, who is the Lord. Thus,

the existence of those ties between us and the souls of the saints does not take place stealthily without the presence of the Lord, nor do those ties and bonds exist at the expense of our faith and our relationship with God, as though to weaken our salvation. On the contrary, every act that strengthens the unity of the parts of the one Body does increase the efficiency of salvation and the devotion of all the parts for the good of the Head.

Thus, all love, honor and sanctification we offer to the saints who have gone before us, does in fact delight them, and delight the heart of Christ as well as cheer us up and grant us more trust and hope for the coming salvation which we will complete with them if we always set our eyes towards the same goal they kept before them. Those redeemed saints who have been saved and perfected with the mother of the Saviour in the lead, have, as we have known from the Lord, "entered into the joy of their Lord . . ." (Matt. 25:21).

The joy of Christ is our salvation; even the angels rejoice at the repentance of the sinners. So, if they rejoice with us how can we not rejoice with them especially as we are members with them in the same Body, and how can we not participate in this same joy and celebrate it with praises?

Is not the assumption of the body of the Virgin Mary into heaven in fact an indirect honor to the person of the Lord who has taken his bones and flesh from it?

Moreover, the assumption of the body of Virgin Mary into heaven accompanied by a host of Angels, is it not a direct honor to all humanity which has reached that level of merit through God's past mercy and grace which filled the Virgin whose body, which is the same as ours, has been honored and glorified as a precedent promise and proof of a coming resurrection of our bodies when they will be transformed through God's mercy and grace, into bodies similar to that of the resurrected Lord?

The feast of the assumption of the body of the Virgin is in fact not only a praise and celebration of joy and cheer, but it carries a measure of deep faith in the resurrection of the body in its general redeemed form which is to come according to St. Paul the Apostle, "... Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body." (Ephes. 5:23)

Today, the Church, by celebrating the assumption of the body of the Virgin, seems to be telling every believer that thus shall the body be redeemed and thus shall the Lord bring it to Him, raising it from the abyss of destruction and corruption, and thus shall the Lord, on the day of redemption, reward the moans and tears of the sufferings and sicknesses, the crushing of the body, the bitterness and sorrows of the repentance of sin and error, and the wounds of the bleeding spirit which have resulted from the incapability of the body to reach perfection through complete piety—the Lord shall change this body to one similar to His through the power of the humility of His cross and shall lift it to Him through His spirit of grace and the power of His resurrection, so it shares in the experiences of the Spirit.

Therefore, the feast of the assumption of the body of the Virgin into heaven does not preserve for us a dead tradition, or old history, or a custom of the forefathers; but it preserves for us a divine truth, a measure of faith, strength and hope capable of going beyond our worldly pains, sorrows and sighs resulting from the weaknesses and incapacities of the body, to make us live a sure, forthcoming delight, a true revelation, and a participation in a great joy—the joy of the Virgin when she entered into the joy of the Lord and Son, with her abundant share which she has obtained not only for her sole delight, but for the rest of the members, i.e. the whole Church, to enjoy.

Did not Paul the Apostle tell the Corinthians, “my joy is the joy of you all” (2 Cor. 2:3)? So if Paul’s joy is our joy, is it not more fitting for the Virgin’s joy to be our joy? Or is it that we at present participate in suffering while joy becomes solely for one person? Is it possible for the members of the one body to feel the pain but not to react to one another’s joy? Did not St. Paul assuredly say, “The members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.” (1 Cor. 12:25-27)

Thus, now it is firmly proven that the joy of the saints in heaven is our joy and their honor and glory whether in heaven or on earth are for our comfort and joy, because we are one body with them.

Today, if the Church rejoices because the heavens have received the body of the Virgin as an honor to the Christ she bore, then let us all rejoice with a joy that changes to the hope of expecting the same fortune because we also have become part of his flesh and bones, as we also draw from the Virgin’s joy as she stands on the right of the Lord more strength, comfort, patience and a good strife, more than what we draw from all the saints, because she is the mother of “this Body”.

Thus, if we are truly capable through our faith in the mystery of the Church as one Body and our belief that the interest of all members of this mystical Body is one and the same interest, as the holy Apostle Paul said, we are thus capable to draw continuous strength from the joy of the saints and also draw to ourselves assistance from God’s honor to them—furthermore, is not this what intercession is?

When the Virgin and the saints intercede on behalf of our weakness, this intercession is none other than this secret relationship that truly exists between them and us being members of the one Body in which they have more freedom of movement than us. Therefore, it is definitely impossible that they should have all that strength while we are weak, without their strength circulating into our weakness because of their ability to make this happen and according to our belief and acceptance of the fact that we are one body. It is also impossible for them to be in the joy of complete salvation while we are in

sorrow over our inability to achieve this salvation, and not have their joy reach us, to console our hearts, and strengthen us in our strife to complete our salvation. As it was in the beginning so it shall be from generation to generation and until all generations are completed in accordance with the great plan of salvation in the same spirit by which it started.

Tradition therefore, has preserved for us this day a feast loved by all. Through this feast, Tradition succeeds in proving its reality and the importance of its existence, by relaying to all segments of the Church a deep but very simple spiritual experience that goes back to its original sources, in a frame of splendor, joy and hope; an experience that never aged in spite of its relation to the most intricate problems of theology which is the fate of the body after death and its share in the overall salvation.

Let then the Church rejoice with the praises of the faithful hearts as the heavens rejoiced in the coming of the body of the Virgin with the praises of the Angels.

May we gain from this feast a spiritual experience that will assure us of the salvation of the body and believe that as the Holy Spirit dwelt in it and sanctified it and made it God's temple, so will God surely change it according to the promise, and clothe it with a heavenly shape so it becomes fit to be always with the Lord.

Translated by Mrs. Lily Soliman

SAINT AUGUSTINE IN SEARCH OF GOD

Esmat Gabriel, M.A., M.S.S., Ed.D.

*"... HE LOVES EACH OF US,
AS IF THERE WERE ONLY
ONE OF US."*

St. Augustine

Saint Augustine combined holiness with knowledge, speculation with faith and action with contemplation in an unparalleled degree. He was moreover the most universal Doctor and the most powerful minded of the Latin Fathers. A great man of letters, he was still more a man of tradition and authority, as well as a daring theologian and an original thinker.

Personally, I hold unmeasurable eagerness and desire to penetrate and understand the simplicity, complexity and fruitfulness of his great work. I will attempt here to focus on the idea of God which forms the center of all Augustine's thoughts.

Early in his search for wisdom Augustine turned to the Scriptures, but he turned in vain for their style seemed to him far inferior to that of the great classical authors, and he was as yet unable to solve the difficulties which met him in the moral inconsistencies of some Old Testament figures (Such things as the polygamy of the patriarchs, the deception of Isaac by Jacob . . . etc.) He was a young man, and young men impatient of difficulties are always liable to be captured by anyone who will cut the knot for them with a slashing answer. Such an answer was forthcoming in the teaching of the

Dates in the Life of St. Augustine

A.D.

- 354 Born at Tagaste in Africa
- 370 At Carthage to study rhetoric
- (371) Death of his father Patricius
- 374 Augustine with the Manichaeans
- 375 At Tagaste where he opened a school
- 376 Back to Carthage to teach rhetoric
- 383 Leaving to Rome against his mother's wishes
- 384 Becoming professor of rhetoric at Milan
- 384 Monica joining Augustine at Milan
- 387 Baptism by St. Ambrose at Easter
- 387 Death of St. Monica at Ostia
- 388 Return of Augustine to Africa
- 391 Ordained a priest at Hippo
- 395 Consecrated bishop, to assist Valerius of Hippo
- 396 Death of Bishop Valerius
- (400) Writing of "Confessions"
- 413-
- 426 Writing of "The City of God"
- 430 Death of St. Augustine on August 28 during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals

Manichaeans, and precisely at this moment, when his upward progress was checked by disappointment with the Scriptures, Augustine came upon Manichaeism.

This system, which is often referred to as a heresy though it originated outside the Church was an astonishing farrago of Oriental fantasies plus a whole series of dogmatic statements on matters which belong to the domain of scientific fact. It will be sufficient here to say that it was an extreme form of *Dualism* which taught that, from the beginning, there has been two *rival principles*: LIGHT and DARKNESS, GOOD & EVIL, and which built up on this basis a structure widely fantastic, and so far as it dealt with natural phenomena, they were demonstrably false. But, and this is the point which fascinated Augustine and probably most of its more intelligent followers, it answered his two conundrums for him. In particular it solved the question of moral responsibility in *precisely* the way which appealed most to *human vanity*. To his question as to the Hebrew Scriptures Manichaeism answered that they had been tampered with, and that the moral inconsistencies of the patriarchs, etc. were due to these *interpolations*. To the other question, the existence of the evil, and how far he himself was responsible for his sins, it answered in effect, "You are not responsible at all. Sin is all due to the interference of the power of darkness, who has imprisoned the human soul, which came from the light principle in a body of darkness, so that it cannot help acting and shining as it does. But if you accept me as your guide and obey me, I will teach you how to free yourself from bondage." The offer was a tempting one, and to the young enthusiast it seemed well worth trying.

The Manichaean sect was divided into two classes the elect, and the auditors. The former—who were strict ascetics abstaining from wine, flesh-meat and marriage, and living on vegetable food alone—were supported by the auditors, whom they repaid by giving them a share in their prayers. Augustine never advanced beyond the grade of auditor and before many years his acute intellect began to feel dissatisfaction with Manichaeism. He explains how it failed him,

First, there was the destructive character of Manichaean philosophy, "They destroy everything and build up nothing".

Secondly, the immorality of the men towards themselves.

Thirdly, the feebleness of their arguments against the Christians with regard to Scripture.

Fourthly, the obvious falsity of their so called scientific teaching—this last point was one of special importance for the Manichaean "science" was an integral part of its theological system. When therefore, it contradicted natural facts, as it did for example in its theory of eclipses, the failure threw doubt upon all the rest, since all was based upon the authority of the founder Mani. Also their great doctor Faustus proved a com-

plete disappointment. Faustus knew nothing of science, and at once acknowledged that he could not answer the difficulties raised. The spell was broken, Augustine rejected the teaching, and his mind was free again though for want of anything better he still remained nominally Manichaeist.

In this state of unrest, Augustine for a time drifted towards the sceptic philosophy of the New Academy, the Agnosticism of his day. But his optimistic character rebelled against the teaching that TRUTH could never be attained by human reason and his was not the type of mind that could rank the search for Truth above the possession of it.

At Milan he met St. Ambrose, and though he seems never to have reached any intimacy with the great Bishop, he became a regular attendant at his sermons, which rapidly broke down the prejudice against Christianity that his ignorance of its real teaching had bred. But he was destined to approach the Church by a path which changed his whole philosophical outlook and colored his teaching to some extent even to the end of his life. This was the system known as Neoplatonism.

Augustine's knowledge of Greek was slight, but soon after reaching Milan he fell in with some Latin translation of Plotinus' books and was completely captivated by their teaching. From this writer—a heathen, born in Egypt about A.D. 204, in whose writings Christianity is not once named—Augustine received the impulse which brought him ultimately to the feet of Christ. From him he learned that "God is a spirit," eternal, unchangeable, and immaterial. This was a vital matter to him. He had been unable to conceive of any spiritual substance, and so had thought of God as some vast, luminous, all containing body, much like the ether of Space. Now for the first time, he saw God presented as the *One Reality*, the *Soul of souls and Life of lives*. Now first he heard that evil is nothing but separation from God, that the whole purpose of man's life is to mount up to him and be united to him, that he can do this only by self discipline and self restraint, rising from lower to higher levels by contemplation of God and that at length he may even reach the highest degree of union possible in this life, that ecstasy wherein the soul is lost to space and time in the all absorbing embrace of God. St. Augustine seems to have become an adept and to have achieved the summit of platonic vision.

In Neoplatonism St. Augustine could satisfy his intellect. However, in that system God is regarded as a Trinity, the Good, the Mind, and the world Soul. He is an object of reception and contemplation by the intellect alone. Plotinus knows nothing of him as the Father who loved his Children or as the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. The Neo-platonic God might satisfy one who had never fallen a victim to passion, but not one like Augustine, to whom the consciousness of his divided nature had been brought home by a long habit of sin, which all his efforts could not break. When therefore,

Neoplatonism told him that moral will could be got rid of by moral discipline alone, Augustine knew that it was speaking falsely, for his past life proved to him that this was not so. It was useless to tell him that by means of ascetical practices, the soul could gradually be brought back to spiritual health and freed from sin. Augustine knew in advance that this was impossible without help from outside himself and such help Neo-platonism did not pretend to offer. So once again came disillusionment and once more he failed to find the truth. But by this time, the clue to the secret was found through the preaching of St. Ambrose and his increasing interest in the Scriptures and in Christ. If Plotinus had revealed to him a God who was worthy of all love and honor, it was St. Paul who showed him how he might become capable of fellowship with God through Christ.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S CONCEPT OF GOD'S EXISTENCE & NATURE

St. Augustine judges that God's existence is so evident that it cannot be ignored. And it is precisely the agreement of mankind on this point that forms one of his proofs. Often he bases his demonstration on the beauty of the world and the order manifest therein. Usually, however, he develops the metaphysical and psychological proofs. He is struck by the changing and therefore imperfect character of the beings that surround him, and is thus forced to seek higher for a Being in whom truth, goodness and perfection are in no wise limited. On the other hand, the necessary and universal character of those noble ideas which make the light and strength of the spiritual soul, those notions of truth and goodness which guide all its intellectual and moral activity offer him still greater attraction, and more often than not it is by this psychological avenue that he comes to God.

Moreover, although these first principles are not absolutely innate, there is something so effortless and so spontaneous about them, that Augustine is nothing loath to attribute them to the action of God, Who is the principle of all knowledge, and Who is the principle of all being. He insists more especially on this point, since these primary ideas, though simple, yet enable man to contemplate God already in this world, and even to see Him in some measure when they are illuminated by supernatural wisdom.

The divine attributes which especially attracted Saint Augustine's attention, together with that of the perfect and unchanging Being, are those of Truth and Goodness. This conception of God, which follows from what has already been said of the proofs of His existence, is well rendered by the following expression, reminiscent of Platonism. God is the perfect Being, with a perfection which excludes all change, unlike all other beings which receive from Him all they possess. Nevertheless Augustine is still more drawn by the aspect of truth and goodness in God. God is Truth in Himself, since in God there is no difference between the idea and its realization; God is Truth, also

with regard to all creation, since He is the principle of all the truth which resides in created beings, and of all the knowledge possessed by created minds. He is Goodness, in Himself and outside Himself, for all He has made is good, and for His reasoning creatures He constitutes the supreme rule of moral good and the principle of all supernatural good. With truth and goodness is linked wisdom, which occupies a great place in Saint Augustine's thoughts.

Conclusion

It is evident that this rapid summary of Augustine's thought of God does not pretend to say all that can be said, or even to indicate it but an attempt has been made to note the essential points of his thought. Also it should be pointed that his insistency on the idea of God consequently led him to seek and write on the rights of God. His great qualities enabled him to study with so much fruit the great mystery of the Trinity, to build up the exact framework of Christian anthropology and the theology of grace, to open up and develop fresh avenues of thought on the Church and the Sacraments and to throw new light on the traditional teaching on the last things.

It was inevitable that such a man should attract disciples in all ages. His doctrinal influence has made itself felt through the centuries and is implied in that intellectual movement known as Augustinism.

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THE PRACTICAL METHOD IN THE SEARCH OF GOD

Fayez A. Bashir, M.A.

Using his system of philosophy, Augustine went on a long journey searching for God, but his prolonged research was fruitless; he could not find God. He longed for a method that would throw light on his way, and give rest to his soul that tired itself in vain—a feeling shared by many who have used various systems to seek God. As the years pass by, man becomes more eager to find Him, because in his inner self there is a deep awareness of His presence. The problem is to know the way to Him. Those searchers for God also feel that they will know Him whenever they meet Him. The soul will be attracted to Him by love, and the mind will rest contented in Him. Meanwhile, their hearts cry for him,

“O Real God, show us the road to You. Our journey has become too long . . . Our souls are thirsty for You . . . How many times have we come back with the unfulfilled hope of seeing You? Instead, we saw gods which the people have made, but we hated them and refused them, and our thirst for You and our eagerness to meet You have increased.

“We feel that on meeting You, we shall find the true happiness, we shall see the perfect beauty, we shall hear the truth which gives rest to our thoughts, we shall find in You the love which fills our life. In our souls there is a need, which is not for money, for words, or for fame, but a need for rest, a need for what we neither know nor can describe, but what we are sure to get when we meet You.

“O Real God, many days have passed in my long search for a meaning of existence, for a true taste of life, and for an end of the perdition which engulfs me. You are the source of life and the secret of existence and I trust that when I find You I will find my life and reach the mystery of my existence. Even I will then feel my lost self.”

After years of struggle, aided by the preaching of St. Ambrose and the examples of good Christians, Augustine accepted Christianity. But this was a matter of the intellect, which had no effect upon his personal life. He moved from the folly of those who did not know God, to the folly of those who knew Him, but glorified him not as God. The light was in front of Augustine, but still he was held back by his old self, “Stay a while. Even these worldly things are pleasant, and carry no small sweetness with them.”¹ Augustine was

actually running away from Christ as he later described in his *Confessions*, "While I thus desired a happy life, I yet feared to seek it in its true abode, and I fled from it while yet I sought it."¹ Again he says, "O crooked ways of mine! Woe be to my audacious soul, which hoped that, had it forsaken Thee, it might find something else which was better. Though it turn and toss, upon the back and side and breast, it hath found all things hard; and that Thou alone art Rest."² "What torments did my heart endure in that travail, what sighs were those, O my God! Yet even then were Thine ears open, and I knew it not; . . . the unspoken contrition of my soul appealed loudly to Thy mercy."³

Reading the Scriptures made Augustine sure that Christ is the Way, "For it is one thing from some wooded mountain top to see the land of peace, without being able to find the way thither, and to strive towards it in vain through certain impenetrable ways . . . ; and another to keep on the way that leadeth thither, secure in the care of that heavenly leader."⁴ But, alas, "The Way, the Saviour of the world, did please me well, but I could not find it in my heart to follow Him through the strait gate."⁵ . . . "For now I had nothing left which might answer to that call of Thine, '*Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise up from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*' On all sides Thou didst show me that what Thou saidst was true, and I, being convinced of that truth, had nothing to answer thereto but certain slow and sleepy words, as 'Shortly . . . I will do it shortly; have patience with me, yet a little while.' But my 'shortly, shortly' grew into great length; and my 'little while' stretched out a long while. In vain was it for me to be *delighted with Thy law interiorly*, when there was *another law in my flesh, fighting against the law of my mind, and leading me captive to the law of sin, which is in my members*. For the violence of custom is a kind of law of sin, whereby the mind of man is drawn and holden, even against its will, and that justly, since at the first it slipped into it willingly. *Wretched man that I was, who could deliver me from the body of this death, but Thy grace only, through Christ Jesus, our Lord?*"⁶

This was the state of Augustine when a certain Pontitianus visited him at Milan where he lived with some friends. This African visitor took occasion to speak about St. Antony the Great⁷, whose name was famous then in Europe, only three decades after his death. Augustine was amazed when he heard the wonderful things wrought by God in the life of St. Antony. He learned also from Pontitianus about the teeming monasteries filled with monks following in the footsteps of Antony and living in "the fruitful bosom of the barren desert."

Augustine found in Saint Antony a man who had reached what he himself failed to reach, despite the fact that Antony was a common man who knew neither science nor philosophy. It took no time for St. Antony to leave everything and commit himself totally to a life with God, while Augustine spent twelve years (since he was nineteen) struggling through a different

method, and he failed. What was the method of Antony? Augustine tried to meditate upon the life of St. Antony which pierced his heart, and found that his method was a simple one, a method which can be followed by anyone.

While Pontitianus was still speaking the soul of Augustine turned inward upon itself. By the time the visitor left, Augustine was greatly disturbed in the secret chamber of his heart. Then he turned to his friend Alipius and exclaimed, "Must we bear this? What is it? What didst thou hear? The unlearned start up and carry heaven by storm, and we, with all our learning, see how we wallow still in flesh and blood! Are we ashamed to follow, because they have gone before, or shall we not be much more ashamed, if we do not so much as follow after them?"⁸

Augustine was courageous enough to encounter himself and to face his friend with a confession of their error, and through his sincerity in the search for God he accepted to follow a system he took from "the unlearned."

After these words, Augustine went to the garden of his house where he continued struggling with himself; could he ever lead a chaste life? But before his mind were now many examples of young men and maidens who led such a life. It was as if Continnence herself appeared to Augustine and addressed him, "Canst thou not do what all of these have done? Or can these men and maidens perform so much by their own strength, and not rather by that of the Lord, their God? . . . Thou standest upon thyself, and therefore it is that thou standest not. Cast thyself upon Him and fear not, He will not withdraw Himself and let thee fall. Cast thyself upon Him securely, He will receive thee and will heal thee."

Augustine then felt as if the whole heap of his misery was drawn up out of the secret depths of his heart, and was piled before his mind where a huge storm was building up. He eagerly knocked at the door of God, casting himself down under a fig tree, and giving full liberty to his tears, which ran like rivers from his eyes, "How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not even now? Why not even at this instant, make an end of my uncleanness?"⁹ God's response was not delayed. It was Augustine who finally responded to the call of God, and what he did not attain during a life spent in learning and philosophy, he finally reached in hours using the practical method.

The mysterious touch of God made Augustine burn with His love as he later described, "Thou didst call and cry out, and so didst break through my deafness. Thou didst shine forth and glow refulgent, and so didst chase away my blindness. Thou didst breathe Thy fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath, yet do I pant after Thee. I tasted Thee, and still do I hunger and thirst for more. Thou didst but touch me, and I do even burn with a desire to enjoy Thee."¹⁰

Now what is this practical method? Christ Himself offered us this method when He said, "*Come unto me . . .*" "*and him that cometh to me I will in no*

wise cast out . . ." *"Watch and pray . . ."* (Matt. 11:28; John 6:37; Matt. 26:41) When Philip spoke to Nathanael about Christ, he did not offer proofs or use arguments, but he simply said, *"Come and see."* (John 1:46). It is then an invitation from God to man to come to Him and enter into a dialogue with Him and see Him. According to Scripture, God is certain to meet man when man is fully eager and willing to accept Him, and to open the door of his heart for Him (Rev. 3:20) The place of the encounter is the deepest part of the soul. Man is then filled with a wonderful sensation of happiness and tranquillity which puts an end to all sensations of division, or perdition, or mental struggle. The soul in this state has a strong desire for its lasting forever, *"Lord, it is good for us to be here . . ."* (Matt. 17:4)

This method is not difficult; the difficulty is in having the courage and sincerity of St. Augustine in facing himself in order to respond to God's call. You even need no book to lead you. You will hear the voice of God addressing you when you open the Bible, and the power of God's word will strengthen your soul in following Him. Certainly if you have the will and the eagerness, the moment of your meeting with God will be much sooner and easier than what you think.

This is the method of the Orthodox Church for the search of God. God is a living Person, Who hears, sees and speaks. It is easy to enter a dialogue with Him. God is not a thought that can be searched for by the mind through a system of philosophy. Nor is He a material thing that can be analysed in the laboratory. God is a Spirit that has to be reached through a spiritual system. He is an utter need of the human soul and spirit. God is to be tasted and enjoyed, *"O taste and see that the Lord is good, (Ps. 34:8)* and not for criticism or analysis. He is a Person that satisfies my soul and fills my life, much more than a rhetoric that fills my head. God is a great Symphony which we need to hear and enjoy instead of constantly worry about analysing its tunes. God is perfect Beauty whom our souls always try to taste. He is complete Perfection where our thoughts find rest.

This is the secret discovered by the vast numbers who not only found God, but also dedicated their whole lives to Him. With millions of people that have met God, and have advanced rapidly in His knowledge, it would be strange and shameful if we are still asking whether God exists. We should be ashamed when the unlearned take heaven by violence while we, who profess to be learned in science and philosophy, spend our lives asking a simplistic question which the children have felt, the ignorant have seen, and the philosophers and scientists have become certain of.

Yet some are really fleeing from God because of desires and passions that contrast with His law. They try to cover up their action by a mask of the denial of His existence or by being unwilling to meet Him.

The fact is that all of us will meet God one day, whether we will it or not. All of us will be tried according to the law of God, whether we acknowledge it or not. Some have still to face themselves, as Augustine did.

The Practical Method in the Light of Modern Thought

Plato belittled manual work and glorified mental work. In his "*Republic*" he put the philosophers in the highest position. Many followed him, insisting that only mental work is highly esteemed, till the experimental method came and showed the value of manual work in the laboratory. Later came John Dewey with his philosophy of *Pragmatism* in which he proved the value of direct experience. He said that the best system of education is based upon direct experience, i.e., the person experiences by himself and gets in touch with the facts by himself. Recent trends in education elaborated more upon the concept of experience. Beside the sensory experiences, there are experiences of emotions and passions. Man experiences all actions with all his cognitive perception. Experience is not limited to the individual experience, but there is also a collective experience; the experiences of nations are always added to the human tradition.

This is the call of modern thought to man, to enter into experience in order to learn and to search. It is the same call of God from ancient times; and which became more obvious in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also our practical method which we have known in our Church,

"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)

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A NEW MARTYR: SAINT GEORGE THE EGYPTIAN

On June 26, the Coptic Church celebrates the martyrdom of St. George the Egyptian, who suffered in the year 979 during the reign of the Fatimids.¹ A new martyr is the special term used to denote one who died under Islamic persecution.

St. George was a native of Northern Delta. His father was a Moslem; but his mother, who had been married against her wish and the wish of her family, was a Christian. His original name was "Mozahem".

His mother Mary was a devout Christian, and through her Mozahem was inflamed with the love of Christianity. He read Christian books, and practised private prayer. He used to go with his mother when she celebrated the Christian feasts with her family. But he could not attend church as he was considered a Moslem.

At the age of twelve he asked his mother to take him with her to church. He wanted to share with other children of his age their happiness when they, wearing their best clothes, went to church to celebrate the Holy Mystery. His mother answered that this could not be done unless he was first baptized. But with his insistence, she gave him a piece of the blessed bread (the antidoron). Strangely enough to both of them, it tasted in his mouth like honey.

Since that day he longed for Baptism. When his father heard about his intention, he threatened to kill him. It was not an easy thing for Mozahem to be baptized. It meant martyrdom for him, trouble for the local church, and possibly a new wave of persecution. He travelled to several places where he might be baptized secretly. Failing that, he asked a priest to leave the baptismal water after the service. Then, after all people had left the church, he dived in the water in the name of the Holy Trinity. He thought that he finally obtained Baptism.

Later on, he married Seyola, who was the daughter of a priest in a village near his home village. When she heard about the story of his conversion and Baptism, she told him that his baptism was not valid; besides, he did not receive the sacrament of Myron (Confirmation).

Before they could decide what to do, Mozahem was arrested, his belongings confiscated, and Seyola was beaten. They were later set free but they spent the next several years wandering from place to place in the Nile Delta. More than once they were discovered by the Moslems, and were persecuted for their faith.

One day Mozahem felt very sick, and his wife was sad lest he should die unbaptized. So they travelled to a new place, where the priest accepted to baptize him. At Baptism, he had his new Christian name, George, after the name of the famous Capadocean martyr.

George was thinking of spending the rest of his life in the Monastery of St. Macarius the Great.² But God had prepared for him another way of serving Him. In a dream, he beheld that he was tortured by the governor, died, and was buried. Then he saw Christ raising him from the dead.

Soon the Moslem mob discovered him again, began to beat him and spit at him. When the governor of that place (Damira, in Northern Delta), heard about this, he sent his force to take him. He tried to persuade him to return to Islam. Failing that, he threatened him, and then ordered him to be scourged all day. One of the fanatics broke his skull with a log of wood.

He was then put in prison. That same night he saw the Virgin in the appearance of a pigeon that spread her wings over his head, and he was healed.

He remained in prison for 26 days. During that time the mob wanted to kill him. But the governor heard more to his Christian wife, who convinced him to ask the "Sultan" before sentencing him.

He spent most of his time in prison in prayer; he had also the chance to see his wife frequently. On her first visit she was happy to find that his injury had healed. But, in another visit, one week later, he could not even answer her. Two fanatics had managed to enter the prison, and beat him, apparently breaking his thigh. She tried to encourage him and strengthen him, while inwardly she was very sad, and as soon as she left him she was weeping and mourning. Again he was miraculously healed.

Some Christians came to see him in prison to obtain his blessings; as he became well known all over Egypt as a confessor of the Christian faith. He gave them some of the rags he had used to cover his wounds. When Seyola heard about that she came to blame him, lest Satan should conquer him through pride. She said, "... How do you assume that you are a martyr? Have you been thrown into flames? Have you been dismembered? Have your eyes been blinded? You would better have kissed the feet of all who came to be blessed by you, and asked for their prayers and for remembering you in the Divine Liturgy!"

In the eyes of Heaven, he was a great saint. In prison, he saw several visions of Christ and of His angels and His saints. He knew the day of his death, he beheld in a vision the palm tree under which he was going to suffer, even he was told about the number of stones that were going to be thrown at him.

Finally the letter of the "Sultan"³ came; he had to be set free. But the angry mob threatened the governor, in a great riot, asking that he may be delivered to it. The governor yielded.

On the day of his martyrdom, he washed himself, he even anointed his body with some perfume brought to him by Christian friends. He appeared to be preparing for a great feast. He was then taken from prison by the people and was led to the place he had seen in his vision. There, they took off his clothes. About 1500 of them surrounded him, some scourging him, some beating him with rods of iron, others piercing him with spears and swords. During all that, he had only the *Jesus Prayer*⁴ on his lips. One of the people finally crushed his head several times with a stone.

The people tried to burn the body of the saint, but water came out of it and blew out the fire. They then mutilated it, even hired butchers to cut it into pieces, and finally threw it into the river.

A part of his body came to shore and was miraculously found by a Christian youth, who gave it to his faithful wife. Seyola rejoiced and took it with kisses to her original city, Beesat, where a church was built in his name. Many people with different diseases were healed in that church. A part of his relics is now in St. George's church at Damietta.

Notes

1. The Fatimid dynasty (969-1171) is one of the Islamic dynasties that ruled Egypt after the Arab invasion. Except for the time of the mad Caliph al-Hakim (996-1021), it was a period when the Copts enjoyed religious freedom. Several Copts held the highest administrative positions as viziers.

2. Founded in the Western Egyptian Desert by St. Macarius the Egyptian in the 4th century and is still one of the most active monasteries in the Coptic Church.

3. The sultan here is the second Fatimid caliph al-Aziz. His reign was one of prosperity for the Copts and for all the country. He was very tolerant in matters of religion. He even left unharmed several persons who renounced Islam and became Christians—an act “normally” punishable by death.

4. “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a sinner.” This mystic prayer that has flourished in Eastern Christianity, and during this century in the West, was first practised by the Egyptian monks in the 4th century.

CURRENTS IN COPTIC CHURCH STUDIES

THE VOYAGE TO CANAAN

By Blessed Father Bishoi Kamel

“The heavenly Canaan is all my desire in life. When its picture fades away from me, I get lost in a wilderness, and drowned in a sea where the desires, lusts and philosophies of the world attack me.”

“The Lord Jesus, whose members we are, is the road to Canaan; union with God is Eternal Life itself.”

“The Book of Exodus has drawn for us, in a practical way, the road to Canaan. The saints never deviated from it during their sojourn in the world. Every new sect has designed for itself a personal system, but the Church has designed for its sons the method of Exodus in order to reach Canaan, and she ordered them to sing the Song of the Crossing each night (Exodus 15: The first song of Matins). While our beloved John, the beloved of Christ, has revealed for us the Song of the Triumphants, which is the same Song of Moses, and the Song of the Lamb.” (Rev. 15)

Salvation is only through the Coming Down of God (Exodus 1-3)

Through his own free will man became a slave of sin. (Ex. 1:14, 15) When Moses depended on his own power, he failed to save his kinsmen, and he fled from his powerful enemy (Ex. 2:11-15). He then heard the voice of God speaking from the burning bush, “. . . I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . , and have heard their cry . . . , for I know their sorrows. And I am *coming down* to deliver them . . . and to *bring them up* . . . unto a good land. . . .”

Because of the sighs of his poor God brings salvation (Ps. 12:5). He comes down in order to raise us up, and to make us sit together in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

God came down only once in the bush. Then He repeatedly came to His people in the Pillar of Fire, and gave them the manna from heaven (a type of His Body), and the water from the Rock (a type of Christ.) Later He ordered them to make Him a sanctuary, that He might dwell among them (Ex. 25:8). The temporary tabernacle gave place to a stone-built temple. This was also destroyed, leaving man without any security. Finally “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). He was united with our flesh, without separation even by death. We became “members of his body, of his flesh, and

of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). This is the complete salvation, which gives man complete security. Incarnation, which started to be revealed in the Bush (a type of Virgin Mary) is the perfection of security through salvation.

Slavery

If the aim is to reach Canaan, the first step should be freedom from the bondage of Pharaoh, or in our case from attachment to the world.

Life in bondage is caused by putting more trust in the world, than in the word of God. Starting by "enjoying the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25), it continues with the attachment to the world and ends in affliction till death. This is explained in the parable of the lost son. The son thought that freedom was outside his father's house. His servitude to sin started by a temporary pleasure, followed by joining himself to a citizen of the far country, and ended in eating the husks of the swine and even perishing with hunger (Luke 15:11-17). The people of God started by a temporary rest in the land of Goshen (Gen. 50:8), where they cultivated the habits of sitting by the flesh pots (Ex. 16:3) and eating the leeks and the onions (Num. 11:5) and worshipping the golden calf, but ended in affliction with burdens and having their sons killed (Ex. 1:10-16). On the contrary, life in Christ, starts by enduring his reproach (Heb. 11:26), then becoming one spirit with the Lord through joining and uniting with Him (I Cor. 6:16, 17), and ends in resurrection and glory.

Examples of Slavery are seen in:

1. *Slavery to gluttony.* The desire of eating from the forbidden tree was the cause of the fall of Adam and Eve. The Israelites preferred death beside the flesh pots, rather than being free away from them (Ex. 16:3).

2. *Slavery to sins of the flesh.* The Israelites left God in order to worship the calf; such worship was accompanied by dancing, singing and adultery (Ex. 32). We have also examples of such slavery in the lives of Samson (Judges 16) and of Amnon, David's son (2 Sam. 13).

3. *Slavery to worldly positions.* Some people think that Moses could serve his people better had he stayed in the palace of Pharaoh. But the fact is that the Church suffered through men of high rank who tried to serve in the Church through their power. "Church service is not through worldly powers, but in sharing in its burdens. It is not in the use of a high rank, but in letting God use us from any rank. It is not in using power to defend the Church, but in bearing affliction with the people of God and sharing with them."

4. *Slavery to fear.* "This slavery followed the people throughout all their travels. They murmured against Moses and Aaron saying, '... ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us.' (Ex. 5:21). . . Fear is caused by lack of faith, so the gospel combines both when it says, 'But the fearful, and unbelieving . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire . . .'

(Rev. 21:8). . . . Examples of such fears are the fear of telling the truth for fear of persecution, the fear of being honest for fear of poverty, the fear of fasting for the sake of better health, and the fear of illness. . . .” The cure of all these fears is in God’s words, “Take no thought for the morrow”.

5. *Slavery to time.* This causes anxiety and boredom. God is not subject to time, and He can in one instance accomplish what man fails to do during all his life assisted by all modern technology.

Freedom

Freedom is only obtained through the redemptive work of Christ, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36). Moses discovered this in his forty years of solitude in the wilderness after his failure when he depended on himself. Before any man can carry his cross and follow Christ, he has to deny himself (Matt. 16:24). The Book of Exodus reveals to us how we are saved by the descent of the Son and our union with Him in His Crucifixion. Salvation is only through the Blood of Christ. This has been typified in the first of the ten plagues when water was turned into blood (Exodus 7:14-24) and in the last one when the Israelites were saved by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. (Exodus 12)

The Book of Leviticus elaborates more upon the theme of the salvic effect of blood, a theme later explained by the author of Hebrews, “And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.” (Heb. 10:11, 12).

“For the Israelites, salvation by the blood of the lamb was fulfilled in the crossing of the Red Sea, which became a permanent barrier between Satan and the people of God. The greatest battle for salvation was won by the rod of Moses which was a symbol of the Cross that opened the sea of Baptism where Satan was drowned. This was revealed by the Apostle, “Buried with him in baptism, . . . Blotting out the handwriting of ordinance 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. 2:12-15).

“Those who have tasted freedom know that it should end in joy, praise, glorification, singing and dancing . . . The song of freedom is always the same. The Israelites sang it yesterday (Ex. 15). The Church sings it every day in Matins. And the Church will sing it in heaven for ever, “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory . . . stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb . . .” (Rev. 15:2, 3). In ancient times, the People sang the song of freedom on the shore of the Red Sea. We now sing it joyfully on the shore of Baptism; and we will sing it for the whole eternity on the sea of glass.”

Experience of Freedom

- *There is no fear in freedom.* In the new life there is no fear of Satan, of death, of hunger or of any worldly temptation.
- *Freedom is a life with God.* Baptism transfers us from life in the servitude of Pharaoh to the life in the wilderness with Christ.
- *Freedom is a life through God.* We receive as food the manna from God's hand (i.e. the Body of Christ.) and we drink from the fountain of water flowing from His side, "for they drank from that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." (1 Cor. 10:4).
- *Freedom is an exodus for worship.* "Let my people go, that they may serve me." (Ex. 8:20).
- *Freedom is finally a constant movement towards Canaan,* where there is love without end (John 13:1) and eternal joy, peace and triumph.

Spiritual Combat:

Crossing of the Red Sea is not an end, but the beginning of struggle in the wilderness till we reach Canaan. In the wilderness of this life, a Christian has to fight along several fronts:

1. *Standing firm* in the power of resurrection which we have received in Baptism. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage . . . For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." (Gal. 5:1, 13). The Israelites failed in this and longed for the land of Goshen while they were in the wilderness (Exodus 16:3, Num. 11:4-8, Acts 7:39).
2. *Watching our passions.* The desire for food is watched by fasting. The love of money is watched by depending upon God. On the contrary the Israelites murmured against God because of their hunger (Exodus 16:3) and thirst (Ex. 17:2, 3).
3. *Spiritual growth.* The Israelites had to travel continuously in the desert in order to reach Canaan. A Christian should grow continuously "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13). He grows in spirit and his "inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16) "after the image of him that created him." (Col. 3:10).
4. *Struggle with Amalek.*

"Why does God allow spiritual warfare in the wilderness? Spiritual warfare is useful in many ways. Without it we do not taste the sweetness of triumph, nor receive crowns, nor enter into deep communion with God, nor discover the weakness of the world before us, nor grow in faith, nor discover that 'He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4)."

Amalek is a type of Satan who always tries to kill the children of God (Ex. 1:16). He was conquered by the raising of Moses' hands (Ex. 17:11), a symbol

of the Cross. "The Christian should always remember the Cross, for through it the world has been crucified, together with desires and passions. Rest, laziness and avoidance of the Cross make one remember the flesh pots and erect for oneself a golden calf. . . . Therefore the Cross is our means to watch the passions. . . ." Other weapons in the spiritual warfare are mentioned by St. Paul (Eph. 6: 10-22) and include prayer, the word of God, faith, and finally patience (Rev. 13:10).

Purpose of Exodus

Although the destination of the Israelites was Canaan, the essential purpose of their exodus was life with God, i.e. His worship. Worship is first understood as slavery to God, "Let my people go, that they may serve me." (Ex. 9:1). But it is fulfilled as life in His Kingdom, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation," (Ex. 19:6) where we are united with Him and become members of His Body through the Eucharist.

Means of Worship

The Book of Exodus discusses in detail the three means of worship: the law (Ex. 20-24), the tabernacle (Ex. 25-27 & 30) and the priesthood (Ex. 29, 35 & 40). Blood is the foundation of all service; this is the theme of the Book of Leviticus.

Law

The law is the word of God, written with His finger (Ex. 31:18). It is not mere commandments, but also a covenant with God (Ex. 24:8).

Tabernacle

The tabernacle with all its contents is a symbol of the Incarnation of Christ (Ex. 25:8). In it there are many symbols of the Church that at the same time serve as a "shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5).

1. The *altar of burnt offering* is a symbol of the Cross of Christ.
2. The *bronze laver* stands for Baptism.
3. The *ark of the covenant* is a symbol of Virgin Mary who carried the Word of God (symbolized by the manna and the tablets of the covenant inside the ark.) The ark was the divine dwelling place (Ex. 25:22 & 40:34, 35).
4. The *table of showbread* is also a symbol of the Virgin Mary; the showbread stands for Christ.
5. The *candlestick* stands for St. Mary the Theotokos (carrying Christ) as Christ is the light of the world.
6. The *altar of incense* is the place of worship in front of the veil that led to the Holy of holies. Since the veil was rent at the time Christ died, our altar of

incense stands now directly in front of the ark. We are in the constant presence of God.

Priesthood

The first and principal work of a priest is to offer sacrifices in behalf of his people (Num. 15:25). In the Old Testament the rites of consecration of a priest included washing with water (Ex. 29:4), sprinkling with blood (Ex. 29:21) and anointing with oil (Ex. 29:7).

The people of God could meet Him when the consecrated priest offered sacrifices and thus the aim of exodus was reached. Christ is our High Priest and our Sacrifice. Therefore we can now enter boldly into the holy place and draw near to God. (Heb. 10:19-22).

BOOK REVIEWS

The Story of Monica and her Son Augustine

By Msgr. Leon Cristiani. Translated from the French by M. Angeline Bouchard. Boston, Ma: The Daughters of St. Paul, 1977. Pp. 171. Cloth, \$3.95. Paper, \$2.95.

This book deals with the spiritual biography of two saints. St. Monica was born about the year 331 in a city of North Africa known as Tagaste. After giving a general idea about her childhood and youth, the author elaborates on the areas where her life in Christ shone in its fullness. As a faithful and loving wife, she suffered for years from her Pagan husband Patricius who was both rough and unfaithful to her, till she finally won him for Christ, a short time before his death. Monica also won the love of her mother-in-law. However, St. Monica's name is famous because she brought to us St. Augustine, not only to this earthly life, but much more important to the spiritual life. This she accomplished through training him in the Christian faith in his childhood (which kept his faith in the presence of God during all his wandering away from Him), through her prolonged prayers for him, and by following him as a guardian angel till the end of her life. Augustine says about her, "And You sent Your hand from above, and raised my soul out of that depth of darkness, because my mother, Your faithful one, wept to You for me more bitterly than mothers weep for the bodily deaths of their children . . . You heard her and did not despise her tears when they flowed down and watered the earth against which she pressed her face wherever she prayed."

The success of St. Monica as a wife and mother was a fruit of a deep spiritual life which was manifested in her love for the Church. Although she shared in its prayers every day, her real attachment to the Church appeared during the time of trouble. In the year 386 when St. Monica was staying at Milan with her son, its bishop, St. Ambrose, "flatly refused to obey the empress' (Justine) command" to turn one of the churches to the Arians. Soldiers were sent to seize the churches, but the faithful hurried to protect them. For long days the churches remained under siege and Ambrose never left his cathedral where he kept teaching the people and leading them in the singing of hymns which he composed. In all this St. Monica was in the

forefront, as *The Story of Monica* vividly describes, “Monica would stand close to Ambrose’s pulpit, listening to his every word and ready to obey his every command. She sang the psalms with her whole soul. She took very much to heart the anxieties and struggles of the Church. After her concern for her son’s spiritual welfare came her desire to serve the bishop of Milan in his struggles for the Catholic Faith.”

St. Monica had one final desire in this world, to see her son Augustine a faithful Christian. On Easter of 387, Augustine was baptized. A few months later, St. Monica died at Ostia. St. Augustine describes her virtues in his confessions saying, “She was the servant of Your servants, and whosoever knew her did give much praise unto her, and love and honor unto You; because he found Your presence in her soul, the fruits of her holy conversation bearing witness to this. For she was the wife of one husband, she complied with her duty to her parents, she governed her house with all piety, her actions had the testimony of a good conscience, she brought up her children, travailing in labor for them often, so many times as she found them forsaking You. And lastly, O Lord, of us all who before her death lived together in Your fear (i.e., Augustine and his friends), having the grace of baptism, she did so take care, as if she had been the mother of us all; and yet she did serve us, as if she had been the daughter of us all.”

About Augustine himself the book deals with the first 33 years of his life from his birth in 354, till his baptism and his mother’s death in 387 A.D. It stresses the many factors, persons and circumstances which God used in drawing Augustine to Him. For those who find the *Confessions* too tedious to follow as Augustine wanders away in his meditations or philosophic arguments, this book is an excellent reference for his early life.

BOOK NOTICES

COPTOLOGIA,

A research Publication in Coptic Orthodox Studies. Volume II.

Edited by F. M. Ishak, Ph.D.

Thunder Bay, Ontario: Lakehead University, 1982. Pp. 80 \$3.90 (Can.) \$3.50 (U.S.)

This is a query into the rich world of the Coptic heritage both ancient and modern. Among the subjects discussed, five articles deal with the biography and theology of St. Athanasius the Great, an interesting article deals with the journey of the soul after death as described by the Church Fathers, and two articles discuss the immigration of Copts to America.

(Correspondence should be addressed to the editor, Professor F. Ishak, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario.)

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Volume Two.

Edited by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982, Pp. 1175, \$35.00.

This is an invaluable and an up to date source of information for anyone interested in Bible study (Vol. I was published in 1979, Vols. III & IV to follow). It is illustrated by many photographs, colored plates and attractive maps. In addition to the elaborate introductions to the Books of the Bible, Volume II (E to J) contains notable articles on theological themes and geographical places, with a wealth of historical information. However the reader should be aware that most of the contributors are evangelical Protestants. With this limitation in mind, the Coptic Orthodox reader can still benefit from its high level of scholarship.

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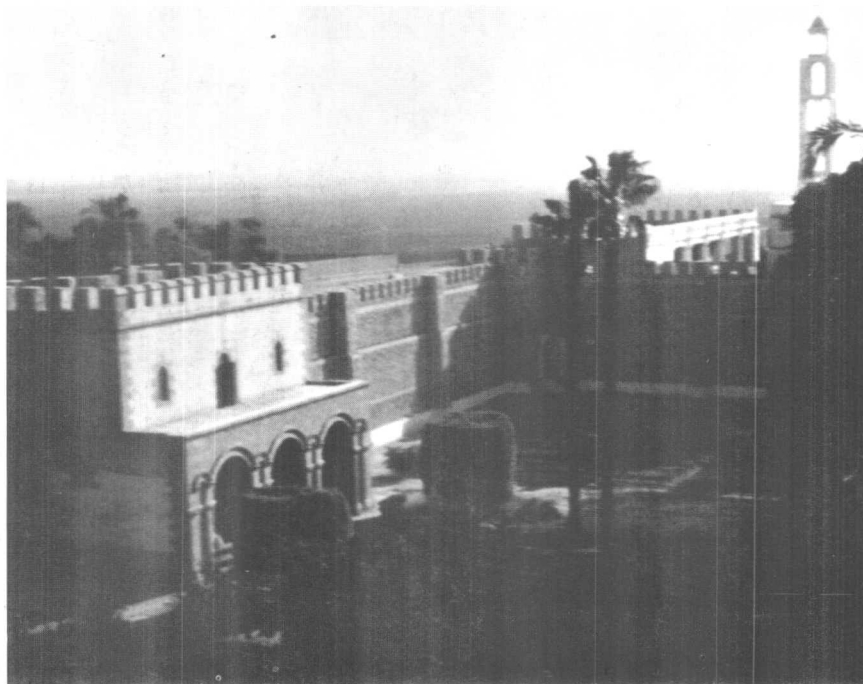
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MONASTERY OF OUR LADY (AL-MOHARREQ)

This fourth century monastery was founded at the time of St. Pachomius the Great on the site where, according to an ancient Coptic tradition, the Holy Family stayed in Egypt. It is situated two hundred miles south of Cairo. Bishop Wissa of Al-Balyana and three other bishops who have been recently released from Egyptian prisons reside now in this monastery. Of the seven bishops now released no one has been allowed by the government to return to his diocese, nor go back to his original monastery at Wadi-el-Natrun where Pope Shenouda is still in exile.