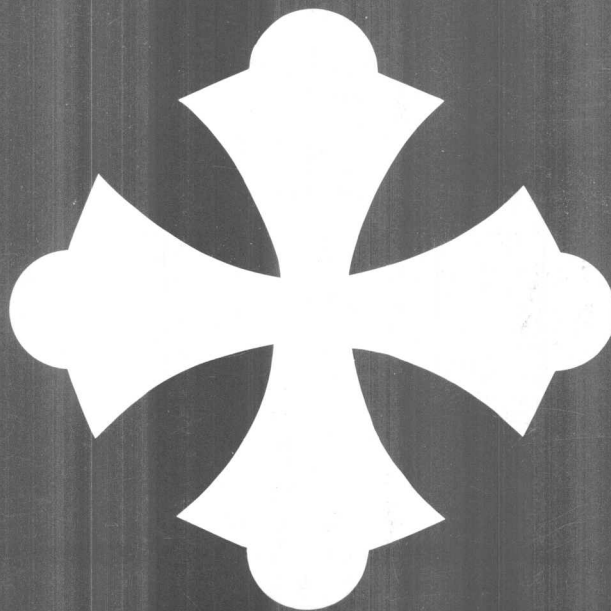


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# COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

*Volume 9, Number 2 . . . . . Summer 1988*

- ***POPE SHENOUDA: THE SPIRITUAL WAY***
- ***THE CHURCH BEHIND ST. ATHANASIUS***
- ***MONASTICISM IN THE AGE OF ST. MACARIUS***



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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

It can hardly be disputed that St. Athanasius has been the greatest Patriarch of the Church of Alexandria since its foundation by St. Mark the Apostle in the first century. The article ***'The Church Behind Saint Athanasius the Great'*** does not deal directly with his life or works but rather with the achievements of the people among whom such a rare Christian hero appeared. This paper was presented at the *Fifth North American Patristic Society Conference* held in Chicago on May 26-28, 1988. The feast day of St. Athanasius is May 15 in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The second part of ***A Sermon on Penitence Attributed to St. Cyril of Alexandria*** appears in this issue. It is translated from a Boharic Coptic manuscript by *John S. Jorgensen*, a Ph.D. candidate at John Hopkins University. The present article narrates the miracle of a bleeding cross, which reflects the belief of the early Copts in the power of the cross. This miracle is commemorated in the Coptic Church on Masari 14 (August 20).

In ***Spiritual Renewal and Eastern Christian Spirituality***, *Jack Phillips* quotes important Western sources that stress the value of the teachings of the Eastern Fathers and of the liturgical life in the Orthodox churches for a new vision of Christianity in the West. This is Mr. Phillips' second contribution to the *Journal*; in the last issue he described his first encounter with the Coptic clergy, monks and liturgy. Though he is of Presbyterian background, yet he is the Director of Adult Education at St. Leo Catholic Church in Omaha, Nebraska.

In the section of *Currents in Coptic Church Studies*, *Dr. Boulos Ayad* reviews three important books that have been written, in Arabic, in the last several years: ***Characteristics of the Spiritual Way*** by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, ***Coptic Monasticism in the Age of St. Macarius*** by Father Matta El-Meskeen, and ***History of Coptic Education*** by Professor Soliman Nessim.

*Editor*

### ***Backcover Picture***

Interior view of St. Mark's Cathedral at Alexandria. Rebuilt in 1947 on the site of the first patriarchal seat and, according to a Coptic tradition, the site where St. Mark suffered martyrdom.

Reprinted from *Coptic Egypt*, Art Publishers, 1986.

# ***THE CHURCH BEHIND SAINT ATHANASIUS THE GREAT***

***Rodolph Yanney, M.D.***

Saint Athanasius the Great, the 20th Patriarch of Alexandria (AD 328-373), is known as the champion of the Nicene Orthodox faith, for which he went into exile five times, for a total period of seventeen years, during the reign of four different Roman emperors. What is not widely known is the heroism of the people who defended their faith and who struggled for the return or for the safety of their leader. Through monasticism, the spirituality of the Egyptian Church Fathers in the fourth century, most of them laymen, reached a summit which has never since been excelled. This article deals with a completely different aspect of the greatness of this church. However, the towering figure of Athanasius that gives him the titles of "Apostolic", "Pillar of Faith", "Father of Orthodoxy", and "Doctor of the Church", has eclipsed behind him the Church which he was her sincere son. The doctrinal, ecclesiastical and political factors which contributed to throw both Church and state into havoc during the fourth century are beyond the scope of this paper, and the reader who is interested to follow the historical sequence of events will easily find them elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. Except for his first exile to Treves by the emperor Constantine, and which the emperors could not justify to the people<sup>2</sup>, Athanasius always chose where to go or where to hide. The people knew how to conceal their leader and to defend him. Different segments of the Alexandrian Church contributed toward the one struggle for Orthodoxy.

## ***Laity***

After the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), Constantine was seeking the peace and unity of the empire at any price, and for this he took stock in the anti-Nicene camp - the Arians and the Semi-Arians. Arius returned from exile in 328. However, his original Church, Alexandria, refused to accept him in communion. That this was not the decision of Athanasius alone is understood from what happened after he was deposed and exiled by the council of Tyre. In 336, Arius went to Egypt, supplied by letters of recommendations from the Emperor, and escorted by Roman guard. The contemporary historian, Socrates, describes what happened, "The return of Arius

with his adherents to Alexandria disturbed the whole city; for the people of Alexandria were exceedingly indignant both at the restoration of this incorrigible heretic with his partisans, and also because their bishop Athanasius went to exile.”<sup>3</sup> Arius, failing to obtain communion with the Church of Alexandria, returned to Constantinople.<sup>4</sup> Father Matta-el-Meskeen gives further detail and comment in his monumental Arabic work on Athanasius,

“The people closed the doors of the churches in his face and Alexandria erupted into a real turmoil which forced the governor to withdraw Arius from the city and arrange for his departure to Constantinople. This reveals the greatness of the people who were able to defend the faith in the absence of their bishop. Indeed this marvelous stand is of the utmost importance since it puts on record the personal role of the Egyptian people in protecting the faith.”<sup>5</sup>

The expulsion of Arius from Alexandria and even his death in Constantinople which followed were not enough for the Alexandrians who continued their appeal to the emperor by various means and in a way that irritated him. In his anger, the emperor wrote to them accusing them of folly and of disorderly conduct.<sup>6</sup>

Athanasius returned to his Church after the death of Constantine. He was hardly in Alexandria over a year when its Prefect published an edict that announced the appointment, by the Emperor Constantius II, of Gregory the Cappadocian as bishop of Alexandria. Hearing this, the people rushed to the churches, demonstrating and exclaiming against the uncanonical appointment of an Arian bishop instead of their beloved Father.<sup>7</sup>

The people succeeded in protecting Athanasius and saving him till he could escape to Rome, beyond the reach of Constantius. However, the impostor took hold of the churches with the support of the Roman army. For six years, only Arian priests were allowed to officiate in churches. The people boycotted the churches and they chose to worship behind the closed doors of their homes, to leave their children unbaptized, and to die without any spiritual succor, rather than to bow their heads under the hands of heretics.<sup>8</sup>

Athanasius returned from his second exile in AD 346, to find his Church in great trouble and the people in spiritual agony. After this, Athanasius had to stay among his people at any price and the whole Church did pay the price for keeping him inside Egypt in spite of three more imperial orders to arrest him.

It took several years for the Arian party to gather its power. After condemning and deposing Athanasius by two general councils in Arles and Milan, all bishops refusing to consent being immediately banished by the emperor, Constantius dispatched two of his secretaries with a verbal order to send Athanasius to exile. Athanasius refused to leave without a written order. The civil powers of Egypt found themselves inadequate to deal with the situation openly and they were

***Exiles of St. Athanasius***

AD	
325	Council of Nicaea
328	Athanasius Archbishop of Alexandria
335	Athanasius deposed by Council of Tyre
336-37	First Exile (under Constantine)
337	Death of Constantine
339-46	Second Exile (Replaced by Gregory)
356-62	Third Exile (Replaced by George)
362	Death of Constantius II
363	Fourth Exile (Under Julian)
365-66	Fifth Exile (Under Valens)
373	Death of Athanasius

forced to sign a treaty with *the popular leaders of Alexandria*. Then, by secret orders, the Prefect of Alexandria hastily called the legions in Libya and in Upper Egypt. Twenty three days after the treaty was signed, five thousand armed soldiers attacked the church of St. Theonas where Athanasius was leading the people in the Vigil service. This was soon followed by similar attacks on other churches.<sup>9</sup> Father Matta-El-Meskeen comments on these political maneuvers and military adventures which fill pages of history books,

“These reveal the great strength of the Egyptian people, and the utmost caution of the Roman empire in dealing with it, as well as the close union of the people

with the Church and with the spiritual leader when he is faithful for her Tradition and her faith.”<sup>10</sup>

Athanasius escaped and disappeared inside Egypt. Counts, prefects, tribunes, whole armies were successively employed to pursue a bishop and a fugitive. Liberal rewards were promised to whoever was able to find Athanasius, alive or dead.<sup>11</sup> All this was of no avail. Athanasius was hidden safely by his people till the death of Constantius. Although Athanasius spent the greater part of these years among the monks in the deserts, he occasionally visited Alexandria. The series of treatises he wrote during this period shows his fresh knowledge concerning what was happening in his Church and abroad. His hiding place in Alexandria was the house of the young virgin Eudaemonis. Palladius, who met this virgin fifty years later when she was seventy years old, wrote that the Archbishop “trusted his person to no one, not to a relative, friend, cleric or any one.”<sup>12</sup> It was dangerous for anybody to know where he was. The virgin washed his feet and brought him food, books and news.<sup>13</sup>

During the absence of Athanasius the laity had to struggle both for his freedom and for its faith. They wanted no Arian bishop to rule them. This they made very clear in a public letter of protest to the Emperor, which was written in 356 after the first attack on the churches. It concluded by saying, “If an order has been given that we should be persecuted, we are ready to suffer martyrdom . . . we request that no attempt should be made to bring any other bishop; we have resisted unto death,

desiring to have the most Reverend Athanasius, whom God gave us at the beginning, according to the succession of our Fathers . . .”<sup>14</sup>

The Emperor did not take the words of the Alexandrians seriously, and he forced another Arian Archbishop, George the Cappadocian, to preside over the Church. Most of the Egyptian orthodox bishops were either banished or forced to flee, and were replaced by followers of Arius. The laity was left to fight for the true faith. Forty lay leaders were arrested, scourged and sent to exile. A number of those died from their wounds. Virgins were arrested and threatened by fire to deny their faith; and with their steadfastness, they were stripped naked and beaten on the face. The widows of the Church were scourged on the soles of their feet and their stipend was cut. Houses of free citizens were broken into, and their treasures plundered and taken away.<sup>15</sup> All this did not affect the morale of the people, now powerless with no clerical or lay leadership. They boycotted the churches for eighteen months, after which violence erupted in Alexandria. The intruding bishop, George, was attacked inside the church of St. Dionysius. He hardly escaped with his life and remained outside the city. In 362 AD, after the death of Constantius, he ventured to return to the city. The pagan populace came into the scene; apparently it was then a national revolution and not a religious strife. They seized the bishop, put him in chains and finally killed him.<sup>16</sup>

During the last two exiles of Athanasius, under Julian (363 AD) and under Valens (365-366 AD), things did not last long. The Governor of Alexandria in 366 AD was unable to resist the popular revolt asking for the return of the religious and national hero. Valens had to submit to the will of the people and he gave a public promise never to interfere in the freedom of Athanasius. Thus he appeared and was free to exercise his duties in Alexandria at a time when most orthodox bishops had been banished.<sup>17</sup>

### *Clergy*

We cannot ignore the great Meletian schism from which the Egyptian Church suffered during the first half of the fourth century and which even the Council of Nicaea was unable to handle. When Athanasius became bishop, the Meletians allied themselves with the Arians and greatly challenged him and caused him a lot of mischief. However, Athanasius quickly gained popularity, and the Meletian cause steadily declined, especially after their leader John Arcaph failed to gain the favor of Constantine and was banished by him in 336 AD.

When Athanasius was summoned by Constantine to appear before the council of Tyre, forty eight bishops accompanied him and actively participated in a fierce contention the result of which had been decided beforehand, since the presiding bishop was an Arian and among the judges were six bishops, notoriously hostile to Athanasius.<sup>18</sup> Athanasius was exiled, but soon after his return to Alexandria a synod

of one hundred bishops met in 338 AD and wrote an encyclical letter to the Catholic bishops everywhere. This letter examined and refuted in detail the baseless charges that had been brought against Athanasius.<sup>19</sup>

The power of the Egyptian bishops was not ignored in the battle for faith, and later when George was imposed as bishop of Alexandria, ninety bishops were desposed. Of those, twenty six were banished; their names have been registered by Athanasius himself who mentioned that they were driven to their exile with no respect for their age, or their deteriorating health. Some were carried on litters, some died in the desert, some worked in the stone-quarries, some were persecuted and many others were plundered.<sup>20</sup> More than thirty bishops were forced to flee.<sup>21</sup>

The minor clergy also had their role. Timothy, a presbyter, stood for his bishop in the Council of Tyre.<sup>22</sup> After the first exile of Athanasius, the clergy and the virgins in Alexandria were not silent and Constantine had to issue a special order to them to remain quiet.<sup>23</sup> During the time of his son, Constantius, some of them had to suffer and die for their faith.<sup>24</sup>

### ***St. Serapion of Thmuis***

During the absence of Athanasius, especially in his prolonged third exile, the leader of the church was Serapion, the bishop of Thmuis in the Nile Delta. He was distinguished by the wonderful sanctity of his life and the power of his eloquence.<sup>25</sup> St. Jerome gave him the title *Scholasticus* on account of his great learning.<sup>26</sup> For some time he presided over the Catechetical School of Alexandria. He retired afterwards into the desert where he became a superior of a monastery and a great friend of St. Antony. He was consecrated bishop some time before Athanasius' second exile in 339. He accompanied the Patriarch to the Council of Sardica in C. 346 AD, where he strenuously stood for the Catholic faith. Ten years later, things were going bad for the faith outside Egypt, even the most important bishops of Rome and Cordova were broken down in exile. Athanasius knew that the Church of Alexandria was isolated and that the final blow was as at hand. It was dangerous for Athanasius to leave Egypt; so he sent a delegation of five bishops and three presbyters, led by Serapion, to the emperor in a last and hopeless attempt to refute the Arian calumnies and conciliate the ruler. On their return, St. Athanasius was already in exile. No one better than Serapion could fill the vacancy left by the Archbishop, in a church attacked everywhere by heretics. During the following years Serapion governed the Church in the name of Athanasius and remained in full contact with him through secret and frequent correspondence. Several writings of Athanasius during the period were distributed through Serapion. He informed Athanasius about the new Macedonian heresy against the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius refuted this heresy in four letters which he addressed to Serapion. In 359, it was his turn to be banished from his see.



St. Serapion was a theologian on his own. He wrote an excellent book against the Manicheans and a treatise on the Psalms. He is most famous for his *Euchologion* which is one of the oldest Egyptian extant liturgies.

### ***St. Didymus the Blind***

Another theologian the Egyptian Church produced during the Arian crisis was Didymus the Blind, whom St. Athanasius appointed to preside over the Catechetical School on his return from the second exile in 346 AD. He remained in that position for more than half a century. He was neither a bishop, nor a priest; yet bishops became his disciples. He was not a monk; yet St. Antony visited him in his cell in Alexandria three times. He told him on one occasion, "It is not a severe thing, nor does it deserve to be grieved over, O Didymus, that you are deprived of the organs of sight which are possessed by rats, mice and the lowest animals; but it is a great blessing to possess eyes like angels whereby you can contemplate keenly the Divine Being, and see accurately the true knowledge."<sup>27</sup> He was so knowledgeable that he interpreted both the Old and New Testaments word by word.<sup>28</sup> Although he did not appear in the various councils, yet his presence in Alexandria was a great blessing. He wrote three books on the Trinity, several books against the Arians; and a treatise on the Holy Spirit long before the condemnation of the heresy of Macedonius in the Second Ecumenical Council of 381. Socrates calls him "the great bulwark of the true faith."<sup>29</sup> The scholarly work of Didymus did not prevent him from closely following and participating in the sufferings of the Church. Palladius mentions how, once during the fourth exile of Athanasius under Julian, he was sorely troubled and had not even tasted bread till late in the evening. He fell asleep in his chair and in his ecstasy he saw white horses running with soldiers and proclaiming, "Tell Didymus, Julian died today at the seventh hour; get up and eat, and send word to Athanasius the bishop that he too may know."<sup>30</sup>

While Athanasius was preoccupied with the political battles he was forced to wage, and with his pastoral duties, Didymus was essentially a learned recluse who kept out of the political fires. He was a scholar and a teacher who revelled in learning for its own sake. His faith was not based on philosophical theory, but on his study of Scripture and his experience of worship.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Monks***

It is strange to find a significant role for Egyptian monks in what happened in the ecclesiastical scene in the world of the fourth century from which they primarily fled to the deserts. Although monasticism started in Egypt, yet it never progressed to become a career for serving the Church as it did in the West. An Egyptian monk is called mainly for a life of prayer and of contemplation in solitude. However, such life cannot interfere with the call to every Christian to be a witness for Christ (John

15:27; Act 1:8 & 4:33). The pioneers of Egyptian monasticism in the fourth century did not hesitate to become witnesses, *martyrs*, when the Church desperately needed their witness.

*Saint Paul the first hermit* was totally dead to the world. He left for the desert some sixty years before Constantine, and years before Athanasius was born. He never heard about Athanasius, his struggles, nor his exile for faith except when he was on the point of death. When St. Antony visited Paul, Athanasius was then in his second exile and an Arian bishop was seated on the throne of St. Mark in Alexandria. Paul told Antony of his approaching death and added, "Go and fetch the cloak given you by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in which I desire you wrap my body." It took Antony several days to fulfill this strange request, but historians consider that the cloak of Athanasius wrapping the dead body of the first hermit was a testimony to his veneration for the exiled Bishop and his high regard for the orthodox faith on account of which Athanasius was then suffering.<sup>32</sup>

*St. Antony the Great*, the Father of Coptic monasticism, wrote to the Emperors during the first and second exiles of Athanasius, asking for his return. Antony reminded the Emperors of the judgement that awaited them at the hand of Christ the Eternal King and asked them to give heed to justice. Antony himself made nothing of the Emperors' answers, nor did he rejoice at the messages they contained.<sup>33</sup> Historians have recorded the core of Constantine's letter to Antony in which he ratified the decisions of the Council of Tyre and added that "Athanasius was contumelious and arrogant and the cause for dissension and sedition."<sup>34</sup>

Antony did not leave the intruding bishop, Gregory, govern the Church without objection, but he wrote to him several times. The letters of Antony were thorns to Gregory which he hated and tried to belittle. Once he asked Duke Balacius to spit upon one of them and to cast it from him.<sup>35</sup> This general was known for his bitter persecution of the Orthodox; he beat virgins and stripped and scourged monks. Antony sent to him a harsh letter warning him of the wrath of God that was on the point of coming upon him. Balacius laughed and threw the letter on the ground and spit on it. He insulted the bearers and threatened to take revenge against Antony himself. Eight days later, the Duke died from an injury inflicted on him by one of his horses.<sup>36</sup>

Again we have the comment of a present day Coptic monk on those activities of Antony during the exile of Athanasius,

"We can conclude from this that St. Antony felt, during the absence of St. Athanasius, his spiritual responsibility towards the Church, the people, the virgins and the monks; and he succeeded in fulfilling his role within the limits of his monastic calling. With all spiritual courage and ecclesiastical zeal, he wrote advising and warning those who worked against the Word of God and the Apostolic Tradition. He never dreaded their authority nor their tyranny, but cared only for his divinely given duty

which circumstances and spiritual responsibility made necessary. He had to do all this in the absence of Athanasius, the father of all the Church and the one responsible for her."<sup>37</sup>

St. Antony died in 356 at a time when the Nicene faith was denounced all over the world and everybody knew that the fate of Athanasius was near. Following the example of Paul the hermit, Antony, on his deathbed, gave a public testimony of his union in faith and communion with the defenders of the Nicene faith by leaving them what earthly belongings he had, "To Athanasius the bishop give one sheepskin and the garment whereon I am laid, which he himself gave me new, but which with me has grown old. To Serapion the bishop give the other sheepskin . . ."

In Upper Egypt, *St. Pachomius, Father of the Koinonia*, gave Athanasius the popular support he was in utmost need of. In 328, when he was elected to be bishop of Alexandria, Arians, Meletians and Eusebians circulated the rumor that his ordination was uncanonical. At this time Pachomius declared to his monks that Athanasius had been chosen by God to become a pillar and a lamp for the Church. Pachomius frequently praised Athanasius and constantly called him "the father of the orthodox faith in Christ". When Athanasius visited Upper Egypt, a stronghold for the Meletians, Pachomius organized the monks in a procession to escort him in his way to the main monastery at Tabennisi.<sup>38</sup>

Toward the end of the second exile of Athanasius, Pachomius felt that his work ought not to be limited to the Thebaid, while the Church in Alexandria was in disarray and its members suffering severe affliction. It was during this period (AD 345) that Pachomius' health was quickly deteriorating because of chronic malaria from which he had suffered for years. He was also persecuted by the local bishops and clergy who envied him and even tried to kill him at the synod of Latopolis. Forgetting all his troubles, Pachomius sent an embassy led by two of his best monks, Theodore and Zacchaeus to Alexandria to strengthen its orthodox faithful, and to carry the witness of the monks of the Koinonia to the Nicene faith.<sup>39</sup>

The faith of the monks was nourished by serious theological study. We know from a story about Abba Sisoës how Athanasius' writings were circulated among the monks. A few years after the death of Antony, Sisoës moved to his cave in Mount Pispir. One day some Arians came to see him and they began to speak against the Orthodox Faith. The old man gave them no answer but he called his disciple and said to him, "Abraham, bring me the book of St. Athanasius and read it." Then their heresy was unmasked and he sent them away.<sup>40</sup>

But it was during the third exile of Athanasius that the monks had to offer more than words. Athanasius fled to the desert, hunted by the armies of Constantius. Among the monks of Nitria, Scete, and the Thebaid, he had countless friends who were ready to sacrifice even their lives for his sake. The monasteries were attacked by military force. Tortures could never wrest from the monks any confession of the

whereabout of Athanasius; some of them bravely stretched their necks to the executioner. They preferred the commands of their abbots to the laws of their monarch, and they believed that their prayers, fasts and vigils, deserve less merit than the zeal which they braved in the defence of truth and innocence.<sup>41</sup>

In conclusion we can say that when Athanasius stood 'against the world', he stood for the biblical Christianity lived and practised in the Egyptian villages and monasteries, and studied by philosophers and theologians in Alexandria. His defence of the Nicene faith was conducted against a background of pressures within the Church in Egypt, a Church composed of bishops and laymen, monks and virgins, theologians and martyrs.

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## ***A SERMON ON PENITENCE ATTRIBUTED TO ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA***

***John S. Jorgensen, AB***

### *Second of two parts*

So that you know the goodness of God--that He does not wish anyone among the work of His hands to perish--hear again. Let me tell you another story that took place in the city of Alexandria in the days of my father, Theophilus, when I was a deacon under his jurisdiction, so that you might know God's great compassion for men, because He does not wish for His creation to go to destruction, but that he might turn, repent, and live.<sup>1</sup>

There was a Jew in the city of Alexandria, who was a chief in the synagogue. He was a very rich man in gold, in silver, in servants, and in livestock.<sup>23</sup> He was a man who feared God according to the law of Moses, performing many great services in the synagogue according to all those things written in the laws of Moses. He was famous throughout all the city for his trading, and of his great love of the poor and of God he was spoken of. Everyone spoke his blessing. But God did not leave His good compassion in darkness without revealing as it is written: "Among all the nations, those who fear God and do His will He receives to Himself."<sup>24</sup>

There were two laborers in the city of Alexandria. Now (as for) these, they were Egyptian Christians in origin who lived in the Jewish quarter. That the Jews were rich in gold and silver, the two Christian men saw. Now one day when the two workers were sitting down, they spoke to one another saying, "We are amazed at these Jewish men," they were saying, "because they are sinners. It is they who crucified Christ, the Son of the living God. They are richer than the Christians." But the one was a God-fearing man (and) replied saying, "Truly, my brother, there is not a faith upon the earth, that is as glorious as this one that pertains to the Christians. These are the things which the Lord said concerning them in the gospel: "Woe to those who are satisfied now because they shall hunger.<sup>25</sup> Woe to those who take their rest upon the earth. Woe to those who laugh now because they shall weep." Moreover, He said, "Blessed are the poor because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.<sup>26</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for truth.<sup>27</sup> Blessed are those who weep now

because they shall be comforted.”<sup>28</sup> The other one replied saying to him, “Indeed, I shall arise and hasten, and I shall labor for a year for Philoxenus.” His companion said to him, “No, my brother. Truly God shall bless your little toil more than the riches of that one.” But (the other) did not heed him, and when (his companion) was tired of speaking with him, he was not able to convince him and he remained with him. Then the laborer arose and went to Philoxenus, the chief of the synagogue of the Jews speaking to him thus: “I beseech you, have pity on me that this year I may be your servant.” Philoxenus replied to him, “Of what religion are you my son? What then is your faith?” The laborer answered, “I am a Christian.” And Philoxenus replied saying, “It is not possible for us to mix with any Christians, anyone outside our brothers the Israelites. Now<sup>29</sup> my friend, if you need anything, take it; go (and) give honor to your God in your faith.” The man said to Philoxenus, “I entreat you by God and the law which was given to Moses, do not turn me away, but receive me.” Philoxenus answered saying, “It is not possible for us to deal with any man if he does not renounce his religion and, moreover, also renounce his laws that he may receive our service.” The man replied to him, “If you receive me I shall do your service entirely (and) in every matter, and I shall not leave you to the day of my death.” Philoxenus replied, “Go until I speak with my Jewish brethren.” The man dashed to his house. Then Philoxenus spoke with the Jews concerning him and they said to him, “If any man renounces his religion and walks according to our law, we shall receive him into our synagogue and give him our law.” Then Philoxenus called to the laborer saying to him, “Lo, I spoke with my fellow Jews, and they said that if one receives our law and observes our customs we shall receive him in our synagogue that we might give him the law.” The workman replied saying, “I shall do your religion in every way you tell me, only receive me.” Philoxenus said to him, “Go to your house until the morning of the sabbath. Come to the synagogue and we shall receive you and give you the law and all our traditions.” And so the man went to his house. When the sabbath came he arose early and hastened to the synagogue. And when Philoxenus saw him he took him in, and after the Jews questioned him he confessed: “I shall perform your religion in every matter which you tell me.” The Jews had a law that if anyone, after fleeing to them from any religion and wishing to become a Jew, first renounces his religion, they afterwards fashion for him a tall cross of olive wood and it is set up in the synagogue. And the man who wishes to become a Jew pledges to take a sponge filled with vinegar and holds it up upon a reed and sets it against the cross. After this he receives a sharpened lance to strike against the cross. Immediately, they place upon him a crown of willow wood<sup>30</sup> and the law is read to him, and he becomes a Jew. Hereafter, having fashioned the cross, they spoke with the man saying, “Do you want us to receive you among us in our synagogue that we might give you our law? Lo, this is our custom for you to follow.” The man obliged himself (and) took the sponge, filled it with vinegar, bound it to the reed (and) stretched it out to the cross. Afterwards, he took a sharp lance and

spear the cross. Much blood appeared pouring from the cross, and it filled the entire path so that a crowd of the Jews being amazed at what had come to pass all cried out saying, "The God of the Christians, Jesus Christ who was crucified, is one. And truly our fathers were guilty of a great and irremissible sin." Philoxenus had a small daughter of twelve years. She was begotten blind. In seeing the blood which came out from the cross, he spoke thus in his great faith: "By the power of the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, if I anoint the face of my daughter with this blood which came from the cross so that she might see, I shall renounce the religion of the Jews and their synagogue and become myself of the religion of the Christians to the day of my death." And saying this he smeared the eyes of his daughter with the blood of the cross while saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ the son of the living God." And at that moment the maiden saw. The entire crowd of the Jews which was in the synagogue cried out saying, "The God of the Christians, our Lord Jesus Christ, is one." Then Philoxenus the chief of the synagogue wrote a letter to our father Theophilus the archbishop of Alexandria, it being written thus:

Philoxenus, the unworthy Jew writing to you, the true physician of Christ.

I tell you the things that happened to us in our synagogue through the wonder that occurred by the sign of the holy cross, the one upon which they hung our Lord Jesus. When I put the blood which came forth from it on the eyes of my daughter she immediately saw. Furthermore, we all know that there is not a God in heaven or the earth except Jesus Christ the God of the Christians, and in truth our fathers were guilty of a great, irremissible sin. Since when we ourselves came up,<sup>31</sup> we received the traditions of our fathers calling it religion. I beseech you, let your joy be upon these sheep by returning them to the sheepfold of Christ, I and my entire household.

Then my father, the holy archbishop, Abba Theophilus, upon hearing this rejoiced exceedingly, and he arose and went by foot to that place with the notables of the clergy and other great men of worth. I was walking with him. Philoxenus, seeing my father, cast himself down before his feet saying, "Servant of Jesus Christ, pity me and grant me forgiveness." They led (the archbishop) and took him into the synagogue and they told him of the cross set up<sup>32</sup> in the midst of the synagogue while blood flowed from it and of the small girl who saw. The man, on the other hand, who struck the cross with the lance was seized with fear, and he became stiff like a stone, he gave up his breath and died. He received the share of Judas the traitor who sold his soul for money. Then my holy father, Theophilus, had them take the cross to the church, singing songs, and they were amazed at the event which had come to pass (and) praising God for the sign which they saw. And when Philoxenus was received into the church with his wife and his daughter and the other Jews who believed, (Abba Theophilus) instructed them. Afterwards, he had baptistries



prepared, (and) he baptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and gave them of the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with the peace, and let them go. Philoxenus contributed freely to the archbishop half of all he had so that he might spend it for the service of the poor. After he received the holy baptism his face shown like the sun. And at the end of a year's time when his piety manifested itself, the archbishop made him a presbyter. Alexander his son he made a deacon and they increased in piety. And his wife, very much a believer, gave much money to the poor until she made them rich. Completing their lives in orthodoxy thus, they went to Christ.<sup>33</sup>

I have said all of this out of love for you, my beloved, teaching you the compassion of God--that it is merciful and clement. For another holy man said someplace, "If the life of man were but one single day upon the earth, he should not be free of sin."

Now, O my beloved, let us run to God's compassion and beg him. For truly he is merciful. He shall forgive us our sins and He shall make us worthy of His heavenly kingdom through the grace, the mercy, and the compassion of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, through whom all glory, honor, and adoration is suitable to the Father and Him and the life-giving and consubstantial and coequal Holy Spirit.

### Notes

1. Ezekiel 33:11
23. Isaiah 5:8-9 (Chaine page 508)
24. Acts 10:35
25. Luke 6:25
26. Luke 6:20
27. Matthew 5:6
28. Matthew 5:4
29. Amend *dje=de*
30. "they place upon him a crown of willow wood and the law is read to him." The willow is one of the species of tree branch used in the Jewish Feast of Succoth (Tabernacles). "And you shall take on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook" (Leviticus 23:40). What the willow symbolically represents is open to interpretation. Goodenough (1953) states that the luab, myrtle, willow and ethrog symbolize the spine, eye and heart of a man and therefore represent the offering up of a person's entire self. The presence of a crown of willow wood in this instance may be nothing more than an association with "Jewishness" in the mind of the sermon's author--a vague and incomplete remembrance of the use of willow in the Feast of Succoth.
31. The sense of "when we ourselves came up" is not clear. Maybe, "when we grew up," or "when we were children," or it may refer to the coming up from Egypt of even the pilgrim's aliyah.

32. Amend *teho*=*taho*

33. An interesting metaphor: literally "they flew to Christ."

The same metaphor was used almost 2500 years earlier in The Story of Sinuhe where the pharaoh "flew up to heaven."

\* Biblical verses are translated from the Coptic MS.

\* Coptic and Greek words have been transliterated.

\* I would like to acknowledge the kind guidance and help of Dr. Orval Wintermute and Dr. Melvin Peters of Duke University, and Andrew N. Blatt for *prendre patience*.

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# ***WESTERN RENEWAL AND EASTERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY***

***Jack Phillips, M. Min.***

Many Christian communities are engaged in programs of renewal. It goes without saying that even those communities or denominations not following a prescribed program of renewal are deeply concerned with spiritual integrity. The agenda of the day is spiritual growth through personal and communal revival. The Orthodox Christian traditions are a treasury where the sources of renewal may be found. It seems that renewal always involves a going back, a returning to an ancient source, form, or experience. Religious reformations always seem to be concerned with a revival of a reality more authentic and original than that of the current ethos. Christian renewal seeks the future in its past. This endeavor is therefore at once biblical, apostolic, and futuristic.

One can find a looking back, which for Western Christians is a turning East, in many current instances. Henri Nouwen has recently published a book entitled *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons* wherein he shares an awareness of icons as gateways to heaven.

George Maloney, S.J. is a prolific writer who continually draws upon the ancient spiritual traditions of the East. *Pilgrimage of the Heart: A Treasury of Eastern Christian Spirituality* includes the following remarks in the introduction:

Many Christians of the West have felt a need for a spiritual vision to offset the Augustinian Platonism that has cluttered up Western Christianity . . . Some have turned to ancient spiritual teachings of the Christian East to find a vision of the Christian life . . .

Bookstores, libraries, and college catalogues all give witness to both a spiritual thirst and a growing interest in Eastern spirituality. The teachings of the Christian East are increasingly a source of rediscovery for the Christian West. The Vatican II *Decree on Ecumenism* states:

From their very origins the churches of the East have had treasury from which the Church of the West has drawn largely for its liturgy, spiritual tradition, and jurisprudence.

. . . Therefore, it is earnestly recommended that Catholics avail themselves more often of the spiritual riches of the Eastern Fathers . . .

Eastern Churches have the means to contribute greatly to the spiritual renewal of Western Christians. In America, the Eastern Churches are seldom noticed, yet they continue to be a community and a tradition sustained by the spirituality of the desert Fathers. Historically, and mystically, the ancient apostolic churches of the Near East are the foundation of modern Christianity.

It is therefore vital at this point in history for the dialogue and mutual respect between East and West to grow. We are children of the same mother. It is in our relationship that Christianity can be renewed and reshaped for the future.

## ***CURRENTS IN COPTIC CHURCH STUDIES***

### ***Characteristics of the Spiritual Way***

*By His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. Publication of the Orthodox School of Theology, Anba Ruais Press, Abbassiya, Cairo, Egypt, November 1987, 240 pp.*

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has many talents. He is the author of a number of books and hundreds of articles, journalist, philologist, archaeologist, historian, excellent preacher, wonderful teacher, true scholar, lecturer and professor.

*Characteristics of the Spiritual Way* is useful for the Christian. One can read it many times and find something new each time. It shows the reader many types of meditation and deep thinking which will lead to a higher degree of spiritual life. The book is written in a sincere fashion and contains valuable advice and instruction for the monks, clergy, and laymen.

This book is an important aid in the study of the Bible, with many Biblical quotations. His Holiness cites examples from both the Old and New Testaments, giving fresh and new interpretations to their meaning. He discusses things and situations which can cause a person to go astray and gives helpful hints on how to avoid them.

The title *Characteristics of the Spiritual Way*, describes exactly what the book is about and how it attempts to shed light on the spiritual way. The advice contained therein is immeasurable in terms of its applicability to the correct spiritual life.

This book should be a part of every Christian's library because of its importance to the study of the Bible. It contains a summary of Christian beliefs for those who would follow the narrow way spoken of in the Bible in preparation for spending eternity with the Heavenly Father.

The reviewer recommends that this book, as well as all fifty books of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, be translated into the major foreign languages to increase their availability to other than Arabic-speaking people. Although this has been tried for a few books, yet better translations and worthy editions are needed.

*University of Colorado*

*Boulos Ayad Ayad*

***Coptic Monasticism in the Age of Saint Anba Magar (Macarius)***

*By Father Matta El-Meskeen. Publication of the Monastery of St. Macarius, Wadi Natron, Egypt, Sec. Ed., 1984, 876 pp.*

Father Matta El-Meskeen is a true scholar not only in the history and archaeology of the Coptic Church but also in the spiritual and social life of the Coptic people. Father El-Meskeen is the author of about seventy books and monographs, among which are five books each containing approximately 800 pages. It would be difficult to find in the Coptic Orthodox Church any Arabic book concerning monasteries, published in this century, which contains as many pages as this book. Father Matta's books enable us to become aware of the early Fathers of the Coptic Church and the prolific writings which they offered to the Church, the monasteries, and the world.

The book *Coptic Monasticism in the Age of Saint Anba Magar (Macarius of Egypt)* is divided into seven sections containing a total of fifty chapters. The main topics of the book include: information concerning the history of the establishment of Monasticism; the biography of St. Macarius; the deserts of Nitria, Cellia (Coptic: *Niri*=cells) and Scete; a detailed history of the lifestyle of the monks who resided at the monastery of St. Macarius, a residence for the monks throughout the centuries, which also includes an accurate study of its architecture, library, and archaeological history for its buildings; names of patriarchs and bishops who graduated from the Monastery and its various heads; and churches throughout the ages which have carried the name of the Saint.

The author has added six supplements: the sources of early Monasticism, life of the most famous historians mentioned in the book, a subject index, plates for the region of Cellia, for the Monastery, and for the provinces of Lower and Upper Egypt which also show the location of Christian monuments. The book also contains three pictures and five geographical maps at the beginning of the book and many maps and pictures at the back of the book as well as some interspersed throughout its pages. The plans and maps are accurate and the pictures are clear, all of which make this book a required reading for scholars, students and others interested in Coptic history.

This book corrects many long-held opinions and is truly a scholarly study documented by references in most sections and written with a true historical, archaeological and linguistic background--a book which should be translated into the major languages of the world. It would be rare to find any new topic related to this subject which has not been treated in this book.

In addition to being a study of the Monastery of St. Macarius, it also includes a study of the Coptic period and its history, and the influence of Coptic architecture upon the architecture of Islam.

The author writes in a strong and interesting Arabic style which keeps the reader's interest high.

*University of Colorado*

*Boulos Ayad Ayad*

***History of Coptic Education***

*By Dr. Soliman Nessim. Dar-el-Karnak, Cairo, 1963, 253 pp.*

Dr. Soliman Nessim, author of *The History of Coptic Education*, is a Coptic scholar who is well known in the Coptic Church as well as among Coptic people and other Egyptians. He is involved in many church activities and is a Professor of Education at the University of Ein-Shams, Cairo, Egypt.

The book begins with a study of scholars who have written about education in Egypt during different periods of time: Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic Egypt, and Islamic governments.

The study of the Coptic period includes the political, social, economic, intellectual and religious thinking during that period and the effect they had on Coptic education. The author also writes concerning Coptic education in the home, church, Coptic schools, and monasteries as well as the kind of professional education available during that period. He relates the role of these various groups to the creation of the Coptic individual who, because of his training, should become useful in these groups as well as to his nation.

*The history of Coptic education is summarized as follows:*

*Home:* The study of the foundations of education in the Christian home reveals the following principles: a) Regard of Christianity to childhood and b) Settlement of the Coptic family on spiritual principles.

*The church* gave great concern, on one side, to pastorship; on the other to the preparation of its children to be men of struggle and forbearance in an aggressive society and a State which aimed at their annihilation. Through its rites, readings and music it gave attention to the child in his various stages of growth. Stories of Saints and martyrs in particular included children. Besides spiritual education, there was considerable regard to emotional and social education. The church aimed at an integrated personality, to prepare the perfect man of God.

The church existed in a pagan society, therefore it arranged a period of preparation and examination for the new believers of its faith during which they were called Catechumens. They received their education at Catechumenal Schools and studied special books which prepared them for Christianity.

*School:* The school was attached to the church, similar to the Old Temple School. This meant that education was gratis. The syllabus turned around reading and writing Coptic (which had now replaced the old Egyptian Script) and memorizing Bible texts, psalms and church hymns.

*Higher Education* was represented at the Theological School of Alexandria which had been founded by St. Mark the Apostle. According to Eusebius, it was the apostolic custom of establishing a school in every country where they preached. The existence of this school raised thoughtful struggle between its professors and students and the professors and students of the philosophic Ptolemaic School which had been established by Ptolemy Soter I at the end of the 4th century B.C. The result was the appearance of the Science of theology. When some Christian philosophers deviated in faith and Ecumenical Councils were held to consider the deviations, the popes of Alexandria were the leading figures in the discussions and in establishing faith. Among these famous leaders were Athanasius, Dionysius, Cyril and Dioscorus, all of whom were marked professors of the Theological School of Alexandria.

*The Preparation of the Teacher:* The Church, being the center of teaching, took great effort in preparing the teacher. It made sure that spiritual, mental and social conditions were fulfilled in him. Ritual books, and prayers and readings of his ordination service manifest these conditions.

*Female Education:* The ancient Egyptians gave no less attention to female education than to male education. This tradition was transmitted to Coptic Egypt especially since Christianity removed differences among classes and races. It also abolished man's despotic domination on woman. The church nominated the deaconess for the female supervision of the education, preaching and service among women in the church. In monastic systems nunneries were established as well as monasteries. In the Primary School co-education was practised. In the School of Alexandria many ladies of Christian families were disciples of the great theological teachers such as Clement and Origen

*Education at Monasteries:* At monasteries a specific kind of education was practiced, which had its private aims. This spread all over Middle Egypt, Upper Egypt, the Eastern Desert as well as Natrun Valley.

The system of *discipleship* was practised in its full sense in the monasteries, especially the Pachomian. Pachomius laid a law for the organization of the Cenobitic life or the system of community life based on co-operation inside the monastery.

The Pachomian Order followed military rules. The illiterate monk joined a class under the supervision of an elder where he learned ascetic and monastic life. Every week there were meetings for the study and reading of holy books. Besides, social life and professional training were very distinc-



tive in these Pachomian monasteries at Sohag, Tabenna and Isna where they divided labor and the different responsibilities of service and work. What is said about male monasteries can be said about female convents.

*Professional Education in the Coptic Age:* Through their long experience and contact with environment problems, the ancient Egyptian could discover many secrets and specifications of science and industry. Due to these considerations their sciences were practical sciences. Many arts and industries grew and were inherited by the successive generations until they reached the Coptic Age.

Professional industries were divided into three fields: home, industrial houses and temples. There were no special schools for profession training and the method proceeded in these careers was the form of practice. When the Arabs invaded Egypt they continued to depend on Coptic artisans and artists. Historians of Islamic art witness that the Egyptian artistic patterns were always first class.

The book contains an Appendix which lists the names of the Popes of the See of Alexandria during the Coptic period and the names of the Roman and Byzantine Emperors during this period; there are also some Coptic texts. The book also cites many references in both Arabic and English. A map of Egypt shows the location of all monasteries during the Coptic period.

This book, considered the first of its kind to deal with Coptic education, is written in Arabic with a strong style. It is useful and important for the study of Egyptology and Coptology as well as learning about Islamic education in Egypt.

Dr. Nessim is to be congratulated for the effort expended in writing a book such as this, which took many years of research. *The History of Coptic Education* is considered by many to be the only reference written in Arabic in modern times which deals with Coptic education.

*University of Colorado*

*Boulos Ayad*

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### ***Harlots of the Desert***

*A study of repentance in early monastic sources*

*By Sister Benedicta Ward SLG, London and Oxford; A.R. Mowbray (Eight pounds ninety-five pence Sterling). Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications (\$25.95, hard cover, and \$11.95 paperback), 1987. Pp. ix+117.*

This slight volume is a work of considerable importance for any reader who wishes to approach the mind and heart of early monasticism. These are essential texts. Their oral tradition goes back to the Desert Fathers and the earliest texts upon which these are based were perhaps in Syriac and Coptic. The 'first editions' of these texts existed in late antiquity. The recent multiplication of commentaries on the Fathers is an encouragement to us but secondary sources must not be allowed to replace the originals. English-language editions of early sources are only welcome if they are good translations, reading well in the modern language whilst faithful to the ancient text. This a good book and I cannot recommend it too strongly. It is a book to take to prayers; a work for study and meditation.

The heart of this book is a set of four translations of the full texts of the Lives of the 'harlots'. Two of these are well known to English readers from the 1936 translation of Helen Waddell ("The Desert Fathers" Constable, London). The text used by Miss Waddell was Rosweyde's second revised edition of his 'Vitae Patrum' published in Antwerp in 1628. Although Sister Benedicta refers to the Vitae Patrum in her Preface, it seems clear that her text is the better known "Patrologiae cursus completus: series Latina", ed. J.P. Migne (221 volumes, Paris 1844-6). It will be noted that we are reading a translation of a translation. The Latin text of the Life of St. Mary of Egypt is the work of a Napolitan deacon called Paul, working from the Greek of Sophronius of Jerusalem. The Life of Saint Pelagia was written in Greek by Deacon James and translated by Eustochius. The Latin translator of the Life of St. Thais is unknown as is the translator of Archdeacon Ephraim's study of Maria the Harlot. The Latin is here translated into clear and lively English and we all owe a great debt of gratitude to Sister Benedicta for them.

Sister Benedicta Ward, an Anglican contemplative of the Sisters of the Love of God at Oxford, is well known to readers of this Review for her introductory monograph to the "Lives of the Desert Fathers" (Mowbray, London 1980), her translation of the "Sayings of the Desert Fathers" (Mowbray, London 1983) and her

"Wisdom of the Desert Fathers" (SLG Press, Oxford, 1986). In the present work she places her four translations in her useful commentaries on the texts and provides three essays which enlighten our reading. These are an introductory essay on Repentance, a chapter on St. Mary Magdalene as a Biblical icon of that theme and a concluding piece of eight pages analyzing the significance of the Latin versions of these stories in their medieval monastic context.

It will be clear that the proper subject of this book is personal repentance and conversion: "The actual sight of penitents or the story told about them presents the truth about repentance more certainly than an analysis or theory. Repentance is not a theory to be worked out but a way of life; that is why the stories about repentance are more useful than any amount of teaching on the subject. In them the reader is not instructed directly but shown the working of God within human lives, with all their subtlety and variety." (Harlots of the Desert p.8) This emphasis upon story-telling may provide some justification for the title of this book which I find slightly incongruous with the content which is more obviously about penitents and saints than the harlots they once were. I suppose that prostitutes were considered to be more interesting than saints! I prefer the sub-title as an accurate indication of the contents.

The reason for the appearance of this genre is perhaps given by the Archdeacon Ephraim in Cap. XIII of his *Life of Maria the Niece of Abraham*: "All this I have written for the consolation and help of all who want to undertake the monastic life, in piety and to advance quickly in it" (op.cit.p.100). For, as we are shown in the commentary, what concerned the monks of the early Church, and those of the medieval Church, was only one question: 'How can I be saved?'. "The literary tradition .... shows them discovering the meaning of the 'I' in that question by a genuine awareness of the force of passion within themselves" (op.cit.104). The biographies of the desert harlots disclose three themes which would have assisted the monks who read the Greek or Latin texts: personal conversion, as a result of the awareness of sin as alienation from God and man, a study of the redemption of prostitutes, who were prominent in Alexandrian and medieval society, and an understanding of the release which the new sinless life gave to the saints. The latter may not have given the expectation of sinlessness but at the very least it encouraged the monks to experience the reality of the new life in Christ. The lives of the harlots are dramatic, extreme examples of the sin, repentance and love which may be experienced by all Christians: "the stories of extreme sin and extreme repentance were in fact stories of extreme love" (op.cit.p.7). The reader is convinced of the centrality of the theme of repentance at the outset of this study.

As we might expect from a leading medievalist, Sister Benedicta gives a fascinating account of the traditions which accrued to the Biblical account of St. Mary Magdalene with an equally interesting parallel record of the sale, theft and even rejection of her relics. Some readers will know that relics of St. Mary Magdalene are numerous in the Middle East, including the hair which has been kept

for some centuries at the Coptic Orthodox Monastery of the Syrians (Dair al-Surian). There are well-established relics in Jerusalem and, of course, throughout Greece and Turkey. It seems certain that the first Christian narrative elaboration of the theme of a converted prostitute and the subsequent veneration of her relics developed because the Church has seen much in the story than the sexual conduct of one woman. This points towards the larger significance of the tradition of 'harlots of the desert'. "Mary Magdalene is a sinner, and takes into herself all the sins of mankind ..... The appeal of Mary is that she sins and finds salvation by the free gift of love; it is not less love but more; and there in is the Christian hope" (op.cit.p.21).

The four translations should be read carefully on their own and will repay study. The longest of these is the well-known story of St. Mary of Egypt (Mariam al-Misriah) who is listed in the Coptic Synaxarium and whose feast day is the sixth of Barmudah. The same saint appears in Coptic iconography, including a mural in the church of SS. Peter and Paul in Abassiyah which is close to the modern Patriarchate in Cairo. This Mary is presented as a liturgical icon-in-words of the theological significance of repentance. The life contains a compelling portrait of monastic life where the monks "fed their bodies only with bread and water; for each one burned with the love of God" (op.cit.p.,39). The monastic figure in the story is Zossima (Zusima) the Palestinian arab hermit who is remembered on the ninth of Barmudah in Coptic tradition. Two of these texts are about prostitutes who appear to have lived in Alexandria; Mary of Egypt and Thais. The account of the latter is very short and I agree with Helen Waddell when she describes it as "a revolting story". Thais is converted, burns all her worldly goods, is locked away for three years but is finally released to die in fifteen days. Abba Antony the Great features in this story. He does not commit her to the small cell of her penance. That is the decision of Abba Paphnutius. It is a harsh little tale. The life of Saint Pelagia is a lovely record. Pelagia is a beautiful woman who passes by a group of bishops. One of them, Nonnus, a Syrian signatory at Chalcedon in AD 451, admires her: "I did but see her passing by, Yet I shall love her 'till I die." The positive appreciation is mutual but in the story of Nonnus and Pelagia their purity is not compromised by their feelings. In modern terms, this is a love story but the bishop retains his monastic commitment to celibacy and Pelagia chooses to live a life of chastity and solitude after her conversion. In her cell on the mount of Olives in Jerusalem, Pelagia is disguised as a monk though even at the end of her life she did not forget Nonnus who she describes as "a saint of God" (op.cit.p.74). Nonnus was referred to as 'Amantissimus Dei nimirum', beyond question a great lover of God. The fourth life concerns another Maria, this time the niece of a hermit Abraham. This story records a flight from the desert to a brothel and the subsequent repentance and return. Maria is seduced by a 'bad' monk thus raising the issue of pederasty which occurs in the records of the Desert Fathers. Here again we have an element which falls harshly on modern ears.

Although I have urged the reader to study these texts, there is some difficulty in reading them today. When we are faced with the cruel imprisonment of Thais by Abba Paphnutius or the hints at perversion, with a rather crude phallic symbolism, in the story of the child nun Maria, the niece of Hermit Abraham, we expect a different treatment of the events. A modern journalistic account might not include a psychological analysis of conduct, though a modern novel certainly would, but we would expect some careful dissection of the relationship. A modern biography would relate the traumatic event to the history of the individual and the nature of the society in which they lived. There is nothing of the sort here; no psychology, sociology or pathology. The reader needs to understand the genre before reading the 'lives'. These stories are theological narratives which are not directed to history but to the spiritual life and the personal, religious decisions of the monastic reader. Paradoxically, this is also why the application of the stories is universal. "These stories were written to answer the question in mind of the reader, 'Why am I told this?' not the question, 'How did this come about?' They are deliberately told to demand the response of the reader, not to present historical facts as such. They are not best described as fiction, but rather as part of the long tradition of Christian hagiography, in which the events recounted are related to the person of Christ the Redeemer, for the benefit of the reader or hearer" (op.cit.p.91).

Armed with the understanding outlined in the last paragraph, these translations can be recommended to anyone who wishes to expand their understanding of early monasticism, including that in Egypt, in the earliest period.

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### ***Coptic Egypt: History and Guide.***

*By Jill Kamil, The American University Press, Cairo, 1987. 149 pp., 8 pictures, 2 maps, and 9 plans.*

*Coptic Egypt, History and Guide* is the second book to be published with the words "Coptic Egypt" in the title. The first one was published by Dr. Murad Kamil in the 1960s.

Jill Kamil begins her book with a *historical introduction* which discusses the late history of pharaonic Egypt and the influence of its religion on the Egyptians. During the time of the Persian rule, Alexander the Great invaded Egypt, conquered the Persians and occupied their capital of Persepolis. He continued waging battle until he reached the doors of India. The Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt followed that of Alexander, with the Greek Rule lasting approximately three hundred years (323-30 B.C.). The kings in this dynasty were Greek but considered Egypt as their homeland. They made many improvements in the country and showed great respect for the Egyptian religious beliefs, even to building temples for the Egyptian deities.

The author discusses the culture of Egypt during the Ptolemaic Dynasty, the language and its development, conflicts between Egyptians and Greeks, the economic problems and the spiritual life of the people. This dynasty ended after the battle of Actium when Cleopatra and Mark Antony committed suicide following defeat by Octavius Caesar who then occupied Egypt in 30 B.C. The Romans then ruled Egypt, treating it as a province useful only to supply wheat to Rome. Although the Romans respected the Egyptian religion and even built temples to their gods, they treated the people badly for "an enormous burden of taxation was placed on the people of the Nile Valley" (p. 27).

Toward the end of this chapter the writer makes a comparison between Ptolemaic Egypt and Roman Egypt, citing the differences between the rulers. The chapter ends with a discussion of the cult of Isis in various parts of the Old World.

Following the introduction, Ms. Kamil writes about *early Christianity* and about Saint Mark the Evangelist who brought Christianity to Egypt during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero in the first century A.D. The author proves that Christianity spread throughout Egypt "within the half century of Saint Mark's arrival in Alexandria" (p. 33). She then discusses the importance of the Catechetical School of Alexandria and of its heads. In addition, the author tells of the origin and teachings of the Gnostic sects and of their documents, which have been recently discovered in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt.

The author then continues by discussing the persecution, under the Roman Emperor Diocletian. According to this report, spiritual leaders such as Saint Paul and Antony appeared in Egypt. Among the first martyrs were Saint Sophia, and the holy Damiana.

Saint Pachomius was born during this time period (approximately 285 A.D.) and became the "founder of a form of monasticism that took his name" (p. 39). A description is then given of the system which St. Pachomius created and which was to be followed in his monasteries and afterwards.

In the Byzantine Empire, Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan which gave Christians their religious freedom. Ms. Kamil writes in detail concerning the Council of Nicaea, held in 325, and the history of Athanasius, as well as the conflict between the Egyptian Christians and the Arians. Moreover, "The New Testament was translated into Coptic at this time"<sup>1</sup> (p. 47) and "many ancient temples were converted into monastic centers in the fourth and fifth centuries" (p. 47). The author then enumerated the many monasteries and churches widespread throughout Egypt.

The author then discusses the Council of Constantinople in 381 and in more detail the Council of Chalcedon in 451. She has this to say about the latter Council: "In fact, it eventually led to the schism that alienated Egypt from both the Eastern and the Western (Latin) churches forever." (p. 49)

This chapter ends with a discussion of the Arab Conquest of Egypt and the position of the Copts under their rule.

In the *second chapter* the position of Coptic Christianity today is discussed. The author writes concerning the Coptic language, Coptic music, the sacraments, church services and the Egyptians as pious people, Coptic religious customs, Coptic weddings, Coptic Christmas, the seasons of fasting, belief of the Copts in miracles, the mortuary customs and traditions, the annual pilgrimage to Gebel al-Tair, and the visit of the Holy Family to Egypt. Further information is given on the pilgrimages to shrines and holy places, the Coptic heritage, and the new Cathedral of Saint Mark on Ramses Street in Cairo.

The *third chapter* discusses Coptic art and includes: various influences on the art, material sources of the art as "From burial grounds, . . . funerary stelae, or tombstones, cartonnage sacrophagi and fragments of woven textiles, . . . Monastic centers, churches and shrines provide stone and wood-carvings, metalwork, wall and panel-paintings, as well as a wealth of utilitarian objects like ivory combs, wooden seals for impressing sacred bread, pottery and glassware" (p. 68). The author then discusses ancient Egyptian symbolism in early Christian art. Coptic art is a day-to-day type of art, Jesus Christ is depicted in this art. She then tells of the general neglect of the study of Coptic art, Gaston Maspero and the Coptic art, the importance of the Coptic Museum and its relationship to the Coptic art, Coptic textiles, Coptic manuscripts, paintings, and icons, and the painters both before and after the Arab conquest.

The *fourth chapter* deals with Old Cairo and its history, architecture and a full description of its churches and convents such as the Church of Moullaka, the Church of Saint Sergius (Abu Sarga), Church of Saint Barbara, Convent of Saint George, Convent of Saint Mercurius (Dair abu Saifain).

The *fifth chapter* describes the Coptic Museum and its establishment. The Museum contains the New Wing, an upper floor, and the Old Wing. Ms. Kamil writes in full detail about the many pieces housed in each part of the Museum as well as a description of recent excavations and restoration work on the Gatehouse of the old Roman fortress.

The *sixth chapter* deals with Coptic Monasteries. After a historical and religious introduction, the author divides the remaining portion of the chapter into a study of the monasteries according to their geographic locations:

1. The Monasteries of Wadi Natrun, which include:  
Monastery of Saint Makar (Macarius), Monastery of the Syrians (Deir el- Suryani), Monastery of Saint Bishoi, and the Monastery of the Romans (Deir Baramos).
2. Monasteries of the Red Sea, including the Monasteries of Saint Antony and Saint Paul.

3. Monasteries in Middle Egypt including: the Monastery of Palamon (Anba Balamon), the White Monastery (near Sohag), the Red Monastery (also known as Deir el-Bishai), Ruins of the Monastery of Saint Thomas, Deir el-Muharrak.

4. Monasteries south of Luxor: Monastery of the Holy Martyrs (Esna), and Monastery of Saint Simeon (Aswan).

5. The Shrine of St. Mena in Maryut which lies in the desert southwest of Alexandria and northwest of Wadi Natrun.

This book is written in an academic style and is considered one of the best guides to Coptic monuments, churches, monasteries and the Coptic Museum. It gives a thorough background of Coptic history, along with the religion of Egypt and its culture during the different periods until the Arab Conquest, and ends with a description of the daily life of the modern-day Copts.

The reviewer congratulates Ms. Kamil for her effort and time spent on this book with its clear pictures, maps, and plans.

**Note:**

1. Some scholars believe that the NT was translated into Coptic as early as the second century A.D. Others believe that this took place some time between the third and fifth centuries.

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***Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology.***

*By William M. Thompson. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987. Pp. 208. \$8.95 (Paper).*

Since the early years of Christianity, devotion to the saints has been popular in many ways and for various reasons. Saints have been prized for their holy lives as examples to imitate, for their extraordinary achievements as a cause to glorify God in them, and for the miracles He works through them. In *Fire and Light*, William Thompson, who is a Roman Catholic Theologian at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, tries to break new ground in an old teaching of the Orthodox churches who do not separate theology from sanctity. He says in his introduction, "Saints are sources of theology, and even of doctrine". The book is a unique and extensive study of how and why theology might consult the saints. The author does not only refer to the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church who, in defence of the Faith, have left volumes of works which are valuable theological references for all ages. He even does not spend much time on these written theological treatises, but stresses "a theology that wants to be rooted in experience," and for this we need to consult the saints.



In the first half of the book, Dr. Thompson surveys the renewed interest in this topic among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox theologians. The experience of the saints is a witness to Tradition. But this is not a dead Tradition. Saints aid us in developing on experiential and practical mediation of Tradition. They probe the beliefs of the Church and live them out under new circumstances. They keep the Tradition moving and intersecting with contemporary experience.

In the second half of the book, the author gives examples, mainly from medieval and modern Catholic mystics, that reveal the theological resourcefulness of the saints, especially for our time.

We consider this book a great success in its intention to overcome the dichotomy between the fire of sanctity and the light of theology. Writing as a theologian, he gives a new understanding of how theology can be enriched through the lives and writings of the men of God. He opens an essential dimension of both theology and hagiography.

However, we consider the book just an introduction to a new subject. Following the example set by Dr. Thompson, we need more studies of the saints, especially those of the early Church who were scarcely touched in the present book. They have much to say to our generation.

### ***Coptologia***

#### ***An International Journal of Coptology and Egyptology, Volume VIII***

*Edited by F. M. Ishak, Ph.D. (5334 Yonge Street, Suite #412, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M2N 6M2), 1987. Pp 140. \$8.50 (US), \$10.00 (Canada).*

The 1987 volume of Coptologia starts with an interview with Pope Shenouda III in which he answered questions related to ecumenism and to the problems faced by the Copts in the diaspora. This is followed by a well-researched article that refutes the Primacy of St. Peter, by Anba Gregorius, Coptic bishop for Higher Theological Studies. In support of his argument, he quotes many biblical, historical and patristic references. There are five articles dealing with the Egyptian Martyr, St. Mena, that describe his biography, the monastery and city named after him and his miracles. Other articles address modern Coptic monasticism, Coptic art and philosophy of religion.

