



PAROUSIA

*Parousia*

**FATHER ATHANASIOS ISKANDER**

# PAROUSIA

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*by*

Father Athanasius Iskander

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## FOREWORD

*Parousia*, a periodical published by Saint Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada started in March 1990 and continued for more than twenty years, when electronic publishing made paper publishing almost obsolete.

Many of the articles published in *Parousia* were series dealing with a particular topic. Many of these series were later published as books.

A series under the title *Understanding the Liturgy*, published between September 1993 and March 1997 was published as a book with the same name in September 2001.

Another series titled *The Abomination of Desolation* published between September 1997 and January 2003 was published as a book with the same name in January 2003.

A third series titled *Practical Spirituality* published between June 2004 and January 2005 was published as a book with the same name in February 2005. This book was translated into Arabic, Portuguese and Amharic and is sold almost all over the world, even in Japan!

The final series titled *Science, Genesis and Creation* was published between March and July 2007 and was published as a book titled *Creation* in September 2011.

Most of these books are available for free download on our website [www.smcoc.ca](http://www.smcoc.ca) and are also available as paper copies by contacting me at [athanas@sympatico.ca](mailto:athanas@sympatico.ca).

Many other single topic articles were interspersed in between the series. This book has several of the most popular of these articles. These articles while useful for high school and university age Copts are also useful as resources for servants. Many of them are a must reading for potential converts to the Coptic Church. I hope it will be used unto the glory of our Lord. Amen.

*Father Athanasius Iskander*

*Pachons 24, 1729 AM*

*June 1, 2013*

*Feast of the Entrance of Our Lord into the Land of Egypt*



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## **EGYPT AND THE BIBLE<sup>1</sup>**

I would like to address this topic under 5 sub-headings:

1. Egypt in the Old Testament.
2. Egypt in the inter-Testamental period.
3. Egypt and the New Testament.
4. Egypt and Biblical scholarship.
5. The place of the Bible in the Egyptian church.

### **EGYPT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:**

The first mention of Egypt in the Old Testament is in Gen 12:10, where we are told that “there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there.” Egypt is mentioned once again in Gen 13:10, “And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt.”

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<sup>1</sup>An address by Father Athanasius Iskander to the Canadian Bible Society dinner meeting in Guelph, Ontario, April 5, 2000

Egypt was a land of plenty, described as being even as the garden of the Lord. The Lord allowed Joseph to be sold to the Egyptians by his brothers, in order to bring Israel and his children into Egypt, where for more than 400 years, the church of the Old Testament would be nurtured in Egypt.

When the time came for the Lord to bring His people out of Egypt, he allowed Moses to be raised by Pharaoh's daughter, and we are told "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." (Acts 7:22)

But the major story about Egypt in the Old Testament is without a doubt the story of Exodus. A simplistic way of looking upon the Exodus account is to view it as a good guys versus bad guys story, the good guys win and the bad guys loose. If, on the other hand we look more carefully at the account in Exodus, we will find a totally different story emerging.

In Exodus 7:3 The Lord tells Moses, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." One may wonder, why would the Lord harden Pharaoh's heart, and then punish the Egyptians by visiting the 10 plagues upon them? But the answer to this query comes in Exodus 7:5, where the Lord explains, **"And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord,** when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them."

The key word here is **"And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."** This was God's plan for the salvation of the Egyptians. The Lord wanted to bring them into His fold. But the Lord knew that the Egyptians were stubborn and proud and that the only way to bring them into His fold was to bring them to their knees.

Again, in Exodus 14:4 "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; **that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.**

Exodus 14:17 "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. **And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.**"

In a most emphatic way, the lord tells Moses that the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And it worked, for when the Lord troubles the host of the Egyptians and takes off their chariot wheels (Ex 14:24,)

the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them. (Ex 14:25)

A similar encounter between the Egyptians and the Lord happened 900 years later, in the time of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. When Nebuchadnezzar set siege to Jerusalem, the Egyptians incited the Israelis to resist, promising them military assistance. This was contrary to the word of the Lord through Jeremiah, who told the Israelis to submit themselves to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, for the Babylonian exile was fore-ordained by the Lord. The Egyptians were thus a stumbling block unto Judah, and for this the Lord visited them with another set of plagues that are described in the Book of Ezekiel.

In EZE 29:3-6 the Lord says, “Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales. **And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord.**” The same words used in Exodus are used here.

EZE 29:9 “And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; **and they shall know that I am the Lord.**”

EZE 30:8 “**And they shall know that I am the Lord**, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and when all her helpers shall be destroyed.”

Again and again we are told that the object of these plagues is to bring the Egyptians to the knowledge of the Lord.

EZE 30:13,19 Thus saith the Lord God; I will also destroy their idols, and I will cause their images to cease out of Noph; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. Thus will I execute judgments in Egypt: **and they shall know that I am the Lord.**”

Here it becomes more clear, I will destroy their idols and cause the images to cease, a strong indication of the conversion of the Egyptians from idol worship to the knowledge of the Lord.

EZE 30:25 But I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; **and they shall know that I am the Lord.**

EZE 30:26 And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; **and they shall know that I am the**



## Lord.

EZE 32:15 When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate, and the country shall be destitute of that whereof it was full, when I shall smite all them that dwell therein, **then shall they know that I am the Lord.**

What the Lord is telling Ezekiel here is this, when I have broken the idols of the Egyptians, not only their idols of stone, but also their idols of pride, of arrogance, of obstinacy, when I bring them down to their knees, only then will they know that I am the Lord.

The Book of Isaiah, summarizes for us the dealings of the Lord with the Egyptians in ISA 19:22 “And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: **and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them.**”

You see, the Egyptians needed to be smitten, in order to return to the Lord, and be healed by the lord. The smiting came in the time of Moses and in the time of Ezekiel, the healing came later, when in MAT 2:13, we are told that, “the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”

The coming of the Lord into the land of Egypt to seek refuge from the tyranny of Herod was the healing and the reconciliation that came after the smiting. Like a loving Father Who chastens and corrects then he reconciles and heals.

Isaiah prophesies about the coming of the lord into Egypt in ISA 19:1, “Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.”

Then in ISA 19:19-21, we are told about the beginning of the Church of Egypt, “ In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it.”

The altar to the Lord in the Land of Egypt is not an Old Testament altar, for it was not lawful to have any altar except in Jerusalem, it is the

spiritual altar of the New Testament. And the sacrifice and oblation mentioned are not Old Testament sacrifices, which could only be offered in Jerusalem, they are the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist.

The story has a very happy ending in ISA 19:25 where we are told that, “the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people.” Egypt becomes the only nation among the gentiles to be called “my people” by the Lord. And in return for the plagues Egypt receives a blessing from the Lord, “Blessed be Egypt my people.”

## **EGYPT IN THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD:**

200 years before the advent of our Lord, something monumental happened in Egypt, when Ptolemy, king of Egypt ordered the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. We cannot possibly over-estimate this historical feat, which made possible to the Gentile world to get to know the Old Testament in the lingua franca of the time; Greek. The translation was done by 70 Jewish Scholars and thus the Translation became known As the Septuagint. This translation was a necessary step for the propagation of the Greek New Testament which was to take place 200 years later. Allow me to quote what Cleveland Coxe wrote about this important milestone:

“The translation of the Hebrew Scriptures to the dialect of the Hellenes, and the creation of a new terminology in the language of the Greeks, by which ideas of faith and of truth might find access to the mind of a heathen world, were preliminaries to the preaching of the Gospel to mankind and to the composition of the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour.”<sup>1</sup>

St Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons in France , Who lived between 120 -201 A.D. wrote this about the Septuagint Translation,

“For the Apostles agree with the afore-said translation; and the translation harmonizes with the tradition of the apostles. For Peter, John, Matthew, and Paul and the rest successively, as well as their followers, did set forth all prophetic announcements just as the

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<sup>1</sup>Coxe, A. Cleveland: ANF vol ii, p. 166

interpretation of the elders contains them.”<sup>1</sup>

It is a pity that the translators of the King James Bible chose to translate from a Hebrew manuscript of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, rather than the time honoured Egyptian translation of the Old Testament dating to 200 B.C.

Today, the Old Testament that was known to the Apostles survives only in the Coptic version used by the Egyptian Church. To justify this bold assertion, allow me give you one example.

Justin Martyr, a Christian Apologist, who lived 110-165 AD., and died as a martyr, writes under the heading THE CRUCIFIXION PREDICTED,

“And again in another prophecy, the Spirit of Prophecy, through David, intimated that Christ, after he had been crucified , should reign again, and spoke as follows. ‘... Let all the earth fear before His face, let it be established and not shaken. Let them rejoice among the nations, The Lord hath reigned from the tree.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

Justin Martyr is here quoting Psalm 96 as it was known in his days. Since the Apology is written to Jews, then the psalm must have been known in this form to both Jews and Christians. To Justin, as well as to the other ancients, the words “The Lord hath reigned from the tree” were a prophetic utterance about the tree of the cross. Now if you look up this Psalm in any Bible published by the Bible society, or indeed any other Bible, you will find the last verse reading “declare among the heathens that the Lord reigneth” the words “from the tree,” which to the ancients were a prophecy about the Cross are missing. They are missing even from the currently available Septuagint, which has been harmonized with the Hebrew. They survive only in the Egyptian Psalter which is used by the Egyptians in their every day devotion.

To conclude this part of my address, allow me to share with you the words of Irenaeus, that he wrote 18 centuries ago,

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<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus: Against heresies, Book III

<sup>2</sup>Justin Martyr: First Apology

“God has preserved for us the unadulterated Scriptures in Egypt, where the house of Jacob flourished, fleeing from the famine in Canaan, where also our Lord was preserved when He fled from the persecution which was set on foot by Herod.”<sup>1</sup>

## **EGYPT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT:**

The Good News of the New Testament were preached in Egypt at a very early time. The Book of Acts tells us that on the day of Pentecost, among those converted by the Apostles were, “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) We are later told that those included people from Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene.

These newly converted Christians must have started spreading the Good News as soon as they were back into their own countries. The Church historian Eusebius speaks of small communities of these new converts already forming around Lake Mareotis in Lower Egypt. They were called Therapeutae, or healers, because people brought the sick to them to be healed, and those who were afflicted by unclean spirits to be cleansed. Not only did these Therapeutae heal the people’s physical illnesses, but they also healed them from their spiritual illnesses by turning them back from the worship of idols to the knowledge of the true God.<sup>2</sup>

The oldest Biblical papyri were found in Egypt. Some of these, in the Coptic language were found buried in the sands of remote regions in Upper Egypt, a testimony to the rapid spread of Christianity into Egypt. Most of these predate the oldest authoritative Greek versions of the Scripture in the fourth and fifth centuries including the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus, the Vaticanus, and the Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus. ... Fragments of those papyri dating from the second century, in both Coptic and Greek, are to be found in numerous manuscript repositories in the world. The most monumental collection is the Chester Beatty Papyri, now in Dublin, Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus: Against heresies, Book III

<sup>2</sup>Eusebius of Caesaria: Ecclesiastical History

<sup>3</sup>Ateya, Aziz: The Copts and Christian civilization

According to our tradition, Egypt was the place where the first Epistle of St. Peter was written. It was also the place where the Gospel according to St. Mark was written.

Some commentators believe that the Epistle to the Hebrews was also written in Egypt and that its author was Apollos.

How and when did St. Peter visit Egypt where he wrote his first Epistle is the subject of great speculation. According to Dr. Samir Girgis, the visit must have followed St. Peter's miraculous release from prison reported in Acts 12, which is dated A.D. 43<sup>1</sup>

Acts 12 tells us that after his release by the Angel, Peter came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. (Acts 12:12) Peter told those gathered how the Lord had brought him out of the prison, asked them to bring the good news to James and the brethren, then he departed and went to another place. Acts 12:19 tells us that the next morning, Herod, looked for Peter everywhere but could not find him. It is very safe to assume that Peter left the country, knowing that Herod intended to kill him after the Passover (Acts 12:4)

It is possible that, following the example of his Master, he fled into Egypt, accompanied by John Mark. Mark who was raised up in Lybia, must have taken the trip to Jerusalem, once a year, passing through Egypt, and would make an excellent travel companion to Saint Peter.

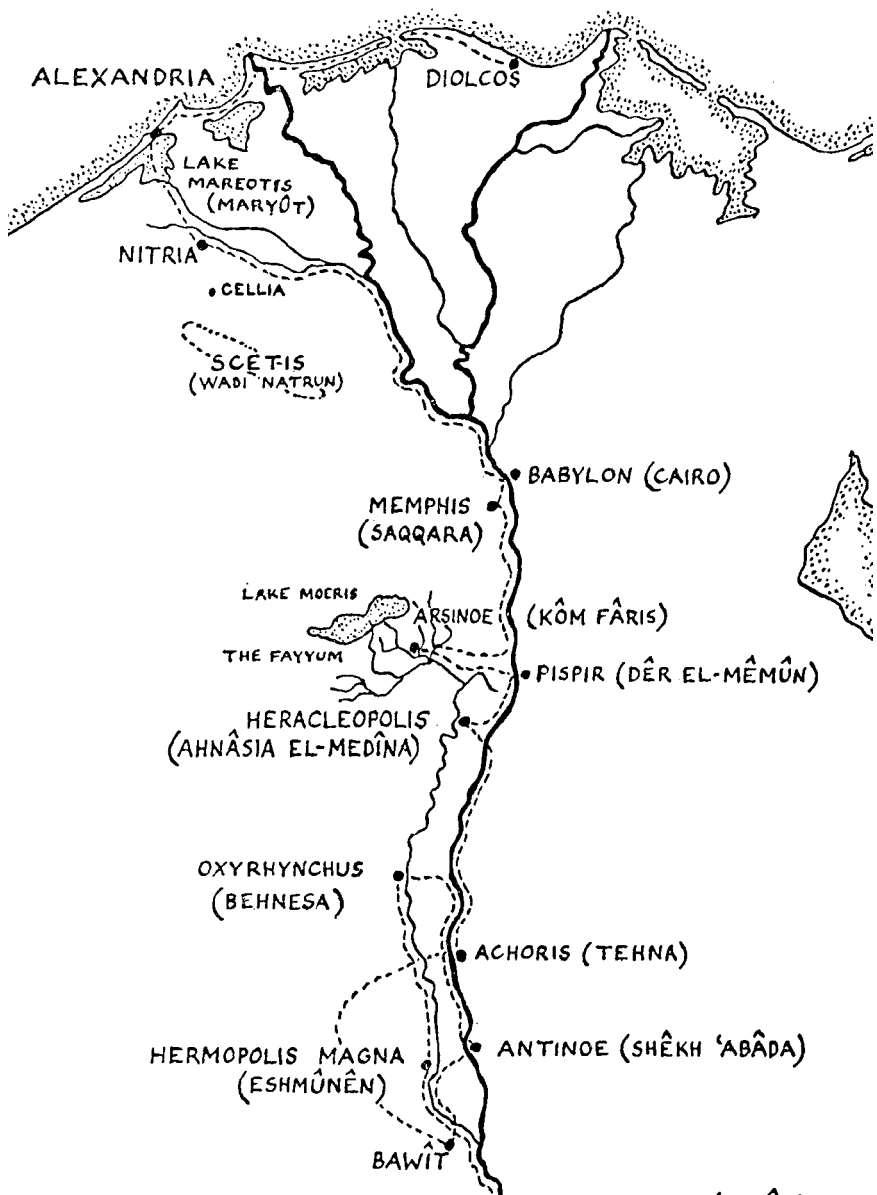
Coming to Egypt, there were two places where they might take refuge among the Jewish community, One of them was Alexandria, with its large Greek speaking Jewish community, and the other was Babylon, an ancient city, the ruins of which are still visible on the outskirts of modern day Cairo. Babylon had a sizeable Jewish minority and a large Synagogues, and it was there that they must have remained until the death of king Herod in A.D. 44. It was there that St. Peter must have written his first Epistle.

This date also agrees with the assertions of Josephus, Eusebius and others that St. Mark's first entry into Egypt was in the year 43 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Girgis, Samir Fawzy: A Chronology of Saint Mark

<sup>2</sup>Ibid



Map of Ancient Egypt, showing Lake Mareotis, where the first Christian congregations in Egypt formed, Babylon, where St. Peter is said to have written his first Epistle, and Alexandria.

There is internal evidence for this in the Epistle. First, it is addressed to “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bythinya.” This means Jewish Christians dispersed among gentiles.

In his letter to the Galatians written in the year 50 A.D., St. Paul addresses “the churches of Galatia.” This means that by 50 A.D. there were already established churches in Galatia, and had First Peter been written after that, Saint Peter would have never addressed his letter to “strangers scattered throughout Galatia but rather to the churches of Galatia. Actually churches in the areas mentioned in First Peter were founded by St. Paul in his first missionary Journey which started in 47 A.D. which makes the date of First Peter earlier than 47 A.D. and makes the proposed date of 43 A.D. very plausible

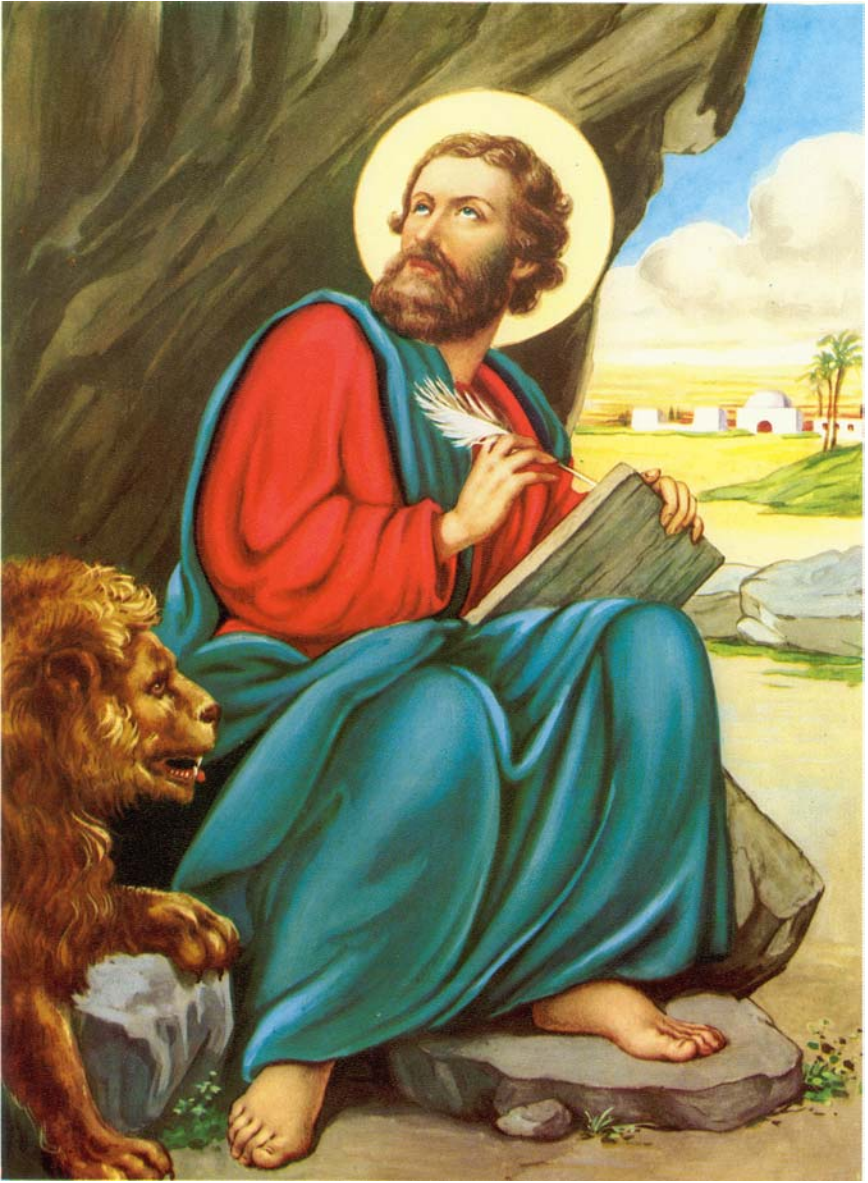
The ending of the Epistle, says, “The church which is at Babylon, elected together with you salutes you, and so doth Mark my son.” The suggestion that Babylon is a code name for Rome is without merit, since there is no Biblical evidence that Saint Peter preached in Rome at such an early date. The Book of Acts which ends with St. Paul’s imprisonment in Rome 61-63 does not mention anything about St. Peter being there. And to suggest a date of writing later than 63 is inconceivable for the reasons we mentioned earlier

The content of the Epistle, also reinforces the argument that St. Peter wrote it after fleeing Jerusalem. The Theme is one of encouragement of early Christians dispersed because of persecution (like St. Peter himself, who fled Jerusalem because of the persecution.)

If we accept this chronology, then First Peter would be the first of all New Testament writings, and Egypt would be the place where it was written.

Saint Mark came to Egypt once again 18 years later, this time to Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, entering there in the year 61 A.D. It was there that he founded the Coptic Church of Egypt, established an ecclesiastical hierarchy that would remain un-interrupted until the present time, wrote his Gospel, and it was there that he died as a martyr on Easter day of the year 68 A.D.

Because of this early evangelization of Egypt and the speed with which Christianity spread throughout the land, the Egyptians were among the first to spread the message of the Bible in lands far and near.



An Italian Artist's portrayal of Saint Mark writing his Gospel, the background is clearly Egyptian, with domed houses and palm trees.



As early as the second century, we hear of Saint Demetrius, the 12<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Alexandria sending Pantaenus, the dean of the School of Alexandria to convert the Hindus. On the way back, he visits Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, the sojourn and later martyrdom of the Egyptian Theban legion was the catalyst to the conversion of the pagans in Switzerland, southern Germany and Northern Italy.<sup>2</sup>

By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Nubia, Ethiopia, Libya and Pentapolis have already been converted by Egyptian missionaries. The Irish tell us that they have 7 Egyptian monks buried in Ireland. They came to preach to the Irish long before St. Patrick set foot on Irish soil.<sup>3</sup>

The British tell us about Egyptian missionary enterprises in Britain especially around Glastonbury. I will conclude this part by quoting the eminent British historian Stanley Lane-Poole, who wrote,

“We do not yet know how much we in the British Isles owe to these remote hermits. It is more than probable that to them we are indebted for the first preaching of the Gospel in England, where, till the coming of Augustine, the Egyptian monastic rule prevailed. But more important is the belief that Irish Christianity, the great civilizing agent of the early Middle Ages among the northern nations, was the child of the Egyptian Church.”<sup>4</sup>

## **EGYPT AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP:**

The Book of Acts tells us about an Egyptian convert from Judaism called Apollos. Acts 18 describes him as an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in the spirit, who spoke boldly in the synagogues and mightily convinced the Jews, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. (Act 18: 24-28) He was so good, that when he went to Corinth, he caused a problem, for it

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<sup>1</sup>Ateya, Aziz: The Copts and Christian civilization

<sup>2</sup>Girgis, Samir Fawzy: Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion

<sup>3</sup>King, Archdale: The rites of Eastern Christendom

<sup>4</sup>Ateya, Aziz: The Copts and Christian civilization

seems that the intelligentsia of that city who liked his sophistication took him as their champion. That unfortunately led to a division in that church. When Apollos learned of this he withdrew from the scene as we are told by St. Paul in 1 Co 16:12. We hear nothing more about Apollos in the Book of Acts. Some believe that, when he heard about Saint Mark's successful preaching in Alexandria, Apollos' native city, he returned to that city to work with Saint Mark.

Coxe tells us that "The genius of Apollos was revived in his native city, A succession of doctors was there to arise, like him, "eloquent men and mighty in the scriptures." He was speaking about the great school of Alexandria that he very strongly believes was founded by Apollos.<sup>1</sup>

The school of Alexandria is described by Eusebius as ancient, and St. Jerome dates its origin to the time of the Apostles. A school that, for the next 4 centuries, will make Alexandria "The brain of Christendom."<sup>2</sup> "All the learning of Christendom may be traced to this source," declares Coxe.<sup>3</sup>

We know very little about the men who taught in the school until 175 A.D., when we hear of Pantaenus as the head of that school. It was this Pantaenus that was sent on a missionary journey to India by Archbishop Demetrius of Egypt. Pantaenus was a stoic philosopher, who embraced Christianity when his mind discovered that true philosophy was only to be found in Nazareth, in Gethsemane, in Gabbatha and in Golgotha; and he set himself to make it known to the world.<sup>4</sup>

Clement of Alexandria who was a pupil of Pantaenus, succeeded him as dean of the School at the close of the second century. Saint Jerome pronounces him "the most learned of all the ancients" while Eusebius calls him, "an incomparable master of Christian Philosophy. But Clement pales when compared to his pupil Origen, who succeeded him as dean of the school of Alexandria at age 18. Dr. F. H. Scrivner, one

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol 2, p.166, vol 6, p.236, vol 8, p.777

<sup>2</sup>ANF vol 2, p. 165

<sup>3</sup>ANF vol 8, p. 777

<sup>4</sup>Ibid

of the best Biblical Scholars writes this about him,

“Origen is the most celebrated biblical critic of antiquity. His is the highest name among the critics and the expositors of the early church. He is perpetually engaged in the discussion of various reading of the New Testament ... seldom have such warmth of fancy and so bold a grasp of mind been united with the life-long , patient industry which procured for this famous man the honourable appellation of “Adamantius.”<sup>1</sup>

Origen wrote more than 6000 tracts mostly about the Bible, and it is said that the average man cannot finish reading what he wrote in a lifetime.<sup>2</sup> He did that by doing what Master chess players do when they match wits with several players at the same time. He would be working on several books in the same time, dictating a paragraph to this scribe then moving on to dictate a paragraph of a different book to another scribe and so on.

Origen’s crowning achievement is his Hexapla, a collation of texts of the Bible in six columns from Greek and Hebrew sources, which he compared and annotated diligently. His labours in exegesis went beyond those of any other expositor, for he wrote most detailed commentaries on every book of the Old Testament and the New.<sup>3</sup>

Origen introduced the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible, a method that suggests that besides the literal meaning of the Biblical text, there is a hidden spiritual meaning. A brilliant example of this is his assertion that the Song of Songs is a book about the love between Christ and the Church or Christ and the human soul, and not only about the love between Solomon and one of his one thousand wives!

Origen was succeeded as dean by his pupil Heraclas , who later became Archbishop of Alexandria around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and became the first Church leader in history to receive the title “Pope”

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol 4, p.235

<sup>2</sup>Patrick, Theodore Hall: Traditional Egyptian Christianity.

<sup>3</sup>Attiya A: The Copts and Christian civilization

six centuries before the bishops of Rome started to claim that dignity.<sup>1</sup>

St. Dionysius the Great, another pupil of Origen, succeeded Heraclas as Dean of the school of Alexandria, in the year 232 A.D. and upon Heraclas' repose in the year 246 A.D., he became the Pope of Alexandria and the 14<sup>th</sup> head of the Egyptian Church, counting Saint Mark as its first head.

We are told that "His pen was never idle; his learning and knowledge of the scriptures are apparent even in the fragments that have come down to us, and his fidelity to the tradition received from Origen and Heraclas are not less conspicuous."<sup>2</sup>

In an age where anathemas were hurled right left and centre, this brilliant Biblical scholar dared to call to question the attribution of the Book of Revelation to the writer of the fourth Gospel and the three Johanne Epistles. He admits that the Book of Revelation is divinely inspired, he often quotes from it. He is filled with awe by it as he tells us here,

"Having formed an idea of it as a composition exceeding my capacity of understanding ... I do not reject what I do not understand, but I am only the more filled with wonder at it, in that I have not been able to discern its import."<sup>3</sup>

He admits that its author of Revelation is called John, but whether this John is the Son of Zebedee that wrote the Gospel and the three Epistles, he has his reservations, that are summarized as follows:

- The author of Revelation tells us that his name is John more than once, while the Evangelist never proclaims himself either in the Gospel or in the Epistles.
- The character, the form of expression, the whole disposition and

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<sup>1</sup>It was Nicholas I who, first claimed for himself the title of Pope in the year 858. Later on Gregory VII (died A.D. 1085) held a synod at Rome and decreed that the title Pope should be peculiar to only one in the Christian world. [ANF vol 5, p. 154]

<sup>2</sup>ANF vol 6, p.77

<sup>3</sup>Dionysius of Alexandria: from the Book on the promises

execution of the Book of Revelation is different from the others.

- The ideas, expressions and collocations of the author of Revelation are different from those of the author of the Gospel and Epistles.
- The Gospel and the Epistles agree with each other. He lists 21 words or phrases that are commonly used in both the gospel and the Epistles but are not found in Revelation.
- The Gospel and the Epistles are not only without actual errors as regards the Greek language, but were also written with the greatest elegance both in their expressions and their reasoning and in the whole structure of their style, while the writer of Revelation on the other hand uses a dialect and a language that is not of the exact Greek type, and often uses barbarous idioms and solecisms.
- Neither the Gospel nor the Epistles make any mention of Revelation, and Revelation makes no mention of the Gospel or the Epistles.

He then tells us that he writes this not to deny the value of the Book of revelation but rather to set right this matter of dissimilarity subsisting between these writings.

Today, some people claim that literary criticism is the brain-child of German Biblical scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I beg to disagree. For what we have summarized above is an example of literary criticism in its purest form, already in use by an Egyptian Biblical scholar in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Literary criticism is only one of the tools of Biblical and Theological scholarship that were forged in the School of Alexandria, as we are told by the Editors of the Ante-Nicene Fathers,

“It was in this school that the technical formulas of the Church were naturally wrought out. The process is like that of the artist who has first to make his own tools. He does many things, and resorts to many contrivances, never afterwards necessary when once the tools are complete and his laboratory furnished with all he wants for his work.”<sup>1</sup>

But the finest product of the school of Alexandria is no doubt saint Athanasius. This is what The editors of the Ante-Nicene Fathers say about him,

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol 6, p. 303

“Athanasius is the grandest figure of the primitive ages since the Apostles fell asleep. Raised up to complete their testimony to the eternal Logos, and to suffer like them. ... He is the perpetual *gnomon* of the Alexandrian School. Its testimony, its prescription, its harmony and unity are all summed up in him.”<sup>1</sup>

As an 18 year old deacon at Alexandria, he could foresee the danger to the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, posed by a Lybian priest called Arius. Arius propagated an innocent sounding hymn among the people of Alexandria. The hymn said, “There was a time when the Father was and the Son was not.”

Athanasius could see the enormous implications. If the Son came into being later than the Father, then he was created and cannot be equal to the father in His divinity, and the whole belief in the Holy Trinity would be destroyed. He started to fight, what would become the battle of his whole life, to uphold the biblical truth of the divinity of the Son. Declaring that the Logos is Co-eternal and Co-Essential with the Father. Before he was 20, he had already written his masterpiece, “Concerning the incarnation of the Word of God,” A classic that is relevant today as it was relevant 16 centuries ago.<sup>2</sup>

We here about him at Nicea, the first Ecumenical council that was held to discuss this heresy that divided the whole church, as a deacon standing beside the blessed Alexander 19<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria, refuting Arius until the heresy was condemned by the 318 bishops assembled there. The greatest trophy that Athanasius and Alexander brought back with them from Nicea was the Creed.

When Alexander reposed in the Lord, Athanasius was chosen to succeed him as the 20<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria, while yet to reach 30 years of age. For the next 40 years, he made his life mission the eradication of the error of Arianism.

When Constantine, the Roman Emperor then offered to mediate between him and Arius, he firmly but politely told him, “Matters of the state are adjudicated by Emperors, matters of faith are adjudicated by

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol. 6, p. 303

<sup>2</sup>The Arian heresy is propagated today by the teachings of the Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses.

bishops of the Church, thus becoming the first in history to uphold the doctrine of separation between Church and state.

Five Times exiled from his seat in Alexandria, he spent many years as a fugitive from one emperor or another. 16 Roman Emperors in all, he had to contend with, but in the end, he outlived them all.

There came a time, during his life long struggle to uphold the Biblical truth, when it seemed that all was lost; when even his friends would look at him with pity saying, alas, the world is against Athanasius. But he was never shaken, “and Athanasius is against the world,” he would answer.

Here is a man that proved that the whole world can be wrong! A man that took on the whole world and won it back to Christ.

His victory was in the end complete, and the last 7 years of his life were spent in peace, being consulted by other bishops around the world, who revered him and considered him “the bishop of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

## **THE PLACE OF THE BIBLE IN THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH:**

The Egyptian church is a deeply liturgical church. It has some of the oldest and most authentic liturgies in Christendom. But it is equally true that the liturgies of the Egyptian church are deeply biblical. A critic of St. Basil’s Coptic Liturgy, dismisses it as “nothing more than a biblical patchwork.”

I personally think that this is the nicest thing that was ever said about our Liturgy! Nothing more than a Biblical patchwork. And indeed it is! I have an old copy of the liturgy that goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is falling apart but it is very dear to me. It is filled with footnotes on every page, that link every phrase in the text with the biblical verse from which it is literally taken. So, when we chant our Liturgy, we are actually chanting the Bible!

But this “Liturgy of the faithful” is preceded by the teaching part of the Liturgy, which we call “The Liturgy of the word.” This part has readings from the Bible that vary according to the day and the season of the church calendar. The readings on a typical Sunday morning

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<sup>1</sup>Both Gregory Nazianzen and Basil addressed him in this fashion. Basil, writing to ask his advice, would address him, “Your Apostolic Holiness!” [Nicene fathers under Basil & Gregory]

service would include, a selection from one of the Pauline Epistles, a selection from one of the non-Pauline or catholic Epistles, a selection from the acts of the Apostles and two selections from the gospels.

The Gospel reading is treated differently, it is first preceded by a prayer, in which we ask God to make us worthy to hear and to act according to the Gospel reading we are about to hear. Then the deacon exhorts the people, "Stand with the fear of God, let us hear the holy Gospel." The Gospel is then read.

Because we believe that we hear the Gospel as if it were from Christ Himself, the reader proclaims before commencing the reading, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!" It is customary for the person with the highest priestly rank to read the Bible, out of reverence. So the priest normally reads it, but if a Bishop is around, he would have the honour, and if the Pope is around, he would be the reader.

Because we believe that the Old Testament, and especially the Book of Psalms contain the shadows of the things revealed to us in the Gospels, every Gospel reading is preceded by selected Psalm verses, that link that particular reading of the Gospel to its prophetic counterpart in the Psalms.

During Lent the readings are expanded to include selections from the Old Testament Books, as well as readings from what the Western Churches call Apocrypha, and what we consider as Deutero-canonical or secondary canonical books.

As we enter the Holy Week, the service becomes wholly a service of the word. The Eucharist is suspended except for Holy Thursday, the day on which the Lord instituted the Eucharist.

There are usually two services for every day of the holy week, one in the morning and one in the evening. Each service will have five selections from the Gospels, with their corresponding Psalm verses, and between five and ten selections from the Old testament.

On Good Friday, the service starts in the morning and ends shortly before 6 p.m. The service traces all the events of Good Friday in their chronological order, through the prophecies in the Old Testament that prophetically fore-shadowed the event, then the Psalm verses that relate to the event, followed by the narratives from all four Gospels. There are also hymns and praises appropriate for the occasion.

The service resumes at midnight (six hours later) with the Vigil



service of Holy Saturday. The Biblical content of this service is staggering, with selections from the Old and New testaments and the Deutero-canonicals. Even the hymns that are sung are taken from the Bible. At 4 o'clock in the morning, the service reaches its high point, when the congregation takes turns in read aloud the Book of Revelation from beginning to end. It is this that gives the service its common name, "The vigil of the Apocalypse."

The service ends at 7 a.m. with the Eucharist. Our children love this service, according to them, it is "the most fun night of the year," they usually invite their schoolmates to attend with them.

Easter service starts 12 hours later at 7 p.m. It is a relatively short service, lasting only til midnight.

The only way to appreciate these deeply Biblical services is to attend one. So, come and join us some day! The services are mostly in English, except for the odd hymn in Greek or Coptic. Service books to help you follow the service are plenty. We will even assign one of our deacons to explain to you what is going on.

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## **CONFESSIONS OF A DEMON A DOCUMENTED EXORCISM<sup>1</sup>**

### **EXORCISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

Exorcisms were common in the early church. They were performed by one of the lower ranks of the clergy. The order of exorcists is one of the "seven orders of God's church" that are mentioned in the Liturgy of Saint Basil.

Exorcisms were an integral part of the rite of Baptism; usually performed the night before the actual Baptism. They often occupied the whole night.

The rite of Baptism used by the Coptic Orthodox church has retained for us the several prayers of exorcism that are said by the priest prior to the actual Baptism. At the end of these prayers the priest breathes on the mouth of the catechumen three times and says, "depart thou unclean spirit."

One of the oldest prayers of our Liturgy; "the intercession for the sick" mentions those "afflicted with unclean spirits" asking the Lord to liberate them all.

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<sup>1</sup>An English translation of transcripts made from an audiotape of an actual exorcism done 20 years ago.

## EXORCISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Exorcisms have been practiced in the Coptic Orthodox church since the early days of Christianity. They are still being regularly performed in our present time. Hundreds of cases of Demonic possession are recognized and exorcized with complete success every year.

There is no order of exorcists in our church today. Exorcisms are performed by some priests and monks who have received a special charism (spiritual gift)

Exorcism is demanding and often dangerous; it should not be attempted by the novice. Young priests are usually cautioned against attempting exorcisms on their own but rather to refer suspected cases to experienced exorcists. This brings to mind the episode in Acts 19:12-16 about seven Jewish young men who attempted an exorcism invoking the name of “Jesus whom Paul preached”. The results were disastrous.

Exorcisms vary in certain aspects, but they have enough common features to allow one to construct a scenario for an “average exorcism”.

Fortunately we have an eye-witness description of an exorcism performed by Abba Abraam the late Bishop of Fayum, that represents a “typical exorcism,” which we will print below:<sup>1</sup>

The Bishop’s power in exorcism of evil spirits has perhaps brought him more visitors from distant parts than any of the other gifts by which he is famous. Knowing a highly intelligent young Copt in Cairo, the son of a blind singer at the Cathedral there, who had witnessed a cure of a near relative, effected by the Bishop, I thought it would be interesting to get the story in his own words. “The Bishop Abraam has a never-failing power against evil spirits, relieving large numbers both of Christians and Moslems every year, who are possessed by them. My young aunt had an evil spirit, and she became a source of great trouble to all our family. Many doctors tried to cure her, but failed. When she was under the influence of the fit, she used to yawn much, and to stretch her arms forwards and backwards, crying incessantly. Unconsciously, of course, she talked much nonsense, cursing everybody; then she would ask to have her feet washed with soap and cold water. This was always done; but in a short time she would tear off all her clothes and roll on the ground, the scene being terribly painful to her family.”

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<sup>1</sup>from a book about Bishop Abraam by the English writer S. H. Leeder.

“Bishop Abraam was not then confined to his house, and because my father was a servant of the Church, we begged the Bishop to visit us if he ever came to Cairo. “At last he sent a message that he was to pay a visit to the Patriarch, and on a certain day he would come to our house. Wishing to honour a distinguished guest in our Eastern custom, we prepared a banquet; but when the Bishop entered the room, and saw this, he sternly rebuked us, and would not eat at all, declaring his first business was to see the sick woman. My father being blind, I had to take the Bishop to my aunt’s room, he carrying his hand-cross.”

“Whether from excitement I do not know, but the moment we appeared, my aunt fell in a fit; crying in an awful voice, ‘Take away this fire. Oh! I am going to burn!’

“The Bishop was praying earnestly, and moved slowly to where my aunt lay. He then laid the cross on her head and said in firm tones, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to go out and leave her!’

“I shall never forget the agony of this moment, for my aunt distorted her mouth, and uttered a fierce cry.”

“The Bishop did not move the cross from her head, and simply repeated his command. Then the spirit, apparently wrestling against the superior power, said, through my aunt, first, ‘I will go out through the eye’; then ‘through the ear’; then ‘through the mouth’; but the Bishop each time sternly rebuked it, saying, ‘Go out through the foot.’<sup>1</sup>

“Then my aunt began to rub her eyes, stretch her arms, and move her hair away from her forehead as if she were awaking from sleep. She then half raised herself, and gazed at the Bishop, who was now smiling. He asked her to get up and show him her foot. Others of the family now came into the room, and we all looked at the foot; there was a red cross of blood on the big toe, which I distinctly observed.”

“My aunt was frightened at seeing the blood, but when she was told what had happened, she got up and took the hand of the Bishop. and kissed it. The Bishop blessed us all, and then said we might prepare for him a small dish of beans, which he ate with a piece of bread. Thanks to the righteousness of Bishop Abraam, my aunt has ever since had the best of health; she is now married and has three fine children.”

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<sup>1</sup>In many cases of exorcism I have heard it declared that the spirit sought to leave its victim by these organs, which it is believed would thus suffer injury—the formula of driving it out by the toe is always followed.

## **A DOCUMENTED EXORCISM**

The story we are about to narrate, concerns a young lady whom we shall call “Eve” she lives in Egypt.

At age 10, she was possessed by several devils under the leadership of a “Captain” For 13 years the power of the devils was neutralized by the Intervention of the Holy Virgin Mary. The devils were “bound” by the Mother of God, having received orders not to harm her until she has graduated from University.

That does not mean that the devils did not try, for in the final year of her University, they caused several illnesses to befall her (Jaundice, back problems, chest problems, allergies). In all this they were desperately attempting to make her fail her final exam, but with no success thanks to the protection of the Virgin and the many Saints to whom the girl appealed for help.

The girl’s faith in Christ and in the efficacy of appealing to His Saints, stood as a sturdy wall against which the repeated attacks of the devil crashed.

The only outward sign that showed on the girl was “depression” a tendency to avoid people, remaining alone for long periods of time, in spiritual communion with the Lord of Glory and the Saints. As often happens, these “religious excesses” were resisted by the girl’s family, often instigated by the devil who claimed to have actually spoken through the girl’s family and friends in order to upset and confuse her.

The devils’ psychological war against the girl included making her feel inferior to others (a poor self image.) This was successfully used by the girl to advance spiritually, by totally denying herself and abandoning herself totally to the hands of the Lord.

An aspect of the girl’s spiritual maturity is her complete refusal of her own will, and only wishing the will of Christ. She often called Christ Papa (dad), and this terribly upset the devil. It is this aspect of the relationship between God and men, that Sonship of the faithful to God that is most hateful to the devil. This Sonship is recalled each time we recite the Lord’s Prayer, which according to the Devil Is like “whipping” them

The importance of reading books about spirituality in warding off

the attacks of the enemy becomes apparent from the angry comment the devil makes on these books. Two books in particular received very bad reviews by the devil, “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble” by H.H. Pope Shenouda III and an Arabic translation of “Unseen Warfare” . The unease of the devil is shown by the uncomplimentary words with which he described H.H. Pope Shenouda III.

An encounter with the Lord of Glory puts a timely end to the career of the devil who called himself “the sorcerer.” Just when he was preparing for his long awaited assault on his victim-now that Eve has graduated and he thought he was no more bound by the Holy Virgin-suddenly, he becomes painfully aware of the supreme power of the Lord Jesus, and even more painfully aware of his own impotence in the face of the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings.

Bound again, he is ordered to reveal his presence in Eve first to her family, and the next day to father Gabriel, a priest in St. Mena’s church in old Cairo. It is significant that this church was the one where Pope Kyrillos (Cyril VI) used to pray when he was yet father Mena the solitary. Eve repeatedly appealed to this great Saint and had his photograph before her. It is no coincidence that the place where he spent his youth serving God, and performing numerous miracles, was given the honour of witnessing the surrender of one of Satan’s Lieutenants.

In total frustration, “the sorcerer” breaks down confessing the power of Jesus Christ and of His Saints, especially of the Holy Virgin, whom Eve always called Mamma (mother,) to the utter disgust of the devil.

The “Sorcerer” Confesses his total lack of power over the children of God, and starts lamenting his bad luck that landed him in this particular girl.

He tells father Gabriel that the Lord of Glory has ordered him to reveal the story of Eve, which prompted father Gabriel to tape “the confession” something totally unheard of before. Father Gabriel felt that it was the will of God that the story be published so that the faith of the children of God be strengthened.

The devil reluctantly tells the story once more to be recorded on tape, with the help of Father Gabriel’s threats to torture him If he does not.

It is quite obvious that telling the story over and over was not something the Sorcerer enjoyed although he could not help. Bursts of

anger and obscene language, at times even crying and wailing are interspersed within the “confessions.” The crying is mainly because-exposed in his hour of defeat- he lost the most precious of any devils possessions, his pride. It was on account of pride that the devils were dismissed from the ranks of Angels.

At the end, the sorcerer seems to be resigned to his destiny, the return to “Gehenna” (the deep) or “going down” as he refers to. He even begs to be let go, preferring this to hearing once more the thundering voice of the Lord of Glory, whom he labels “very bad.”

Father Gabriel immediately interjects, explaining to him that this is a relative matter Jesus being bad only to devils!

The customary, humiliating, 3 time declaration of defeat of the devil, and his unconditional surrender together with all his “helpers,” is followed by the authoritative voice of father Gabriel ordering the devils to depart in the name of the Lord Jesus. Three ghostly screams followed by total silence mark the exit of the devils on their journey back to “Gehenna,” and total victory of another warrior for Christ against the hostile forces of Satan.

Glory be to our God forever. Amen

## **CONFESSIONS OF A DEMON**

P: (Priest)                      D: (Demon)                      (... ) Profanity

P: The miracle of “Eve.” In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ Who commanded you to tell of her trials and prayers. I command you in the Name of the Lord to tell. I command you in the Name of the Lord to tell, the Lord of Glory Who crucified you ...

D: He commanded me to tell every thing.

P: The Lord of Glory Who crucified you will remind you of every thing. Now tell.

D: Since I entered into her?

P: Yes.

D: I entered her 13 years ago.

P: Yes?

D: That's all.

P: What else.

D: That is all.

P: Continue right away.

D: I don't want to.

P: Your crucified hands will be cut off....cut off ... will come down on your hands and feet. The Lord of Glory commanded you to tell every thing that means you tell the story right away, the more you delay ...

D: I entered her when she was 10 years old. That Is the boring story that I said before, do I have to say it again?

P: Continue right away.

D: I entered her when she was 10 (...) years.

P: Carry on.

D: Then that Lady saw me entering.

P: Who Is that Lady?

D: Your mother, the Virgin Mary, she saw me and she bound me ... bound me ... bound me ... I became paralysed and unable to do anything. Whenever I try to harm her in anything in whatever way I can't. I have been bound inside her for 13 years. She told me, "the girl has to finish her education ..." until the girl finished her education.

P: What degree did the girl obtain?



D: She graduated in Archeology.

P: Is that a Diploma or a Bachelor degree?

D: Faculty of Archeology ... Licencee in Archeology (. . .) anything ... whatever ...

P: I see, what else?

D: This Lady admitted her to the Faculty, she did every thing for her. She admitted her to the Faculty, she made her study, she sat beside her in each exam. The girl always asked her: "O Virgin, sit beside me on the chair" She sat beside her ... word for word ... everything ... everything ... We could have muddled the whole world on top of her head while in University, we could have made her life bitter, but we could not do anything ... nothing. She went in and out of University until she graduated like a hair coming out of the dough (an Arabic proverb.) Then she (the Virgin) told us, "you can reveal yourselves now, the girl is out of school and free, you can now. Moreover, the light of her faith will become stronger." "Her faith will be greater when you reveal yourselves ..." "She is not going to be harmed in any way even though she has devils in her ... nothing" "Her faith will increase more and more and she will know Jesus more." The girl did not know Him before, she knew Him later. He showed her the way, He showed her confession. She did not know no (...) confession or Communion or (...) or anything like that. She was going about the easy way When she knew Him she started to pray.

P: You mean when she knew Jesus?

D: When she knew Him, that Man of yours.

P: The Lord of Glory?

D: Yes. She tried Him. She has very strong faith, even while in University, whatever happened, she could do everything by this Man. At the end of her education we wanted to fail her even for a single year ... even her final year ... just fail her ... anything at all ... The best we could do was to make her sick. We put her to bed ... Doctors ... and (...) something in her chest, something in her back ... anything.

P: Who were those Doctors?

D: It's over ... anything, any illness, something in the chest ... something In the back, some allergies, some (...) some ways to delay her ... to take her away from studying ... We couldn't at all ... she always went to Him even in her final year ... He even stayed with her in her house . . until she finished school and became like the rest of her brothers and sisters. We did not want her to be educated. We wanted to educate her ourselves ... to be educated ... so that we could do anything. But we could do nothing ... nothing. For 13 years we stayed in her... idle.

P: Who stayed in her? say it frankly. Say it, who stayed in her?

D: I already told you, don't you know me? I am "the Sorcerer".

P: Are you a sorcerer?

D: I can do sorcery, I can frustrate her, I can frustrate her mother and brothers. I can frustrate them all with my sorcery.

P: Are you alone or do you have company?

D: This is non of my business ... we are a company ... I mean there is myself and another group ... but I am in charge of the group.

P: Their Captain?

D: Yes I am their Captain, they are all fellow servants with me ... to help me (...) they could not help ... or do anything ... even I could not.

P: Ha Ha!

D: Nobody could.

P: Carry on.

D: Until I revealed myself in ... but I didn't harm her.

P: Where did you reveal yourself?

D: I revealed myself here at Abouna Gabriel.

P: Here, at the church of the Virgin.

D: She (the Virgin) is in charge of everything. The girl knew this, that she is in charge of every thing. .every thing is in her hands. Nothing is done without this lady. She (the girl) clings to this lady, she always calls her Mama. Could you believe that she called the Virgin Mama, and that Christ of yours Papa..What is this Papa and Mama? Doesn't she have her own Mom and Dad? She calls her(the Virgin) Mom and Jesus Dad ... She tells them, "I have no one else in this world."

P: Did they or did they not help her?

D: Of course they helped her ... they helped her a lot. Without them I would have had a ball with her. Have I been able to do anything to her? I have been utterly humiliated!

P: Because her Dad is the Lord of Powers.

D: Yeeees!

P: And the Virgin Mother of the Light.

D: He (Jesus) has always bruised us ... bruised us, bringing our pride to the earth. We entered thoughts into her mind, "It's over, you are without hope, you cannot do anything ... you are paralysed ... you are nothing ... commit suicide, come on, do it ... do it.." Her faith was strong , and that can do every thing. We made her inferior, unable to speak to others, unable to cope with people ... others are better than her. I put that feeling inside her for a long time. For a long time she had this feeling, she felt that others were something, but she was something else ... I mean inferior. The result? she put behind her back the world and all there is in it. Nothing was important. The important thing became knowing Jesus ... finding out where Jesus is to be found, and going after Him. She did not care for her mother or brother or anything. Her only care was this Jesus of hers. He was glorified in her life, in her personality, glorified in everything. She clung to "Papa" and we went down the drain ... we just ... stayed in her.

P: What about her hair? what did you do to her hair?

D: We ruined It for her. The girl's hair was(...) it was good ,I mean in reasonable shape, we ruined It. for her..anything..that is what we could do. We ruined it by our sorcery.. it's nothing..that's it. Next week ... she's drowned ... now she is ...

P: Someone else will be drowned now.

D: She Is (....) and that's all. The last thing we could do was yesterday we held her, and stirred up the whole world against her. Her brother started telling her, "I don't approve of what you are into, I am not convinced, are you convinced of what you are doing? Is this going to be your everyday life? Try some entertainment, try going out ..." Of course we ... of course we are saying this and not her brother. Sometimes we speak through her father, "That's enough, I am sick and tired ... everyday same thing ..."

P: How can you speak through her brother?

D: I can do anything, I can speak through people, just like that! I could bring someone to tell her- something that bothers her, I can bring about anything to make her angry. I can do it all. We can do anything. Well, the girl started praying, "Lord you have chosen for me this way, only you know how to make me go through it. I don't know my head from my toe, I am afflicted, guide me, guide my life. You are my Father intervene in my affliction," She kept on praying to Jesus. Sometimes asking the Virgin's intercession. Sometimes she would call on Kyrillos (the late Pope Cyril) others on Shenouda (the current Pope) Other times on the Saints. She goes, "I am your daughter. I am your (...), I am your handmaiden ... " She went on and on ... What are those she is bringing in? ... they all stood as soldiers for her ... guards ... guards ... guards. everywhere ... in the apartment, outside the apartment, and over here ... disgusting, they make me sick ... they make me weary ... until that Man came! I could not manifest myself neither in the street, nor in the (...) thing. So I said to myself: manifest yourself at her work! and so I did.

P: When? When?

D: Yesterday at her work, I started playing some tricks so that people would gather around her... so that those people who esteem her highly might think she is mad or has some disease or any (....). Suddenly, they bound me and forbade me to speak or manifest anything.

P: Who did bind you?

D: Him, that Father of yours.

P: The Lord of Glory.

D: He bound me and did not allow me to utter one word. As if nothing was happening! People thought that she was upset or some thing, and it was over ... over. I could not even manifest my presence in her anywhere ... to scandalize her... never ... nothing at all ...

P: Her Father is strong

D: He is (...)

P: Strong ... strong.

D: Well, He came to me and told me, “Come here I will teach you a lesson ... what do you think of that girl? Her folks at home must know what shape you are in inside my daughter. They must know what this daughter of mine did to you. My daughter, to whom I have given power to cling unto her Father.” “Come here and say it right here. Say it ...” And He went on telling me: “Say it, Say It in what shape are you here?” He exposed me and scandalized me before her mother and her sister.

P: How?

D: I am burnt out inside her ... I kept on saying, “I am afflicted, she ruined me!” and I went on telling them who she is in reality. When her father came home they told him, “That which is inside Eve was crying and saying these things.” Her father said, “I will not stand in the way of this girl anymore. Go my daughter and seek Father Gabriel as you wish.” (even though he did not want her to come to you) So, I said to my self, I will take hold of her mind, and confuse her completely. I will make her doubt every thing, I will put a patch of darkness before her eyes, to make her go about without direction, not knowing her beginning from her end. I will also invent some stories for the folks at home ... and give her lots of trouble. Well, the girl went on saying: “I am yours Jesus in whatever condition that I am in ... I am yours ... I am your daughter ... in everything, you guide my life. In whatever way You wish me to walk lead me by the hand. You are my Father” Then she took that book written by that (...) Shenouda of yours, whose portrait she hangs even at her place of work, and she kept talking to him, “Papa Shenouda intercede for me ... I am your daughter, don’t desert me.” And she went on reading his book all day today, after that she started reading ... would you believe it? “The Unseen Warfare” Absolutely rotten things. Bitter things ...” The Lord hear thee In the day of trouble. (the title of the book by Pope Shenouda) Then she went on saying,

“Father, I am having doubts, forsake me not Father... Forsake me not Father. Save me, I am not relying on people, I am putting myself in your hands. No one has authority over me, I am your daughter. I am the daughter of the strongest One in the whole universe. Why do people think that I am going to this or that Priest, while I am really seeking You. Even this Father Gabriel, I am not putting my hopes on him. I am not putting my hopes on any one in this world. I put my hopes on you and you alone. You are my Father in this world, on earth, and in the life to come.” She went on for the whole day talking to Him, “Papa you know what is happening to me. You know what troubles my heart. I am your daughter, don’t forsake me, for I will always cling to You...”

P: That is what a daughter of Jesus is like.

D: She went on saying Papa (....) Why does she say (....) Him!

P: He is the Lord of Glory, the Lord of Glory.

D: She clung to Him all day long. Even on the road she kept on praying, and He carried her along, putting His hand on her head, until He brought her here ... without harm ... until He brought us all here like a bunch of dogs. “Do you realize what we did to you Satan?” “Tell me frankly, could you find anything wrong with the girl?” (quoting the Lord probably.) He dragged us here like dogs. From her place of work, He dragged us ... Nothing ... we could do nothing (...) our (...) luck! it is our miserable luck that landed us in this girl. The problem is, we cannot have power over a girl that belongs to that Father of yours That Father of yours is ... very bad, bad ... and we cannot ...

P: (interjecting) Strong, strong, strong.

D: We cannot ... we cannot, Families that have Him, we cannot overcome. We cannot overcome this Man ... Whenever she sits with someone she asks a lot of questions ... she is full of words. We wanted to attack her faith and destroy It. We wanted to get hold of her brain, if we get hold of her brain, we can paralyse her faith, and even though she has faith, we can make her feel lost, unable to feel her faith, being unaware of it ... to have faith, but without feeling of that faith, to feel cool ... but not ... that girl Her Father... He made her feel every thing. I cannot perceive every thing, but He can perceive even your inner feelings. What is this! He is very bad this Father of yours!

- P: After she came here, and He told you to tell (the story) what did you intend to do?
- D: I wanted to put some things in her mind, some misery, to trap her, to make her miserable in any way. To confuse her ... to put doubts in her mind and make her life miserable.
- P: And who fastened your hands to the cross?
- D: Your Mother... And your Father, because of what I was doing.
- P: He crucified you?
- D: Yes He crucified me, He wouldn't let me ... what is the use ... very upset.
- P: Any thing else the Lord of Glory commanded that you tell. Any thing else the Lord of Glory commanded that you tell?
- D: I said every thing ... disgusting!
- P: What else happened? try to remember if there is anything else.
- D: I said every thing. You could say that we failed with this girl ... and that's it. We cannot ... whoever walks with your Father... we cannot prevail over him. What else could I say? declare our incompetence? I did that already... I pretended to laugh and be joyful, to make the girl think that we are stronger, but no. We cannot continue any longer. We have been exposed for what we really are. We were exposed yesterday at the house ... it's over ... all we have been doing is gone down the ...
- P: What happens when we say, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven"?
- D: This word Gabriel, is like whips to our backs. Whoever says Our Father and says It over and over is like someone who is whipping us devils, we cannot take it ... lost ... lost ... He gives you ... Fatherhood ... Fatherhood ... what is this? You think that He is sweet ... but He is very bad ... bad!
- P: He is very strong, not very bad. ... bad only for devils. He is strong.
- D: When she says Papa, we burn. She is always fighting us with this word that she keeps repeating, "Papa."

P: What about the word “Papa Jesus?”

D: Always calling Him Papa. Is she a baby or something? Only little children learn to say Papa Jesus. Is she a child? Always telling Him. “Lord I am your daughter ... am your daughter my Papa.” What is this thing, your daughter ... my Papa ... I don’t know ... sob ... sob ... sob (crying)

P: Why are you crying? Why are you crying?

D: I want to go down

P: Is He commanding you to say anything else?

D: No ... the last thing He told me was this, “I have nailed you cursed one ... It’s over.” What else can I say? there is nothing else.

P: If He tells you anything else say it to us. Did He say anything else?

D: No.

P: What is He telling you now? What is the Lord of Glory telling you?

D: He says nothing.

P: What is our Heavenly Father saying to you

D: He is not saying, I don’t want to hear His voice ... ever.

P: Graciously Jesus, Lord of glory we like to hear your voice. Our heavenly Father we like to hear your voice. Our heavenly Father ...

D: I don’t want to hear His voice.

P: We like to hear your voice our Heavenly Father!

D: You hear Him ... I don’t want to.

P: What is He telling you? Say it, what is He telling you?

D: He says nothing. It’s over. He said it’s over.

P: Are you ready to get out of her now?



D: Not yet ... when He completes His revenge ... when He completes His revenge on me. I tell Him, come on, kick me out of her like a dog ... yes ... aaaaah! (3 screams)

P: Wherefrom are you going out?

D: Don't put (the cross) on me, leave me alone.

P: ... all over your body! ... what's wrong with you?

D: I cannot take it.

P: What are you saying?

D: I cannot take it ... I am telling Him have mercy on me! Have mercy on me Jesus!

P: Where did you learn that? Where?

D: I am telling Him have mercy on me!

P: Where did you learn that?

D: I learned it from the girl, she always says have mercy on me, so, I am saying It ... maybe He has mercy on me too, like He has mercy on her. He should have mercy on both of us ... but He ... has mercy on her ... not on me.

P: You have to suffer!

D: The nail with which He was crucified, He is piercing me with It! It's fire aaah.

P: Why are you screaming again?

D: Because of the nail ... the nail which was hammered into Him ... it burns me more than ...

P: Is It burning you?

D: The nail ... He put It all of it Into me ... my pride! aaaah (scream)

P: What happened to you?

D: Aaaaah (wailing and screaming)

P: Why are you devastated?

D: I am totally devastated! He defeated me with His Power.

P: He is the Lord of Powers.

D: He is destroying me.

P: The Lord of Glory, the Lord of Powers, what is He saying to you?

D: He is telling me ... “you are cursed, be prepared for departure immediately. You don’t think that you will go on laughing as usual? you will go out, you will be driven out of my daughter immediately, that is enough.”

P: ... (unintelligible)

D: It’s over, it’s over! We now know the power that You put In your children, and what It is like. We know ... we have personally experienced it. We always wanted to try and see how this Man is glorified ... He proved to us that we have no power against His children.

P: Because His Name Is the Lord of Glory and the Lord of Power.

D: The Lord of all power. Lord of Lords and King of Kings, that Is His Name.

P: Right!

D: We cannot stand up to Him or to His children. We cannot stand up to the power He puts into them. The power He puts into them is so great, we cannot stand up to it. We are no match for that power ... we cant ... This girl ... had all sorts of people coming to her, every one trying to convince her with something, but she would not even consider it. Every one tells her, “you can be cured if you do this ... there is this woman ... go to her ... this woman ..., but never did she say O.K. ... never. She would say, “I am Jesus’ daughter, Jesus is responsible for me. The Virgin Is responsible for me. I am their daughter. They deal on my behalf ...” What is this? what is this? what is ... they deal on my behalf? you mean she does not make one single decision according to her mind? For every thing she goes

running to this Father of hers and ask Him, “what should I do ...” What is this? ... We’ve been bringing all sorts of people to her, “surely you will be cured if you go to this lady.” Even her father wanted to take her to this (...) possessed woman who pretends to be making miracles ... They don’t know ... they don’t know that this One of yours ... dragged us here to you. He controls every thing. This girl never inclined to our will, only to His will. Wherever He leads her she goes. That daughter of (...) keeps on saying, “I am Jesus’ daughter ... I am the Virgin’s daughter. Whatever He wants, wherever He wants me to go I will go. I will not walk according to anyone else’s will.” Today, all day long she kept saying these words ... destroyed me ... She is always clinging to that Lord of yours. She keeps telling Him, “I am your daughter ... yours, You lead me, even to the end of the earth I will go as long as You hold my hand, as long as You control me ... as long as You do every thing You prepare every thing to me, even this trip to Father Gabriel is according to your will . If you don’t approve of It, don’t send me there, if You approve then take hold of me and drag me. In every thing you lead me ... Papa ...” She’s too much for me ... aaaah (3 screams) It’s over, I have no power to do anything more.

P: Even if your hands are set free?

D: Makes no difference considering the place I am going to.

P: Where are you going?

D: To Gehenna.

P: To Gehenna?

D: Throw me down to the earth so that I may go down under.

P: That’s fine, the Lord Jesus untie your hands... Whereto?

D: He is telling me: straight to Gehenna, it’s over, go home. He is telling me, “descend cursed one, worthy of all humiliation.”

P: Because He is strong

D: I will descend ... I will

P: Stretch out your hands

D: Aaaah (scream)

P: Why are you crying? you are coming down to the earth ... why are you crying?

D: All of my pride is gone

P: All of your pride is gone?

D: I have been humiliated!

P: Humiliated?

D: I wanted to humiliate her (scream) ... I became humiliated like a dog.

P: We thank God ... we thank God.

D: Scream ... Scream ... Scream

P: That daughter of Jesus humiliated you because she clung to the hand of the Lord of Glory

D: Scream ... I've been humiliated ... I've been humiliated ... Scream ... get it over with aaaaah(scream)

P: Is it over?

D: Yes.

P: If you would ... I will recite you the Covenant.

D: O.K.

P: This Covenant is for the Lord of Glory

D: sob ... sob (weeping) ... I am humiliated.

P: Repeat after me, I will say it ... can you say it?

D: You say it

P: I do covenant

D: I do covenant

P: I

D: I

P: Who are you? say It.

D: I, the sorcerer, and all my helpers whom I brought to help me in doing sorcery against that girl Eve and against her family.

P: Before

D: Before

P: The Lord of Glory

D: The Lord of Glory

P: And the Virgin, Mother of the Light

D: And the Virgin Mother of the Light.

P: And the Angels

D: And the Angels

P: And all the Martyrs and the Saints

D: And all the Martyrs and the Saints

P: To depart from her with all my forces

D: To depart from her with all ... the sorcery and all ... it's over ... with all the things we put into her mind, and all the things and all the afflictions, and all and all and all and all!

P: And all and all ... indeed!

D: And all and all.

P: We will depart

D: We will depart of her

P: Burnt

D: Burnt

P: And strangled

D: And strangled

P: And slaughtered

D: And slaughtered

P: And dead

D: And dead and humiliated and despised ... and all that you want to say.

P: I do covenant

D: I do covenant

P: I, the Sorcerer

D: I, the Sorcerer

P: And all my armies

D: And all my armies, and my helpers

P : Before

D :Before

P: The Lord of Glory

D: The Lord of Glory

P: And the Virgin, Mother of the Light

D: And the Virgin, Mother of the Light

P: And the Holy Angels

D: And the Holy Angels.

P: And all the Martyrs and the Saints

D: And all the Martyr-s and the Saints

P: And Pope Shenouda

D: And Pope Shenouda and Pope Kyrillos! and all the Saints.

P: That we will depart from her

D: That we will depart from her

P: Burnt

D: Burnt

P: And strangled

D: And strangled

P: And slaughtered

D: And Slaughtered and dead and humiliated and despised

P: And take all my sorcery with me

D: And take all ... all ... all sickness and not to leave behind anything

P: I do covenant

D: I do covenant

P: I, the Sorcerer

D: I, the Sorcerer

P : Before

D: Before

P: The Lord of Glory

D: The Lord of Glory

P: And the Virgin Mother of the Light

D: And the Virgin Mother of the Light

P: And the Holy Angels

D: And the Holy Angels

P: And all the Martyr-s and the Saints

D: And all the Martyr-s and the Saints

P: That we will depart from her

D: That we will depart from her

P: Burnt

D: Burnt

P: And strangled

D: And strangled

P : And slaughtered

D: And slaughtered

P : And defeated

D: And defeated

P: And despised

D: And despised and humiliated

P: And take along every sorcery

D: And take along all our armies, and our sorcery, and all our belongings.

P: In the name of the Lord of Glory I command all of you to depart

D: Aaaaah (scream)



P: In the name of the Lord of Glory I command all of you to depart

D: Scream

P: In the name of the Lord depart

D: Scream

P: In the name of the Lord depart

D: Scream

P: In the name of the Lord depart

D: scream

P: In the name of the Lord depart

D: Scream ... scream ... scream...

P: July 26, 1982

**FOR THOU HAST GIVEN UNTO US POWER TO TREAD  
UPON SERPENTS AND SCORPIONS AND OVER ALL THE  
POWER OF THE ENEMY.**

**GLORY BE TO GOD. AMEN.**

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## **THE PSALMS OF KIAHK**

### **Introduction:**

The readings assigned by the Fathers of the Church for the Sundays of Kiahk are a masterpiece. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Fathers arranged the various readings for the four Sundays in such a way as to prepare us for the advent of our Lord, which we celebrate on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Kiahk.

We often meditate on the Gospels of the Sundays of Kiahk in the sermons we give during that month. At other times we choose to meditate on the Pauline epistle or the Catholic epistle for that purpose. We seldom choose the Psalm verses as the subject of our meditation.

The Psalms assigned to be read for each day of the Coptic year are truly wonderful. One who attempts to meditate on them is struck with awe at the wisdom of the Fathers who, guided by the Holy Spirit, chose those verses. I discovered the beauty of these verses, while translating them from the Coptic at the request of one of our servants, who was not very satisfied with the currently available translations.

The following meditations are based on two sermons I gave on the second and fourth Sundays of the month of Kiahk for the current year of the martyrs, 1723.

*Father Athanasius Iskander*

## MEDITATIONS ON THE PSALMS OF KIAHK

### THE FIRST SUNDAY:

#### Evening Psalm:

Until when, then, O Lord, wilt Thou forget me,? for ever?  
Until when, then, wilt Thou turn away Thy face from me?  
Behold and hear me, O Lord my God: enlighten my eyes.

When I meditate on this Psalm, I could see our father Adam in Hades. And in case you don't have an idea about what Hades is, let me give you an approximation in as much as our language can describe the hidden mysteries. I want you to imagine a basement, built underground, with no windows, and the door to that basement is shut and the key to in is in the hands of Satan! There are no furnishings or any amenities there. Imagine our father Adam sitting on the cold floor, his hands are shackled to the wall behind him and his ankles are shackled to the floor beneath him. It is very dark and depressing.

Adam is tormented by his memories. Memories of his formal happiness in Paradise, when God was his friend. When he had everything and lacked nothing. He had authority over all of God's creatures. God gave him this authority.

He reminisces about the worst day of his life when both he and his wife Eve exercised the divine gift of free will given to them by God, to disobey God; their creator and their friend.

He recalls the words he heard from God on that awful day:

Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, "Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Ge 3:17-19)

Adam and Eve were condemned to a life of sorrow, at the end of which they had to die and then go to Hades to be prisoners of Satan, who convinced them that they will be “like God” if they listened to him.

Beside the doom and the gloom of these word, Adam remembers another word of God that gave him a glimmer of hope. And I could almost hear him crying out to God: “Lord, Thou hast promised us that one day, the Seed of the Woman shall come to bruise the head of the serpent, that serpent that deceived us and robbed us of our eternity.” I could also hear him saying, “Lord it has been thousands of years since that promise and we have been waiting in this awful place: *Until when, then, O Lord, wilt Thou forget me,? for ever? Until when, then, wilt Thou turn away Thy face from me?*”

Then, pleading with the Lord Adam adds: “*Behold and hear me, O Lord my God: enlighten my eyes.*” You see, For all of these years God had turned away His face from the supplication of Adam, and now Adam is asking God to look upon him and hear his prayer. He is asking God to enlighten his eyes. Isaiah the prophet who was in the same place with Adam, must have told him about God’s promise that “*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*” (Isa 9:2)

God’s promises for the future are usually put in the past tense, as if they have been already fulfilled. And in this prophesy God is promising that those in Hades, the place of “darkness and the shadow of death” will one day, see the True Light shining upon them. This indeed was fulfilled after the Lord died on the Cross, when His soul, united to His divinity, descended into Hades to release the souls imprisoned there and bring them to Paradise. It is for this reason that we call Great Saturday, “Saturday of the Light” for in it the True Light did shine upon those who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of Death.

### **Morning Psalm:**

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the earth: To hear the groaning of those in fetters. To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem.

It seems to me that the morning psalm is the answer to Adam’s prayer. The Lord, who for thousands of years had turned His face away from

the fallen human race, has finally decided that the time has come to save Adam and his children from the bondage of the enemy. God now looks down from heaven, *“To hear the groaning of those in fetters.”* Those in fetters are those souls imprisoned in Hades, and they have been groaning for thousands of years, awaiting for the salvation promised by the Lord of old.

Now, the time has come *“To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem.”* “Zion” and “Jerusalem” are to be taken in the prophetic sense as referring to the Church,. The bride of Christ. Now the time has come to declare the name of the Lord in Zion! Now is the time for the fore-runner to come *“To declare the name of the LORD in Zion”* to tell the people of Zion: *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* (Jn 1:29-30) Now the time has come for the angel Gabriel to go to Zachariah the priest to bring to him the good news of the salvation of the Lord.

### **The Liturgy Psalm:**

Thou shalt return, and have compassion upon Zion: For it is time to have compassion upon her, For the LORD will build up Zion, and shall appear in his glory.

This Psalm is a continuation on the same theme: the time has come for the salvation promised by the Lord to be manifested. For His mercy to be fulfilled to Adam and to his children. Of course, not all of the children of Adam could benefit from this promised salvation. Only those who believed the promise of God and had hope in Him would be saved. Those who despaired from their salvation, like Cain would not benefit from the salvation that the Lord offers freely to all. *“For it is time to have compassion upon her”* Someone once said, God’s timetable is so different from ours! We often ask for things from God and want them right now!

Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth must have been praying for years asking the Lord to give them a child. The question must have come to their mind, why does the Lord not answer our prayer? What they did not know is that God will answer their prayer in the appointed time. God knew that they will be given not an ordinary son, but one who is the greatest among those born of women! But his coming to the world

has to wait until the Lord decides that the time to have compassion on Zion has come; for John will be the herald of this compassion!

*“For the LORD will build up Zion”* Indeed the time has come for the true Zion to be built up, not by the hands of men but, by God Himself. This Zion that the Lord will build is not the earthly Zion of the Jews, which became a harlot, going after strange gods, but the new Zion, the Church of God made both of Jews and Gentiles.

*“...and shall appear in his glory.”* Indeed, the time has now come for the Lord to appear in His glory. The glory that the angels declared at His manifestation by saying: “Glory to God in the highest!” For indeed, The baby in the manger was glorified by men on earth and in the same time by the angels in heaven. Some interpret this versicle as a prophesy about the transfiguration when the chosen disciples beheld His glory on the holy mountain.

## **THE SECOND SUNDAY:**

### **Evening Psalm:**

Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Send down Thine hand from on high: Rescue me and deliver me.

As I meditate on this psalm, I could see David the Psalmist, who inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote this Psalm a thousand years before the coming of Christ. To David was given a privilege that few prophets had, for his psalms have more prophecies about the birth, the passion and the resurrection of the Messiah than any other Old Testament Book.

No wonder he cries out asking the Lord to hasten His coming to Earth: *“Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down!”*

David, like many of the Jews, thought of the coming of the Messiah to be associated with the same phenomena that took place when the Lord descended on Mount Sinai to give the Law to Moses. No wonder he adds: *“touch the mountains, and they shall smoke!”* He pleads with the Lord to deliver him from the misery of Hades by saying: *“Send down Thine hand from on high: Rescue me and deliver me.”*

David, speaking by the Holy Spirit, had earlier made a prophesy:

*“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.”* (Ps 16:10) And even though this prophesy was said concerning Christ, yet David must have taken it as pertaining to his own deliverance from Hell. I could imagine him pleading with the Lord: Lord, Thou hast promised not to leave my soul in Hell (Hades, Amenti) and it’s been a thousand years since you made that promise to me, So, *“Send down Thine hand from on high: Rescue me and deliver me.”*

### **Morning Psalm:**

He shall descend like rain upon a fleece: and like drops dripping upon the earth. In his days shall righteousness flourish: and abundance of peace.

It seems to me that this versicle is a response to David’s plea that the Lord come down from heaven! Except that the Holy Spirit is now directing David to another Psalm given to him that describes the manner in which the Lord will make His appearance on Earth.

Unlike the descent of the Lord on Mount Sinai which is described to us in Exodus 19:18: *“And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire”*, the coming down of the Lord in order to save the whole race of Adam will be inconspicuous! *“He shall descend like rain upon a fleece.”* Fleece is the fluffy stuff that people get when they shear lambs. It is what wool is made of. The Holy Spirit speaking through David tells us (and him too) that when the Lord comes down from heaven, it will be like rain falling on a fleece, almost imperceptible.

Indeed, His coming was most un-notable. Only a few poor shepherds knew about it because the angel announced His coming to them. His coming was also revealed to The Three kings, who saw His star in the East, and this was done in order to fulfill the prophesy of another Psalm, the Evening Psalm of Christmas: *“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of the Arabs and Seba shall offer gifts.”*

The Psalm continues: *“In his days shall righteousness flourish: and abundance of peace.”* Indeed in His days righteousness flourished because He was a teacher of righteousness, and a doer of righteousness. *“and abundance of peace.”* that peace which was announced to us by the

angels in their hymn: *“peace on earth and goodwill toward men”* Indeed the coming of the Lord ushered peace between heaven and earth. The Liturgy of Saint Gregory describes this beautifully: “Thou hast reconciled the heavenly and the earthly, and made the two into one.”

### **The Liturgy Psalm:**

Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear: and forget your own people, and your father's house Because the King has desired your beauty: for He Himself is your Lord.

The Gospel reading that follows this Psalm is about the visit of the angel Gabriel and his annunciation of the good news to the holy Virgin Mary. And the Psalm that prefaces this Gospel is a prophesy about this. *“Hearken, O daughter”*: It seems to me that David the Prophet is addressing the holy Virgin Mary. He rightly calls her “daughter”, for indeed, the church calls her the “daughter of David” He asks her to hearken or listen carefully.

After attracting the attention of his daughter according to the flesh, David continues: *“And see,”* See, not only with your eyes but with all your heart and soul, for behold, an archangel will be sent to you! He is one of the seven angels standing before God (Rev 8:2), so look carefully, *“and incline your ear.”*: be obedient to the message he brings to you for it is from the Most High.

The Psalmist prepares the holy Virgin for a major change in her life by saying: *“forget your own people, and your father's house.”* For though she was born of Jewish parents and raised as a devout Jew, yet in a little while, she will become the mother of all Christians.

David now gives the Virgin a hint about the contents of the message to be revealed to her by the angel: *“Because the King has desired your beauty”* The King is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who chose to be born of the holy Virgin. He has chosen her above all the women that were ever born for he desired *her beauty*. Not her physical beauty, but rather her inner beauty, the beauty of her soul.

Another Psalm that speaks of this inner beauty of the holy Virgin is the Morning Psalm for the first day of Pachons; the birthday of the holy Virgin: *“All the glory of The king's daughter is within: clothed with gold-fringed garments, adorned in varied ways.”*



The Psalm speaks of her as “*The king's daughter* “, for indeed, she is the daughter of King David. The Psalm tells us that all her glory is *within*, an inner glory. For indeed on the outside she was a poor teenager, an orphan, given to espouse an older man because she had no one to look after her. But she was “*clothed with gold-fringed garments, adorned in varied ways.*” Not literally, for a poor girl could not afford gold fringed garments. Those gold-fringed garments, according to the Fathers, are her virtues. She is “*adorned in varied ways*”: adorned with all sorts of virtues that the saints wrote volumes about. It was this beauty that the King had desired when He chose her to be His Mother.

But, lest she should think pridefully that she will become the mother of the King, David her father adds: “*for He Himself is your Lord.*” The same King that will be born of you, *He Himself is your Lord*. The holy Virgin must have memorized and understood this Psalm, for when the angel told her what was prophesied a thousand years earlier, she responded: “*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.*” (Luke 1:38)

## **THE THIRD SUNDAY:**

### **Evening Psalm:**

For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation. Here will I dwell; for I have desired it. Her widow with a blessing will I bless.

Zion was the old name of Jerusalem. It belonged to the Gentiles but King David took possession of it and renamed it Jerusalem, which means “the vision of peace”

In the scripture, the word Zion can be understood in many way. It refers to Jerusalem as the city of David but also the city of God, where God dwells! Psalm 9:11 reads: “Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion.”

It also refers to the Jewish nation as a whole; God’s chosen people and the church of the Old Testament.

In the prophetic scripture it also refers to the church of the New Testament, which inherited all the promises given to the old Zion. The church of the New Testament is often named “the daughter of Zion.”

Theologically, it refers to the holy Virgin Mary, who became the

dwelling place of God the Logos, and “the holy city of the Great King”, as we call her in the Sunday Theotokia.

Spiritually, it refers to the human soul, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and thus a dwelling place of God.

The current versicle is meant to be interpreted theologically as referring to the holy Virgin Mary.

“*The LORD has chosen Zion*”: Indeed the Lord has chosen the holy Virgin above all the women ever born to be His Mother, the new Eve, who was to be given as a mother to all Christians, when the Lord told the beloved disciple: “Behold, your mother” (Jn 19:27)

“*He has desired it for his habitation. Here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*”: The Lord has desired the beauty of her soul and the purity of her body as a place where He can dwell. He has desired her “*more than all the dwellings of Jacob.*” (Ps 87:2) Saint Theodosius, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Pope of Alexandria, interprets the “dwellings of Jacob” as the choir of the saints. This means that she was preferred over all the saints, to be Mother of God.<sup>1</sup>

Please note that the same Psalm is used in the Liturgy of holy Baptism. The priest pours the holy Myron into the water in the font, then, he stirs the water while reciting the appropriate versicles of the Psalms. The stirring of the water in the baptismal font is in the likeness of the angel that descended into the pool of Bethesda and stirred the water, and whoever went into the water first was healed from any disease. (Jn 5:4) The analogy is clear, for whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16)

The Psalm versicles recited by the priest while stirring the water are all prophetic references to Baptism. The last versicle to be recited is the same: “*The LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation.*” This refers to the one baptized becoming “Zion” the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver-of-life.

*All Psalm quotations in this article were translated from the Coptic*

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<sup>1</sup>Sermon de Theodose: in *REVUE DE L'ORIENT CHRETIEN*  
1923

# **VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN**

## **A sermon by Father Athanasius Iskander**

To venerate means to publicly acknowledge someone's virtues or good deeds. The person may be alive at the time, but mostly veneration is done after a person passes away. Veneration of the saints has very strong Biblical roots and is well steeped into Christian tradition.

We have many Biblical examples of veneration of the saints and I would like to share some of them with you.

Perhaps one of the Oldest instances of veneration is found in an ancient book of the Old Testament, the Book of Job. Here we find Job venerated by none other than God Almighty:

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and shuns evil? (Job 1:8)

The Book of Deuteronomy venerates Moses the Prophet: "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." (Deut 34:10)

The Book of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach has a whole section at the end devoted entirely to the veneration of the saints of the Old Testament:

Enoch pleased the Lord, and was translated, being an example of repentance to all generations. Noah was found perfect and righteous; in the time of wrath he was taken in exchange [for the world;] therefore was he left as a remnant unto the earth, when the flood came. An everlasting covenant was made with him, that all flesh should perish no more by the flood. Abraham was a great father of many people: in glory was there none like unto him; Who kept the law of the most High, and was in covenant with him: he established the covenant in his flesh; and when he was proved, he was found faithful. (Sirach 44:16 -20)

The New Testament has many examples of the veneration of the saints, St. Paul speaks about the cloud of witnesses in very high regard:

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: .... They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Heb 11:32-38)

The Gospel according to Saint Luke gives us two marvellous examples of veneration:

Luke 1:28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

Luke 1:42-45 And (Elisabeth) spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Perhaps the most impressive example is the Lord himself venerating John the Baptist: “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” (Matt 11:11)

In another instant the Lord not only venerates the woman who anointed him, but also decrees that a memorial shall be made to her: “*Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.*” ( Matt 26:13)

Here we have a direct order from Christ not only to venerate the saints, but also to commemorate them in our public worship. This is why we say at the beginning of the Commemoration of the Saints in the Liturgy, “As this O Lord is the command of Thine only begotten Son that we share in the commemoration of Thy saints.” It’s a command of the Lord!

## **WHY DO WE VENERATE SAINT MARY?**

St. Mary was venerated by Archangel Gabriel, and by St. Elisabeth speaking by the Holy Spirit, as we mentioned earlier.

She was venerated by an unborn baby! For St. Elisabeth tells her “For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.” (Lk 1:41-44). Notice that as soon as St. Mary saluted St. Elizabeth, not only was Elisabeth filled with the Holy Ghost (Lk 1:41), but also John, still in his mothers womb was filled with the Holy Ghost, according to what the angel Gabriel predicted, that “He shall be filled with the Holy ghost, even from his mother's womb.” (Lk 1:15)

She was venerated by the woman who said, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps which thou hast sucked.”

She was venerated by the Lord Jesus, who, answering the same woman said, “Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.”, which is what the blessed Virgin did, according to the testimony of the Gospel (Luke 2:19,51)

She herself prophesied, by the Holy Spirit, that she will be venerated by men from the time she was chosen to be the Mother of God and until the end of time, “For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” (Lk 1:48)

You see, she was venerated by God, by angels, and by men, isn't that reason enough that we too should venerate her?

## **THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN BY THE FATHERS:**

The Fathers of the church esteemed the Virgin very highly. Here are some examples:

Saint Gregory the wonder worker, who is mentioned in our commemoration of the saints, left us some wonderful examples of the veneration of the holy Virgin Mary:

She proved herself prudent truly in all things; neither has any woman been born like her in all generations. She was not like the primeval virgin Eve, who, keeping holiday alone in paradise, with thoughtless mind, unguardedly hearkened to the word of the serpent, the author of all evil, and thus became depraved in the thoughts of her mind; and through her that deceiver, discharging

his poison and refusing death with it, brought it into the whole world; and in virtue of this has arisen all the trouble of the saints. But in the holy Virgin alone is the fall of that (first mother) repaired.<sup>1</sup>

This comparison between the first Eve and the Virgin, the second Eve was very popular among the Fathers. In the same homily, he compares the Virgin to the saints of the Old Testament, showing her to be much greater than they:

Thou knowest, O Mary, things kept hid from the patriarchs and prophets. Thou hast learned, O virgin, things which were kept concealed till now from the angels. Thou hast heard, O purest one, things of which even the choir of inspired men was never deemed worthy. Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and Daniel, and all the prophets, prophesied of Him; but the manner they knew not. Yet thou alone, O purest virgin, art now made the recipient of things of which all these were kept in ignorance, and thou dost learn the origin of them.

He continues to venerate the Virgin extolling her virtues:

For of all generations she alone has risen as a virgin pure in body and in spirit; and she alone bears Him who bears all things on His word. Nor is it only the beauty of this holy one in body that calls forth our admiration, but also the innate virtue of her soul. Wherefore also the angels addressed her first with the salutation, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

And since the angels venerate her, St. Gregory invites all the faithful to join in venerating the holy Virgin:

Come, therefore, beloved brethren, and let us take up the angelic strain, and to the utmost of our ability return the due meed of praise, saying, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee!" For it is thine truly to rejoice, seeing that the grace of

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<sup>1</sup>First homily on the Annunciation to the holy Virgin Mary.

God, as he knows, has chosen to dwell with thee--the Lord of glory dwelling with the handmaiden; "He that is fairer than the children of men " with the fair virgin; He who sanctifies all things with the undefiled."

### **FIGURES OF THE HOLY VIRGIN:**

The ancients saw many types and symbols of the Virgin in the Old Testament, one of these is the Arc of the Covenant:

Come, then, ye too, dearly beloved, and let us chant the melody which has been taught us by the inspired harp of David, and say, "Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest; Thou, and the ark of Thy sanctuary." For the holy Virgin is in truth an ark, wrought with gold both within and without, that has received the whole treasury of the sanctuary.

Like many of the ancient fathers, St. Gregory uses many metaphors to describe the Virgin:

She is the ever-blooming paradise of incorruptibility, wherein is planted the tree that gives life, and that furnishes to all the fruits of immortality. She is the boast and glory of virgins, and the exultation of mothers. She is the sure support of the believing, and the helper of the pious. She is the vesture of light, and the domicile of virtue. She is the ever-flowing fountain, wherein the water of life sprang and produced the Lord's incarnate manifestation. She is the monument of righteousness; and all who become lovers of her, and set their affections on virgin-like ingenuousness and purity, shall enjoy the grace of angels.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Gregory even tells us that all creatures venerate the holy Virgin with us:

Thy praise, O most holy Virgin, surpasses all laudation, by reason of the God who received the flesh and was born man of thee. To

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory the wonder worker: second homily on the annunciation

thee every creature, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, offers the meet offering of honour. For thou hast been indeed set forth as the true cherubic throne. Thou shinest as the very brightness of light in the high places of the kingdoms of intelligence; where the Father, who is without beginning,, and whose power thou hadst overshadowing thee, is glorified; where also the Son is worshipped, whom thou didst bear according to the flesh; and where the Holy Spirit is praised, who effected in thy womb the generation of the mighty King.<sup>1</sup>

In another homily, St. Gregory gives us his own meditations on what the Lord God might have told the Angel Gabriel, when he ordered him to announce the Good News to her:

Go thou, therefore, to the Virgin Mary. Pass thou on to that animate city whereof the prophet spake in these words: 'Glorious things were spoken of thee, O city of God.' Proceed, then, to my rational paradise; proceed to the gate of the east; proceed to the place of sojourn that is worthy of my word; proceed to that second heaven on earth; proceed to the light cloud, and announce to it the shower of my coming; proceed to the sanctuary prepared for me; proceed to the hall of the incarnation; proceed to the pure chamber of my generation after the flesh. Speak in the ears of my rational ark, so as to prepare for me the accesses of hearing. But neither disturb nor vex the soul of the virgin. Manifest thyself in a manner befitting that sanctuary, and hail her first with the voice of gladness.<sup>2</sup>

Note the beautiful metaphors the Church Fathers used to describe the holy Virgin, “the city of God”, “the rational Paradise”, “the gate of the east”, “the second heaven”, “the light cloud” ...

Now St. Gregory meditates on what might the angel Gabriel have told God:

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory the wonder worker: second homily on the annunciation

<sup>2</sup>Gregory the wonder worker: third homily on the annunciation



But how can Mary sustain the fire of the divinity? Thy throne blazes with the illumination of its splendour, and can the virgin receive Thee without being consumed?" Then the Lord says: "Yea surely, if the fire in the wilderness injured the bush, my coming will indeed also injure Mary;<sup>1</sup>

Now you know why we call the holy Virgin "the fiery Bush that Moses had seen in the wilderness"

Saint Methodius, who lived in the second half of the third century (260-312) left us this beautiful "Oration concerning Simeon and Anna on the day they met in the temple."

For if to the ark, which was the image and type of thy sanctity, such honour was paid of God that to no one but to the priestly order only was the access to it open, or ingress allowed to behold it, the veil separating it off, and keeping the vestibule as that of a queen, what, and what sort of veneration is due to thee from us who are of creation the least, to thee who art indeed a queen; to thee, the living ark of God, the Lawgiver; to thee, the heaven that contains Him who can be contained of none?

That bush which could not be touched, which beforehand shadowed forth thy figure endowed with divine majesty, bare God without being consumed, who manifested Himself to the prophet just so far as He willed to be seen.

The golden pot also, as a most certain type, preserved the manna contained in it, which in other cases was changed day by day, unchanged, and keeping fresh for ages.

Blessed art thou, all-blessed, and to be desired of all. Blessed of the Lord is thy name, full of divine grace, and grateful exceedingly to God, mother of God, thou that givest light to the faithful.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid

Note how he calls her the golden pot as we do in our midnight praise, and also Mother of God. This is amazing, since it was only after the third ecumenical council that the word Theotokos or Mother of God used in describing the holy Virgin Mary, but here is a man who died before even the first Ecumenical council was convened calling the Virgin: Mother of God.

Thou hast lent to God, who stands in need of nothing, that flesh which He had not, in order that the Omnipotent might become that which it was his good pleasure to be. What is more splendid than this? What than this is more sublime? He who fills earth and heaven, whose are all things, has become in need of thee, for thou hast lent to God that flesh which He had not.

Hail! hail! mother and handmaid of God. Hail! hail! thou to whom the great Creditor of all is a debtor. We are all debtors to God, but to thee He is Himself indebted.

If I would say this today, I would be called a heretic! But look how bold they were in venerating the Virgin even then in the third century.

For the hymns which we offer to thee, O thou most holy and admirable habitation of God, are no merely useless and ornamental words. Nor, again, is thy spiritual laudation mere secular trifling, or the shoutings of a false flattery, O thou who of God art praised.

Note that even that early, hymns were already in use in venerating the holy Virgin. We were told that these hymns started to be written after the third ecumenical council, but here is proof that they were used in the Church much earlier. So sweet is his justification of this praise by us mortals by the fact that she is praised by God.

Hail to thee for ever, thou virgin mother of God, our unceasing joy, for unto thee do I again return. Thou art the beginning of our feast; thou art its middle and end; the pearl of great price that belongeth unto the kingdom; the fat of every victim, the living altar of the bread of life. Hail, thou treasure of the love of

God. Hail, thou fount of the Son's love for man. Hail, thou overshadowing mount of the Holy Ghost.

Wherefore, we pray thee, the most excellent among women, who boastest in the confidence of thy maternal honours, that thou wouldest unceasingly keep us in remembrance. O holy mother of God, remember us, I say, who make our boast in thee, and who in hymns august celebrate the memory, which will ever live, and never fade away. And do thou also, O honoured and venerable Simeon, thou earliest host of our holy religion, and teacher of the resurrection of the faithful, be our patron and advocate with that Saviour God, whom thou wast deemed worthy to receive into thine arms.

See how he asks the Mother of God to remember us, and see how he asks Simeon the elder to be our patron and advocate with our Saviour since he was deemed worthy to carry Him in his arms.

May we be steadfast in our tradition of venerating the saints and asking for their prayers, their protection, their patronage and their advocacy on our behalf and glory be to God forever. Amen.

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## **THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES AND THE FATHERS**

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. (Jer 6:16)

Innovation is the mark of this age. Old things are discarded and new ones are adhered to. Even morals and religious practices are being updated to keep up with an ever changing society. The Lord admonishes us to “ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein” In this article, we will try to study the old paths of the early Church, the Church of the Apostles and of the Fathers, using Biblical references as well as Patristic references. So, what was the Early Church like? Let us start answering that question:

### **1. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD AN ALTAR:**

a. The Lord Himself told us that!

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the **altar**, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the **altar**, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (MAT 5:23)

Here we have a reference to an altar on which gifts (the bread and wine) are brought, and we are told that unless we are reconciled, we cannot offer our gifts. This is the reason we do not approach communion if we have a grudge against someone.

b. The Old Testament tells us so:

In that day shall there be an **altar** to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it. (ISA 19:19,21)

Here is an Old Testament reference to a Christian altar! It could not be otherwise, for the Jews were not permitted to offer sacrifice and oblation except in one altar: that in Jerusalem. Of course that prophesy was fulfilled when the Egyptians embraced Christianity.

c. Saint Paul tells us so:

We have an **altar**, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. (HEB 13:10)

Saint Paul is telling us here, that we, the Christians have an altar! And that those who serve the tabernacle (the Jewish priests) have no right to eat from it (unless they believe and become Christians!).

d. The Fathers tell us so:

**THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS<sup>1</sup> TO THE EPHESIANS (107 ad.)**

Ante Nicene Fathers (ANF) VOL I page 51

Let no man deceive himself: if any one be not within the **altar**, he is deprived of the bread of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Ignatius became bishop of Antioch in 69 ad. he wrote these epistles in 107 ad. on the way to Rome where he was martyred.

Saint Ignatius not only mentions the **altar**, but also refers to the Eucharist as the **bread of God**.

**THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS (107 a.d.)**

ANF VOL I page 81

Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to show forth the unity of His blood; one **altar**; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants: that so, whatsoever ye do, ye may do it according to the will of God.

Not only does this great saint and martyr assert the presence of the altar in the early Church, but he also asserts the presence of the three tiered ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishop, presbyters (priests) and deacons. He also reminds the Christians of Philadelphia that if they follow these directives, they will be doing the will of God.

**IRENÆUS AGAINST HERESIES -- BOOK IV (circa 180 a.d.)**

ANF VOL I page 484

The oblation of the Church, therefore, which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout all the world, is accounted with God a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him; not that He stands in need of a sacrifice from us, but that he who offers is himself glorified in what he does offer, if his gift be accepted. For by the gift both honour and affection are shown forth towards the King; and the Lord, wishing us to offer it in all simplicity and innocence, did express Himself thus: "Therefore, when thou offerest thy gift upon the **altar**, and shalt remember that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then return and offer thy gift."

The great Irenaeus here tells us in very clear terms that the Lord's words quoted above are to be understood of the Christian oblation and the Christian altar. The great saint tells us that the Lord Himself gave instructions that this oblation is to be offered throughout all the world. He also tells us that the oblation of the Church is accounted with God

a *pure sacrifice*.

## **2. THE EARLY CHURCH USED INCENSE:**

a. The Old Testament tells us so:

For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts. (MAL 1:11)

The prophesy of Malachi specifically tells us that the gentiles and not the Jews are the ones that will offer incense unto the Lord. Here is how the Fathers understood this prophesy:

**SAINT HIPPOLYTUS: A DISCOURSE ON THE END OF THE WORLD, AND ON ANTICHRIST**, ANF VOL V page 250

And the churches, too, will wail with a mighty lamentation, because neither "oblation nor incense" is attended to, nor a service acceptable to God.

In this discourse, Saint Hippolytus describes the church under Antichrist, during the Great Tribulation. He declares to us that "*no oblation nor incense is attended to*", which means that during his life time (second century) there was oblation and incense exactly as Malachi had prophesied hundreds of years earlier.

**FRAGMENTS FROM THE LOST WRITINGS OF IRENAEUS**

Ante Nicene Fathers (ANF) Vol I page 574

Those who have become acquainted with the secondary (i.e., under Christ) constitutions of the apostles, are aware that the Lord instituted a new oblation in the new covenant, according to [the declaration of] Malachi the prophet. For, "from the rising of the sun even to the setting my name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice."

Here Saint Irenaeus tells us clearly that the prophesy of Malachi is about the offerings of the New Covenant. But the most amazing thing is that he speaks about *those who have become acquainted with ... the constitutions of the apostles!*. That means that the early church, in the time of Irenaeus (second century) had a document called “*the constitutions of the apostles*”, This document exists! And anyone can read it in Vol VII of the Ante Nicene Fathers.

### **3. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD A LITURGY:**

a. The Bible tells us so:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (ACT 13:2-3)

The Greek word **λεειτουργεῖν** (*leitourgeo*) that was translated into “ministered” in the English versions of the Bible, really means “to perform a ritual service” (the Liturgy) So, the proper translation of this verse should have been: “As they were performing the Liturgy of the Lord, while fasting ....”, which not only tells us that the early church had a Liturgy, but also that they used to fast in order to attend the Liturgy. This becomes very obvious when we examine verse 3: *And when they had fasted and prayed.* ... The fasting in Verse 2 refers to fasting before the Liturgy, while fasting in Verse 3 refers to fasting before the ceremony of ordination (laying on of the hands), a tradition that our church still keeps.

That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. (ROM 15:16)

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul describes himself as a priest of Jesus Christ **λεειτουργὸν** (*leitourgos*) . This word which is wrongly translated into “minister” actually means a person who performs a ritual liturgical service or simply a liturgist.



Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF) Volume VII has a section for the early liturgies of the Church including the Liturgy of St. Mark's and that of Saint James on pages 529-572.

#### 4. **THE EARLY CHURCH HAD SET OBLIGATORY FASTS:**

a. The Bible tells us so:

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them ... (ACT 27:9)

The Book of Acts tells us that "*sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past*" This "fast" that the Book of Acts simply refers to as "*the fast*" is none other than holy Lent which was observed in the church at the time of the Apostle Paul's journey by sea to Rome.

b. The Fathers tell us so:

#### **THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE PHILIPPIANS** ANF Vol I page 119

Despise not the period of forty days, for it comprises an imitation of the conduct of the Lord. ... do not neglect to fast on the fourth and sixth days, distributing at the same time of thine abundance to the poor. If any one fasts on the Lord's Day or on the Sabbath, except on the paschal Sabbath only, he is a murderer of Christ.

Saint Ignatius, the bishop and martyr writes to the Philippians on his way to be thrown to the beasts in Rome, not only about Lent, but also about the fast of Wednesday and Friday. Fasting was not permitted on Saturday or Sunday, except on Great Saturday.

#### **THE CANONS OF THE BLESSED PETER, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA, AND MARTYR** Nicene/Post Nicene, series II, Volume XIV page 601 **CANON XV.**

Wednesday is to be **fasted**, because then the Jews conspired to betray Jesus; Friday, because he then suffered for us. We keep the Lord's Day as a day of joy, because then our Lord rose. Our tradition is, not to kneel on that day.

Wednesday and Friday fasts were often referred to as the “Stations”, as we see here:

**TERTULLIAN :ON PRAYER** ANF Vol III page 687

Similarly, too, touching the days of **Stations**, most think that they must not be present at the sacrificial prayers, on the ground that the **Station** must be dissolved by reception of the Lord's Body. Does, then, the Eucharist cancel a service devoted to God, or bind it more to God? Will not your **Station** be more solemn if you have withal stood at God's altar? When the Lord's Body has been received and reserved.

In this treatise on repentance, Tertullian answers some objections by some people, who thought that if you are fasting (on Wednesday or Friday) and then attend a Liturgy and have communion, you can break your fast. Note how he speaks about “God’s altar” and receiving “the Lord’s Body”. Tertullian continues further by saying: (page 689)

We, however (just as we have received), only on the day of the Lord's Resurrection ought to guard not only against kneeling, but every posture and office of solicitude; deferring even our businesses lest we give any place to the devil. Similarly, too, in the period of Pentecost; which period we distinguish by the same solemnity of exultation. But who would hesitate every day to prostrate himself before God, at least in the first prayer with which we enter on the daylight? At **fasts**, moreover, and **Stations**, no prayer should be made without kneeling.

Tertullian is explaining another custom of the church in his time: that of not kneeling at prayer on Sundays and the fifty days of Pentecost. He then adds that at “fasts” and “Stations” no prayer should be made without kneeling. Note that he says “fasts” in the plural, denoting that the church had more than one fast besides Wednesday and Friday.

Besides abstaining from food till the ninth hour (3 pm) the early Christians ate a vegetarian diet. This abstention from certain foods during a fast is referred to as **Xerophagy**. Some early Christians, called “Psychics”, raised some opposition saying that this is an innovation, not sanctioned by the Lord, and not needed for our spiritual struggle. To

them, Tertullian wrote:

**TERTULLIAN :ON FASTING ANF Vol IV page 105**

[The Jews] whom, by their regretful hankering after flesh, and their recollection of their Egyptian plenties, they were ever exacerbating: "Who shall feed us with flesh? there have come into our mind the fish which in Egypt we were wont to eat freely, and the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. But now our soul is arid nought save manna do our eyes see!" Thus used they, too, (like the Psychics), to find the angelic bread of xerophagy displeasing: they preferred the fragrance of garlic and onion to that of heaven. And therefore from men so ungrateful all that was more pleasing and appetizing was withdrawn, for the sake at once of punishing gluttony and exercising continence, that the former might be condemned, the latter practically learned.

Tertullian notes that Saint Paul tells us of the many fasts he had:

I think, moreover, that the apostle too, in the Second of Corinthians, among his labours, and perils, and hardships, after "hunger and thirst," enumerates "fasts" also "very many".

Then, returning to Xerophagy or avoiding rich foods during fasts, he adds: (page 107)

Daniel and his brethren, preferring as they did a diet of vegetables and the beverage of water to the royal dishes and decanters, and being found as they were therefore "more handsome" (lest any be apprehensive on the score of his paltry body, to boot!), sides being spiritually cultured into the bargain.

Tertullian goes back to another instance of fasting recorded for us in the Book of Daniel: (page 107)

"In those days," he says, "I Daniel was mourning during three weeks: pleasant bread I ate not; flesh and wine entered not into

my mouth; with oil I was not anointed; until three weeks were consummated:" which being elapsed, an angel was sent out (from God), addressing him on this wise: "Daniel, thou art a man pitiable; fear not: since, from the first day on which thou gavest thy soul to recogitation and to humiliation before God, thy word hath been heard, and I am entered at thy word." Thus the "pitiable" spectacle and the humiliation of xerophagies expel fear, and attract the ears of God, and make men masters of secrets.

Commenting on these writings of Tertullian, the editor of ANF writes:

In our age of an entire relaxation of discipline, the enthusiast (Tertullian) may nevertheless awaken us, perhaps, to honest self-examination as to our manner of life, in view of the example of Christ and His apostles, and their holy precepts. (Page 114)

Note that the editor considers this way of fasting which is preserved in our church as the practice and "holy precepts" of the apostles. The editor then adds this: (page 115)

Think of our Master's fast among the wild beasts! Let us condescend to go back to Clement, to Origen, and to Tertullian to learn the practical laws of the Gospel against avarice, luxury, and "the deceitfulness of sin." I am emboldened to say this by some remarkable words which I find, to my surprise, thrown out in a scientific work proceeding from Harvard University. It is with exceeding gratitude that I quote as follows: "It is well to go away at times, that we may see another aspect of human life which still survives in the East, and to feel that influence which led even the Christ into the wilderness to prepare for the struggle with the animal nature of man. We need something of the experience of the Anchorites of Egypt, to impress us with the great truth that the distinction between the spiritual and the material remains broad and clear, even if with the scalpel of our modern philosophy we cannot completely dissect the two; and this experience will give us courage to cherish our aspirations, keep bright our hopes, and hold fast our Christian faith until the consummation comes."

## **5. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD SET FEASTS:**

a. The Bible tells us so:

But [Paul] bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this **feast** that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. (ACT 18:21)

The feast St. Paul refers to here must be Easter, the feast of the resurrection of the Lord, which dates to the time of the apostles.

For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. (ACT 20:16)

But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. (1CO 16:8)

These two verses tell us that the church even at the time of the writing of First Corinthians (around the middle of the first century) celebrated Pentecost.

b. The Fathers tell us so:

**THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE PHILIPPIANS** ANF Vol I page 119

Do not lightly esteem the festivals.

Even around the year 107 (when this Epistle was written), the church had set festivals that the faithful were exhorted to regard highly.

**CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: THE INSTRUCTOR** (end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century)  
ANF Vol II page 243

Those who are already advanced in life may partake more cheerfully of the draught, to warm by the harmless medicine of the vine the chill of age, which the decay of time has produced. For old men's passions are not, for the most part, stirred to such agitation as to drive them to the shipwreck of drunkenness. For being moored by reason and time, as by anchors, they stand with

greater ease the storm of passions which rushes down from intemperance. They also may be permitted to indulge in pleasantries at **feasts**. But to them also let the limit of their potations be the point up to which they keep their reason unwavering, their memory active, and their body unmoved and unshaken by wine.

Clement's book "The Instructor" is the first book to be written about Christian ethics. In this section about drinking wine, he gives permission to older people to drink it judiciously, especially at feasts.

**METHODIUS: ORATION ON THE PALMS:** ANF Vol VI page 394

Come then, beloved, and let us, too, with prepared hearts, and with ears intent, listen to what the Lord our God shall say unto us out of the prophets and Gospels concerning this most sacred **feast**. ... Let us all come together cheerfully; let us all receive Him gladly, and hold our **feast**<sup>1</sup> with all honesty. Instead of our garments, let us strew our hearts before Him. In psalms and hymns, let us raise to Him our shouts of thanksgiving; and, without ceasing, let us exclaim, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

**CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES. BOOK III-V** ANF Vol VII page 443

Brethren, observe the **festival days**; and first of all the **birthday** which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth of the ninth month; after which let the **Epiphany** be to you the most honoured, in which the Lord made to you a display of His own Godhead, and let it take place on the sixth of the tenth month.

Here is mention of Christmas and Epiphany in a document from the first century.

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<sup>1</sup>Saint Methodius lived in the third century. He wrote this sermon on the occasion of Palm Sunday, which he calls a "most sacred feast"

All who worthily observe the festival of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, acquire as their meet recompense the fuller interest in the message, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured!" It is our duty, therefore, to keep this **feast**, seeing that it has filled the whole world with joy and gladness. And let us keep it with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.

**Feasts of the martyrs:**

The Early Church paid a lot of attention to the relics of the martyrs and from the earliest times, the faithful held annual memorial for them. The Book of Acts tells us that after Stephen was martyred, "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." (Ac 8:2)

**THE MARTYRDOM OF IGNATIUS (AD 107) ANF Vol I page 131**

He was thus cast to the wild beasts close, beside the temple, that so by them the desire of the holy martyr Ignatius should be fulfilled, according to that which is written, "The desire of the righteous is acceptable [to God]," to the effect that he might not be troublesome to any of the brethren by the gathering of his remains, even as he had in his Epistle expressed a wish beforehand that so his end might be. For only the harder portions of his holy remains were left, which were conveyed to Antioch and wrapped in linen, as an inestimable treasure left to the holy Church by the grace which was in the martyr. ... and now we have made known to you both the day and the time [when these things happened], that, assembling ourselves together according to the time of his martyrdom, we may have fellowship with the champion and noble martyr of Christ, who trode under foot the devil, and perfected the course which, out of love to Christ, he had desired.

This noble bishop of Antioch was martyred in the year 107 AD. The story of his martyrdom was written by eyewitnesses. Note that even

though a few of his remains were left, they were esteemed by the faithful as a treasure. The writers of the account tell the rest of the Christians why they wrote the story including the day and time of his martyrdom, “*that, assembling ourselves together according to the time of his martyrdom, we may have fellowship with the champion and noble martyr of Christ.*” This is the earliest record of having an annual commemoration for a martyr.

The clearest indication of this ancient custom of the Church comes from the writings of the North African bishop Cyprian, who himself died as a martyr in the year 258 AD.

**CYPRIAN<sup>1</sup>: EPISTLE XXXIII** ANF Vol V page 313

Laurentius and Egnatius, who themselves also were once warring in the camps of the world, but were true and spiritual soldiers of God, casting down the devil by the confession of Christ, merited palms and crowns from the Lord by their illustrious passion. We always offer sacrifices for them, as you remember, as often as we celebrate the passions and days of the martyrs in the **annual commemoration**.<sup>2</sup>

## **6. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD SET TIMES FOR PRAYER**

a. The Bible tells us so:

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. (ACT 3:1)

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. (ACT 10:9)

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. (ACT 16:25)

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<sup>1</sup>St. Cyprian became bishop of Carthage in North Africa in 248

<sup>2</sup>Instance of “offering sacrifices” (Eucharist) and annual commemoration of the saints circa A.D. 250



b. The Fathers tell us so:

**TERTULLIAN: ON PRAYER** ANF Vol III page 689

Touching the time, however, the extrinsic observance of certain hours will not be unprofitable--those common hours, I mean, which mark the intervals of the day--the third, the sixth, the ninth--which we may find in the Scriptures to have been more solemn than the rest. The first infusion of the Holy Spirit into the congregated disciples took place at "the third hour." Peter, on the day on which he experienced the vision of Universal Community, (exhibited) in that small vessel, had ascended into the more lofty parts of the house, for prayer's sake "at the sixth hour." The same (apostle) was going into the temple, with John, at the ninth hour," when he restored the paralytic to his health. Albeit these practices stand simply without any precept for their observance, still it may be granted a good thing to establish some definite presumption, which may both add stringency to the admonition to, pray, and may, as it were by a law, tear us out from our businesses unto such a duty; so that--what we read to have been observed by Daniel also, in accordance (of course) with Israel's discipline--we pray at least not less than thrice in the day, debtors as we are to Three--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: of course, in addition to our regular prayers which are due, without any admonition, on the entrance of light and of night. But, withal, it becomes believers not to take food, and not to go to the bath, before interposing a prayer; for the refreshments and nourishments of the spirit are to be held prior to those of the flesh, and things heavenly prior to things earthly.

Tertullian here recognizes the third, sixth and ninth hours, in addition to the morning and evening prayers. He also admonishes us to pray before eating, and even before we go to the bathroom!

**CYPRIAN: TREATISE IV : ON THE LORD'S PRAYER** ANF Vol V page 457

For upon the disciples at the third hour the Holy Spirit descended, who fulfilled the grace of the Lord's promise.

Moreover, at the sixth hour, Peter, going up unto the house-top, was instructed as well by the sign as by the word of God admonishing him to receive all to the grace of salvation, whereas he was previously doubtful of the receiving of the Gentiles to baptism. And from the sixth hour to the ninth, the Lord, being crucified, washed away our sins by His blood; and that He might redeem and quicken us, He then accomplished His victory by His passion. ... we must also pray in the morning, that the Lord's resurrection may be celebrated by morning prayer. ... Let not us, then, who are in Christ--that is, always in the lights cease from praying even during night. Thus the widow Anna, without intermission praying and watching, persevered in deserving well of God, as it is written in the Gospel: "She departed not," it says, "from the temple, serving with fastings and prayers night and day."

## **7. THE EARLY CHURCH PRACTISED THE SIGN OF THE CROSS:**

Although the Bible does not mention the sign of the Cross specifically, yet many passages allude to it, as in the morning Psalm of Tut 17 (the feast of the exaltation of the Cross): "Thou hast given a sign to them that fear thee, that they may flee from the face of the bow: That thy beloved ones may be delivered." (Translated from Coptic)

The Fathers, however, preserve for us the antiquity of this custom in the Church, which they simply refer to as "the sign":

**TERTULLIAN: THE CHAPLET** ANF Vol III page 94

At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign.

Saint Hippolytus<sup>1</sup> says the same, almost word for word: (page 103)

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<sup>1</sup>Saint Hippolytus was a disciple of Clement of Alexandria, together with Origen. His Feast day is February 12 (Meshir 5)

In all the ordinary occasions of life we furrow our foreheads with the sign of the Cross, in which we glory none the less because it is regarded as our shame by the heathen in presence of whom it is a profession of our faith.

## 8. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD MYSTERIES (SACRAMENTS):

The word Sacrament is taken from the Latin *sacramentum*, which is a translation of the Greek *mysterion* or mystery. The Bible speaks of mysteries as we shall see from these quotations:

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 1 Co 4:1

Here Saint Paul tells us that people should think of him and his fellow apostles not only as ministers or servants of God but as stewards (persons entrusted with administering) the mysteries or sacraments of God.

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Eph 5:32

Here Saint Paul describes marriage as a “great mystery” but he tells us that the greatness of this mystery or sacrament lies in the fact that it is actually a mirror image to the relationship of Christ and the Church.

The Fathers of the church from beginning, spoke freely of the sacraments of the Church as we shall see from the following examples:

The early church writers had lots to say about sacraments:

**Tertullian: On Baptism** ANF Vol III page 669

HAPPY is our **sacrament of water**, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life!

Tertullian describes Baptism as “the sacrament of water” as a means for washing away the sins and admittance to eternal life.

Let us beware of such dangerous temptations of pride, and let us rather consider the fact that the Apostle Paul himself, although stricken down and admonished by the voice of God from heaven, was yet sent to a man to receive the **sacraments** and be admitted into the Church; and that Cornelius the centurion, although an angel announced to him that his prayers were heard and his alms had in remembrance, was yet handed over to Peter for instruction, and not only received the **sacraments** from the apostle's hands, but was also instructed by him as to the proper objects of faith, hope, and love. And without doubt it was possible to have done everything through the instrumentality of angels, but the condition of our race would have been much more degraded if God had not chosen to make use of men as the ministers of His word to their fellow-men.

That God has in His infinite wisdom decreed that the sacraments are to be administered by the “stewards of His sacraments” is made evident to us by Saint Augustin, with strong Biblical proofs. For though Saint Paul was called by Christ Who appeared to him personally, he had to receive the sacraments from a fellow servant Ananias (Act 9:10-18). The same happened to Cornelius to whom an angel spoke.

**ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: CATECHETICAL LECTURES**

**LECTURE XXI. :ON CHRISM.**

NICENE/POSTNICENE FATHERS SERIES II VOL VII page 150

For as the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Ghost, is mere bread no longer, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no more simple ointment, nor (so to say) common, after invocation, but it is Christ's gift of grace, and, by the advent of the Holy Ghost, is made fit to impart His Divine Nature. Which ointment is symbolically applied to thy forehead and thy other senses; and while thy body is anointed with the visible ointment, thy soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.

Here Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (one of the 318 assembled at Nicea) instructs catechumens in the sacrament of Chrismation.

**TERTULLIAN: THE CHAPLET** ANF VOL III page 94

We take also, in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the **sacrament of the Eucharist**, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike.

Here Tertullian refers to the sacrament of the Eucharist which the early Christians partook of and which he describes as commanded by the Lord. He tells us that the Eucharist is to be taken from the hands of “*none but the presidents*” (the clergy presiding at the Liturgy of the Eucharist)

**SAINT AUGUSTIN: THE SEVEN BOOKS AGAINST THE DONATISTS, BOOK V**  
NICENE/POST NICENE FATHERS SERIES I Vol IV page 474

Wherefore God gives the **sacrament of grace** even through the hands of wicked men, but the grace itself only by Himself or through His saints. And therefore He gives remission of sins either of Himself, or through the members of that dove to whom He says, “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

Saint Augustin refers to the Sacrament of confession as the “sacrament of grace” and further teaches that forgiveness of sins can be given even at the hands of a wicked man, since the grace comes from God.

**SAINT AMBROSE: ON REPENTANCE**  
NICENE/POST NICENE FATHERS SERIES II Vol X page 331

You who make a distinction between sins, some of which you consider that you can loose, and others which you consider to be without remedy. But God does not make a distinction, Who has promised His mercy to all, and granted to His priests the power of loosing without any exception.

Writing to the Novatians who taught that there were some sins that could not be forgiven by the priests, Saint Ambrose corrects them by saying that God granted the priests the power to forgive all sins.

**JOHN CASSIAN AGAINST NESTORIUS, BOOK VI CHAPTER XVIII.**

N/PNF SERIES II VOL XI page 600

**THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION IS NECESSARY FOR THE LAPSED FOR THEIR SALVATION.**

Acknowledge the sacraments of your salvation, by which you were initiated and regenerated. They are of no less use to you now than they were then; for they can now regenerate you by penance, as they then gave you birth through the Font.

In his argument with Nestorius the heretic, John Cassian speaks of the Sacrament of Confession as the “sacrament of reconciliation”. He compares the Sacrament of Baptism as the one that gives us new birth “through the font” and the Sacrament of Confession that “regenerates us through penance”. He considers both as “sacraments of our salvation” or sacraments necessary for salvation. These are the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, Confession and Communion. The other three sacraments of anointing of the sick, marriage and holy orders are not considered necessary for salvation. For one can be saved without being married, being sick or being ordained!

**SAINT AUGUSTIN :ON VIRGINITY**

N/PNF SERIES I Vol III page 420

Let marriages possess their own good, not that they beget sons, but that honestly, that lawfully, that modestly, that in a spirit of fellowship they beget them, and educate them, after they have been begotten, with cooperation, with wholesome teaching, and earnest purpose: in that they keep the faith of the couch one with another; in that they violate not the **sacrament of wedlock**.

**SAINT AUGUSTIN: On Marriage Chapter 11: THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**

N/PNF SERIES I Vol V page 268

It is certainly not fecundity only, the fruit of which consists of offspring, nor chastity only, whose bond is fidelity, but also a

certain **sacramental bond** in marriage which is recommended to believers in wedlock. Accordingly it is en-joined by the apostle: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church.”

In these two excerpts from Saint Augustin’s writings, he defends marriage as a sacrament in its own right and not only as a means of fecundity or having children. He argues for a sacramental bond in marriage in which the love between husband and wife is an image of the love between Christ and the Church.

**JOHN CASSIAN: THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF ABBOT THEONAS CHAPTER IX**  
N/PNF SERIES II VOL XI page 507

For I acknowledge and honour my helpmeet assigned to me by the word of the Lord, and I do not refuse to be joined to her in an unbroken tie of love in Christ, nor do I separate from me what the Lord joined to me by the law of the original condition, if only you yourself will be what your Maker meant you to be. But if you will not be a helpmeet, but prefer to make yourself a deceiver and an assistance not to me but to the adversary, and fancy that the **sacrament of matrimony** was granted to you for this reason that you may deprive yourself of this salvation which is offered to you, and also hold me back from following the Saviour as a disciple, then I will resolutely lay hold on the words which were uttered by the lips of Abbot John, or rather of Christ Himself, so that no carnal affection may be able to tear me away from spiritual blessings, for He says: “He that hateth not father and mother and children and brothers and sisters and wife and lands, yea and his own soul also, cannot be My disciple.”

Here, John Cassian, quoting one of the Fathers of the Egyptian desert in his famous book “The Conferences”, gives us a rare glimpse into the Coptic Church’s belief about matrimony in the latter part of the fifth century. The marital union is described as an “unbroken tie of love in Christ” It is declared as the “Sacrament of Matrimony” without any hint of ambiguity. The passage however confirms that if marriage becomes a hindrance to one’s own salvation, then one has to prefer the love of God to any human love.

#### SAINT AUGUSTIN: ON THE GOOD OF MARRIAGE

N/PNF SERIES I VOL III page 408

Forsooth in the marriage of one woman the sanctity of the **Sacrament** is of more avail than the fruitfulness of the womb.

Here Saint Augustin argues against those who advocate re-marriage if the wife is barren by saying the sanctity of the Sacrament is more important than having children.

#### SAINT AUGUSTIN: ON THE GOOD OF MARRIAGE

N/PNF SERIES I VOL III page 412

In like manner as if there take place an ordination of clergy in order to form a congregation of people, although the congregation of people follow not, yet there remains in the ordained persons the **Sacrament of Ordination**; and if, for any fault, any be removed from his office, he will not be without the Sacrament of the Lord once for all set upon him, albeit continuing unto condemnation.

In this important reference to the Sacrament of Holy Orders (ordination), Saint Augustin reminds us that the gifts of God are “once and for all” An ordained person can be defrocked but he does not lose the sacrament given to him by God, even if he perishes in his sin.

#### SAINT AUGUSTIN: THE CITY OF GOD BOOK XXII CHAPTER 8

N/PNF SERIES I-VOL II page 485

For even now miracles are wrought in the name of Christ, whether by His **sacraments** or by the prayers or relics of His saints.

Saint Augustin tells us that in his time miracles (of cures) were wrought in the name of Christ. These cures were done either through the Sacraments (a reference to the Sacrament of the anointing of the sick) or through the intercessions of the saints or through their relics.

The reference to miracles wrought through the intercession of the saints and their relics is very interesting. This is proof that the early church esteemed the intercession of the saints as well as their relics.



## 9. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION:

The Apostles went on to preach the Gospel, and wherever they went, they ordained **Bishops, Priests, and Deacons**. They did this by **laying their hands** on them. The Bible has many examples of this ordination by the laying-on of hands of the Apostles:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and **laid their hands on them**, they sent them away. (ACT 13:2-3).

Paul and Barnabas were **ordained by the laying-on of the hands** after they were **called** by the Holy Spirit to the ministry. Later on, Paul and Barnabas would do the same, ordaining **Priests** (called Elders in KJV) by **laying on their hands on them**.

And when they had **ordained** them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. (ACT 14:23).

St. Paul ordained two of his disciples as **Bishops**, these are Timothy and Titus. He reminds Timothy of this saying: “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the **putting on of my hands**.” (2TI 1:6)

He admonishes Timothy to do the same by choosing persons that are suitable for ordination:

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.(2TI 2:2)

He warns him however not to ordain any person hastily, since he will be responsible for the actions of those on whom he lays his hands: “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.” (1TI 5:22).

He writes to Titus, his disciple, and now Bishop of the Mediterranean Island of Crete:

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. (TIT 1:5)

The same happened with the other Apostles, they ordained Bishops and Priests and gave the Bishops authority to ordain other Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In a very short time, this three tiered system of the clergy was established in every Apostolic church through the tradition of **Apostolic Succession**. This is obvious in many passages in the Bible:

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. (PHI 1:1)

The ancient writers of the Church considered this Apostolic succession as the only proof of orthodoxy:

#### **TERTULLIAN: THE PRESCRIPTION AGAINST HERETICS**

ANF VOL III page 252

Since the Lord Jesus Christ sent the apostles to preach, (our rule is) that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed; for “no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.” Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach--that, of course, which He revealed to them. Now, what that was which they preached--in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them--can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles founded in person, by declaring the gospel to them directly themselves, both by mouth, and subsequently by their epistles. If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine which agrees with the **apostolic churches**--those moulds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the (said) churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God.

Tertullian continues his argument that only the churches that have this valid apostolic succession have the truth, by challenging the heretics to produce the records that proof their apostolic succession: (page 258)

But if there be any (heresies) which are bold enough to plant themselves in the midst Of the apostolic age, that they may thereby seem to have been handed down by the apostles, because they existed in the time of the apostles, we can say: Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [that first bishop of theirs] shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men,--a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers.

Apostolic churches kept a register of all of their bishops showing that their first bishop was ordained by an apostle. Our church has such a register that starts with Saint Anianus our first bishop, who was ordained by Saint Marc the apostle.

## **10. THE EARLY CHURCH BELIEVED IN HOLY TRADITION:**

The church started through the preaching of the Apostles. The Apostles not only deposited into the churches they established the faith in the Trinity and the salvation through the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord, but also gave them traditions and ordinances. These traditions and ordinances were not all written, but some were given as oral traditions: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the **traditions** which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” (II Th 2:15) These traditions were not invented by St. Paul, but he had received them from the Lord, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” (1 Cor 11:23)

St. Paul praised the Corinthians for keeping the ordinances he delivered to them, “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” (1 Cor 11:2) He tells them that those who rebel against these traditions are going against the “custom of the churches of God,” “But if any man

seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” (1 Cor 11:16) He even commands the faithful to avoid those who despise the tradition he delivered to them:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the **tradition** which he received of us. (II Th 3:6)

The early writers of the church defended the traditions they received from the Apostles, and which the Apostles received from the Lord. Here are some samples:

**IRENÆUS<sup>1</sup> AGAINST HERESIES -- BOOK III (circa 180 a.d.)**

**APOSTOLIC CHURCHES POSSESS THE TRUTH, THEY DO NOT NEED OPINIONS OF OTHERS** ANF VOL I page 416

Since the apostles, like a rich man depositing his money in a bank, lodged in the church's hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account are we bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the thing pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, **and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth.** ... Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, in that case, to **follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?**

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<sup>1</sup>Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, born 130 a.d. became bishop of Lyons 177 a.d. Polycarp was a disciple of John, he is the “Angel of the church of Smyrna” (Rev 2:8) What Irenaeus writes here, he received from Polycarp, who received from John, who was “the disciple whom Jesus loved”

If no passage of Scripture has prescribed it, assuredly custom, which without doubt flowed from tradition, has confirmed it. For how can anything come into use, if it has not first been handed down? Even in pleading tradition, written authority, you say, must be demanded. Let us inquire, therefore, whether tradition, unless it be written, should not be admitted. Certainly we shall say that it ought not to be admitted, if no cases of other practices which, without any written instrument, we maintain on the ground of tradition alone, and the countenance thereafter of custom, affords us any precedent.

When we are going to enter the water(to be baptized), but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel.

We take also (communion), in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike. As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honours<sup>1</sup>.

We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Whitsunday. We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, be cast upon the ground.

At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign(of the cross).

If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held

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<sup>1</sup>Here is mention of the custom of making offering (of the Eucharist) on the anniversary of the death of loved ones

forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer.

**THE CANONICAL EPISTLE OF PETER, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA** (Saint Peter Seal of the Martyrs) ANF Volume VI page 278

No one shall find fault with us for observing the fourth day of the week, (Wednesday) and the preparation, (Friday) on which it is reasonably enjoined us to fast **according to the tradition**. On the fourth day, indeed, because on it the Jews took counsel for the betrayal of the Lord; and on the sixth, because on it He himself suffered for us. But the Lord's day we celebrate as a day of joy, because on it He rose again, on which day we have received it for a custom not even to bow the knee.

**FRAGMENTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF PETER ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA** ANTE NICENE FATHERS VOLUME VI page 282

And not as some who, carried along by ignorance, confidently affirm that after He had eaten the Passover, He was betrayed; which we neither learn from the holy evangelists, **nor has any of the blessed apostles handed it down to us.**

In these two passages, Saint Peter, Pope and seal of the martyrs, here tells us that fasting on Wednesday and Friday, as well as not bending the knees on Sunday are old customs in the church **according to the tradition**. Neither of these were mentioned in the Bible but were universally accepted in the Church on the authority of **received unwritten tradition**.

He also argues another point of interpretation of the gospel by the fact that “we neither learn from the holy evangelists, nor has any of the blessed apostles handed it down to us.”

**SAINT ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC: FESTAL LETTER XXXIX**  
(NICENE/POST NICENE, SERIES II, VOLUME XIV page 603)

As the heretics are quoting apocryphal writings, an evil which was rife even as early as when St. Luke wrote his gospel, therefore I have thought good to set forth clearly what books have been

**received by us through tradition** as belonging to the Canon, and which we believe to be divine. (*Here Saint Athanasius gives a list of the Books of the Old and New Testament that are canonical*)

Saint Athanasius here tells us that even the canon of the Bible (the list that tells us which books are canonical) was **“received by us through tradition”**

**COMMENTARY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, Homily XLV (Acts 20)** Nicene/Post Nicene, series I Vol XI page 274

For, “remember,” he says, “the words of the Lord which he spake: It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And where said He this? **Perhaps the Apostles delivered it by unwritten tradition.**

In St. Paul’s speech to the elders of the Church of Ephesus recorded to us in Acts 20: 18-35, he exhorts them to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Ac 20:35). No where in the Gospels do we find this saying. St. John Chrysostom argues that this could have been delivered by the apostles as an **unwritten tradition.**

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## **HISTORY, THOUGHT AND PRACTICE OF THE COPTS<sup>1</sup>**

The term Copt is equivalent to the word Egyptian. It is derived from the Greek Aigyptos. So, the Copts are the descendants of the old Egyptians who built the pyramids. The Old Testament mentions Egypt more often than any other country except for Israel. Egypt was a land of plenty, described as being even as the garden of the Lord. The Patriarch Abraham sojourned there when there was a famine in the land of Canaan.

The Old Testament narrates for us the story of Joseph and how he was sold as a slave in Egypt and how he rose to become second only to Pharaoh. For more than 400 years the descendants of Israel lived in Egypt, where they both influenced and were influenced by the culture of the Egyptians. The Book of Acts tells us that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." It is no secret that the wisdom books of the Old Testament (Job, Psalms and Proverbs) have many similarities to the Egyptian Wisdom writings. Although the Hebrews and the Egyptians worshipped different Gods, yet there must have been some interchange in the way each of these two nations worshipped their own deity.

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<sup>1</sup>Lecture by Father Athanasius Iskander to students of the Department of Religion and Culture, University of Wilfred Laurier in Waterloo, February 14, 2008



I have an anecdote to share with you in this regard. In the mid nineties, CBC TV in Halifax decided to do a program about the worship rites of Easter among Eastern Christians. At that time I was a visiting priest to our Coptic church in Halifax. The producer of the program, who was Jewish, told me that the chants used by the Copts are very similar to the Jewish chants that are used today in the synagogue. I jokingly told him: You guys spent 400 years among us, you must have learned a thing or two. He laughed and added, yes we were working for less than minimal wage.

Even after Israel went out of Egypt, there was a lot of interaction between the two cultures. The Book of Ezekiel tells us how the Israelis made a pact with the Egyptians against their Babylonian occupiers, and how this angered Yahweh and brought his wrath against both Israel and Egypt.

Even after the Babylonian captivity of the kingdom of Judah, the Bible tells us that some Jews went down to Egypt against the advise of their own seers and prophets. In the remote island of Philae on the Nile which is near the land of Nubia at the southern tip of Egypt, there are the remains of a Jewish synagogue that probably dates to that period.

As the Jews revolted against their successive oppressors, the Greeks and then the Romans, Egypt became increasingly a favourite destination for Jews who wanted to exercise their life and religion in freedom.

There were two main areas where Jews settled in Egypt, one at the old town of Babylon, which is modern day Old Cairo. Here the poor settled and acquired trades and pawn shops, where they spoke their own dialects of Hebrew. The other area was Alexandria, where the intellectuals lived. Those were the Hellenised Jews who spoke mainly Greek. There came a time that Alexandria had more Jews than the land of Palestine.

200 years before the advent of Christ, something monumental happened in Egypt, when Ptolemy IV, king of Egypt ordered the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. We cannot possibly over-estimate this historical feat, which made possible to the Gentile world to get to know the Old Testament in the lingua franca of the time; Greek. The translation was done by 70 Jewish Scholars and thus the Translation became known As the Septuagint. This translation was a necessary step for the propagation of the Greek New Testament

which was to take place 200 years later. Allow me to quote what Cleveland Coxe wrote about this important milestone:

The translation of the Hebrew Scriptures to the dialect of the Hellenes, and the creation of a new terminology in the language of the Greeks, by which ideas of faith and of truth might find access to the mind of a heathen world, were preliminaries to the preaching of the Gospel to mankind and to the composition of the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour.

An even more important event is the sojourn of the holy family into Egypt, narrated to us in the Gospel according to St. Matthew (2:13) where we are told that: “the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”

That visit is so important to the Copts today, in such a way that every single location where the holy family set foot is commemorated by either a church or a monastery.

### **CHRISTIAN EGYPT:**

Egypt was one of the first countries to embrace Christianity. No doubt the interaction with the Jews across the ages, as well as the fact that the Jewish scripture was translated in Alexandria, which at that time was the major center of learning in the Greek speaking world, made this possible.

Many factors facilitated the spread of Christianity in Egypt. The concept of the trinity was not totally new to the Egyptians, they had their own trinity of Isis, Osiris and Horus. They even experimented with Monotheism during the reign of the philosopher king Akhenaton. The sign of the cross was also familiar to them, since the word ONKH which meant life was represented in hieroglyphic by a cross with a ring on top of it. Devout Copts also believe that the sojourn of the infant Christ among them for three and a half years was the first step of their conversion. There are many popular legends that still exist about some miracles that were done by Jesus while in Egypt. Most of these come from the apocryphal Infancy Gospels. But here is one legend that survives even today:

The story goes like this: the Virgin Mary wanted to bake some bread, and as was usual in those days, she knocked on a neighbour's door to ask for a piece of leaven, but the people were so mean. Recognizing her Semitic features, they refused her the leaven. The lane in which that house existed became cursed so that bread cannot rise in any of the houses in that lane. Some people will even show you that lane in Old Cairo, where people will testify to this.

The Book of Acts tells us that on the day of Pentecost, among those converted by the Apostles were, “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) We are later told that those included people from Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene.

These newly converted Christians must have started spreading the Good News as soon as they were back into their own countries. The Church historian Eusebius speaks of small communities of these new converts already forming around Lake Mareotis in Lower Egypt. They were called *Therapeutae*, or healers, because people brought the sick to them to be healed, and those who were afflicted by unclean spirits to be cleansed. Not only did these *Therapeutae* heal the people's physical illnesses, but they also healed them from their spiritual illnesses by turning them back from the worship of idols to the knowledge of the true God.<sup>1</sup>

The oldest Biblical papyri were found in Egypt. Some of these, in the Coptic language were found buried in the sands of remote regions in Upper Egypt, a testimony to the rapid spread of Christianity into Egypt. Most of these predate the oldest authoritative Greek versions of the Scripture in the fourth and fifth centuries including the *Codex Sinaiticus*, the *Codex Alexandrinus*, the *Vaticanus*, and the *Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus*. ... Fragments of those papyri dating from the second century, in both Coptic and Greek, are to be found in numerous manuscript repositories in the world. The most monumental collection is the Chester Beatty Papyri, now in Dublin, Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

According to our tradition, Egypt was the place where the first Epistle of St. Peter was written. It was also the place where the Gospel according to St. Mark was written.

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<sup>1</sup>Eusebius of Caesaria: Ecclesiastical History

<sup>2</sup>Ateya, Aziz: The Copts and Christian civilization

Some commentators believe that the Epistle to the Hebrews was also written in Egypt and that its author was Apollos.

How and when did St. Peter visit Egypt where he wrote his first Epistle is the subject of great speculation. According to Dr. Samir Girgis, the visit must have followed St. Peter's miraculous release from prison reported in Acts 12, which is dated A.D. 43<sup>1</sup>

Acts 12 tells us that after his release by the Angel, Peter came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. (Acts 12:12) Peter told those gathered how the Lord had brought him out of the prison, asked them to bring the good news to James and the brethren, then he departed and went to another place. Acts 12:19 tells us that the next morning, Herod, looked for Peter everywhere but could not find him. It is very safe to assume that Peter left the country, knowing that Herod intended to kill him after the Passover (Acts 12:4)

It is possible that, following the example of his Master, he fled into Egypt, accompanied by John Mark. Mark who was raised up in Lybia, must have taken the trip to Jerusalem, once a year, passing through Egypt, and would make an excellent travel companion to Saint Peter.

Coming to Egypt, there were two places where they might take refuge among the Jewish community, One of them was Alexandria, with its large Greek speaking Jewish community, and the other was Babylon, an ancient city, the ruins of which are still visible on the outskirts of modern day Cairo. Babylon had a sizeable Jewish minority and a large Synagogues, and it was there that they must have remained until the death of king Herod in A.D. 44. It was there that St. Peter must have written his first Epistle.

This date also agrees with the assertions of Josephus, Eusebius and others that St. Mark's first entry into Egypt was in the year 43 A.D.

There is internal evidence for this in the Epistle. The ending of the Epistle, says, "The church which is at Babylon, elected together with you salutes you, and so doth Mark my son." The content of the Epistle, also reinforces the argument that St. Peter wrote it after fleeing Jerusalem. The Theme is one of encouragement of early Christians dispersed because of persecution (like St. Peter himself, who fled Jerusalem because of the persecution.)

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<sup>1</sup>Girgis, Samir Fawzy: A Chronology of Saint Mark

If we accept this chronology, then First Peter would be the first of all New Testament writings, and Egypt would be the place where it was written.

Saint Mark came to Egypt once again 18 years later, this time to Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, entering there in the year 61 A.D. It was there that he founded the Coptic Church of Egypt, established an ecclesiastical hierarchy that would remain un-interrupted until the present time, wrote his Gospel, and it was there that he died as a martyr on Easter day of the year 68 A.D.

Because of this early evangelization of Egypt and the speed with which Christianity spread throughout the land, the Egyptians were among the first to spread the message of the Bible in lands far and near.

As early as the second century, we hear of Saint Demetrius, the 12<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Alexandria sending Pantaenus, the dean of the School of Alexandria to convert the Hindus. On the way back, he visits Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, the sojourn and later martyrdom of the Egyptian Theban legion was the catalyst to the conversion of the pagans in Switzerland, southern Germany and Northern Italy.<sup>2</sup>

By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Nubia, Ethiopia , Libya and Pentapolis have already been converted by Egyptian missionaries. The Irish tell us that they have 7 Egyptian monks buried in Ireland. They came to preach to the Irish long before St. Patrick set foot on Irish soil.<sup>3</sup>

The British tell us about Egyptian missionary enterprises in Britain especially around Glastonbury. I would like to quote the eminent British historian Stanley Lane-Poole, who wrote,

We do not yet know how much we in the British Isles owe to these remote hermits. It is more than probable that to them we are indebted for the first preaching of the Gospel in England, where, till the coming of Augustine, the Egyptian monastic rule prevailed. But more important is the belief that Irish Christianity, the great civilizing agent of the early Middle Ages among the northern nations, was the child of the Egyptian

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<sup>1</sup>Ateya, Aziz: The Copts and Christian civilization

<sup>2</sup>Girgis, Samir Fawzy: Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion

<sup>3</sup>King, Archdale: The rites of Eastern Christendom

### THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA:

The Book of Acts tells us about an Egyptian convert from Judaism called Apollos. Acts 18 describes him as an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in the spirit, who spoke boldly in the synagogues and mightily convinced the Jews, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. (Act 18: 24-28) He was so good, that when he went to Corinth, he caused a problem, for it seems that the intelligentsia of that city who liked his sophistication took him as their champion. That unfortunately led to a division in that church. When Apollos learned of this he withdrew from the scene as we are told by St. Paul in 1 CO 16:12. We hear nothing more about Apollos in the Book of Acts. Some believe that, when he heard about Saint Mark's successful preaching in Alexandria, Apollos' native city, he returned to that city to work with Saint Mark.

Coxe tells us that "The genius of Apollos was revived in his native city, A succession of doctors was there to arise, like him, "eloquent men and mighty in the scriptures." He was speaking about the great school of Alexandria that he very strongly believes was founded by Apollos.<sup>2</sup>

The school of Alexandria is described by Eusebius as ancient, and St. Jerome dates its origin to the time of the Apostles. A school that, for the next 4 centuries, will make Alexandria "The brain of Christendom."<sup>3</sup> "All the learning of Christendom may be traced to this source," declares Coxe.<sup>4</sup>

We know very little about the men who taught in the school until 175 A.D., when we hear of Pantaenus as the head of that school. It was this Pantaenus that was sent on a missionary journey to India by Archbishop Demetrius of Egypt. Pantaenus was a stoic philosopher, who embraced Christianity when his mind discovered that true philosophy was only to be found in Nazareth, in Gesthemane, in Gabbatha and in Golgotha; and he set himself to make it known to the

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<sup>1</sup>Ateya, Aziz: The Copts and Christian civilization

<sup>2</sup>ANF vol 2, p.166, vol 6, p.236, vol 8, p.777

<sup>3</sup>ANF vol 2, p. 165

<sup>4</sup>ANF vol 8, p. 777

world.<sup>1</sup>

Clement of Alexandria who was a pupil of Pantaenus, succeeded him as dean of the School at the close of the second century. Saint Jerome pronounces him “the most learned of all the ancients” while Eusebius calls him, “an incomparable master of Christian Philosophy. But Clement pales when compared to his pupil Origen, who succeeded him as dean of the school of Alexandria at age 18. Dr. F. H. Scrivner, one of the best Biblical Scholars writes this about him,

Origen is the most celebrated biblical critic of antiquity. His is the highest name among the critics and the expositors of the early church. He is perpetually engaged in the discussion of various reading of the New Testament ... seldom have such warmth of fancy and so bold a grasp of mind been united with the life-long, patient industry which procured for this famous man the honourable appellation of “Adamantius.”<sup>2</sup>

Origen wrote more than 6000 tracts mostly about the Bible, and it is said that the average man cannot finish reading what he wrote in a lifetime.<sup>3</sup> He did that by doing what Master chess players do when they match wits with several players at the same time. He would be working on several books in the same time, dictating a paragraph to this scribe then moving on to dictate a paragraph of a different book to another scribe and so on.

Origen’s crowning achievement is his Hexapla, a collation of texts of the Bible in six columns from Greek and Hebrew sources, which he compared and annotated diligently. His labours in exegesis went beyond those of any other expositor, for he wrote most detailed commentaries on every book of the Old Testament and the New.

Origen introduced the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible, a method that suggests that besides the literal meaning of the Biblical text, there is a hidden spiritual meaning. A brilliant example of this is his assertion that the Song of Songs is a book about the love between Christ and the Church or Christ and the human soul, and not only

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol 8, p. 777

<sup>2</sup>ANF vol 4, p.235

<sup>3</sup>Patrick, Theodore Hall: Traditional Egyptian Christianity.

about the love between Solomon and one of his one thousand wives!

Origen was succeeded as dean by his pupil Heraclas , who later became Archbishop of Alexandria around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and became the first Church leader in history to receive the title “Pope” six centuries before the bishops of Rome started to claim that dignity.<sup>1</sup>

St. Dionysius the Great, another pupil of Origen, succeeded Heraclas as Dean of the school of Alexandria, in the year 232 A.D. and upon Heraclas’ repose in the year 246 A.D., he became the Pope of Alexandria and the 14<sup>th</sup> head of the Egyptian Church, counting Saint Mark as its first head.

We are told that “His pen was never idle; his learning and knowledge of the scriptures are apparent even in the fragments that have come down to us, and his fidelity to the tradition received from Origen and Heraclas are not less conspicuous.”<sup>2</sup>

In an age where anathemas were hurled right left and centre, this brilliant Biblical scholar dared to call to question the attribution of the Book of Revelation to the writer of the fourth Gospel and the three Johanne Epistles. He admits that the Book of Revelation is divinely inspired, he often quotes from it. He is filled with awe by it as he tells us here,

Having formed an idea of it as a composition exceeding my capacity of understanding ... I do not reject what I do not understand, but I am only the more filled with wonder at it, in that I have not been able to discern its import.<sup>3</sup>

He admits that its author of Revelation is called John, but whether this John is the Son of Zebedee that wrote the Gospel and the three Epistles, he has his reservations, that are summarized as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>It was Nicholas I who, first claimed for himself the title of Pope in the year 858. Later on Gregory VII (died A.D. 1085) held a synod at Rome and decreed that the title Pope should be peculiar to only one in the Christian world. [ANF vol 5, p. 154]

<sup>2</sup>ANF vol 6, p.77

<sup>3</sup>Dionysius of Alexandria: from the Book on the promises



- The author of Revelation tells us that his name is John more than once, while the Evangelist never proclaims himself either in the Gospel or in the Epistles.
- The character, the form of expression, the whole disposition and execution of the Book of Revelation is different from the others.
- The ideas, expressions and collocations of the author of Revelation are different from those of the author of the Gospel and Epistles.
- The Gospel and the Epistles agree with each other. He lists 21 words or phrases that are commonly used in both the gospel and the Epistles but are not found in Revelation.
- The Gospel and the Epistles are not only without actual errors as regards the Greek language, but were also written with the greatest elegance both in their expressions and their reasoning and in the whole structure of their style, while the writer of Revelation on the other hand uses a dialect and a language that is not of the exact Greek type, and often uses barbarous idioms and solecisms.
- Neither the Gospel nor the Epistles make any mention of Revelation, and Revelation makes no mention of the Gospel or the Epistles.

He then tells us that he writes this not to deny the value of the Book of revelation but rather to set right this matter of dissimilarity subsisting between these writings.

What we have summarized above is an example of literary criticism in its purest form, already in use by an Egyptian Biblical scholar in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Literary criticism is only one of the tools of Biblical and Theological scholarship that were forged in the School of Alexandria, as we are told by the Editors of the Ante-Nicene Fathers,

It was in this school that the technical formulas of the Church were naturally wrought out. The process is like that of the artist who has first to make his own tools. He does many things, and resorts to many contrivances, never afterwards necessary when once the tools are complete and his laboratory furnished with all he wants for his work.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol 6, p. 303

But the finest product of the school of Alexandria is no doubt saint Athanasius. This is what The editors of the Ante-Nicene Fathers say about him,

Athanasius is the grandest figure of the primitive ages since the Apostles fell asleep. Raised up to complete their testimony to the eternal Logos, and to suffer like them. ... He is the perpetual *gnomon* of the Alexandrian School. Its testimony, its prescription, its harmony and unity are all summed up in him.<sup>1</sup>

As an 18 year old deacon at Alexandria, he could foresee the danger to the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, posed by a Lybian priest called Arius. Arius propagated an innocent sounding hymn among the people of Alexandria. The hymn said, "There was a time when the Father was and the Son was not."

Athanasius could see the enormous implications. If the Son came into being later than the Father, then he was created and cannot be equal to the father in His divinity, and the whole belief in the Holy Trinity would be destroyed. He started to fight, what would become the battle of his whole life, to uphold the biblical truth of the divinity of the Son. Declaring that the Logos is Co-eternal and Co-Essential with the Father. Before he was 20, he had already written his masterpiece, "Concerning the incarnation of the Word of God," A classic that is relevant today as it was relevant 16 centuries ago.<sup>2</sup>

We here about him at Nicea, the first Ecumenical council that was held to discuss this heresy that divided the whole church, as a deacon standing beside the blessed Alexander 19<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria, refuting Arius until the heresy was condemned by the 318 bishops assembled there. The greatest trophy that Athanasius and Alexander brought back with them from Nicea was the Creed.

When Alexander reposed in the Lord, Athanasius was chosen to succeed him as the 20<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria, while yet to reach 30 years of age. For the next 40 years, he made his life mission the eradication of the error of Arianism.

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol. 6, p. 303

<sup>2</sup>The Arian heresy is propagated today by the teachings of the Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses.

When Constantine, the Roman Emperor then offered to mediate between him and Arius, he firmly but politely told him, “Matters of the state are adjudicated by Emperors, matters of faith are adjudicated by bishops of the Church, thus becoming the first in history to uphold the doctrine of separation between Church and state.

Five Times exiled from his seat in Alexandria, he spent many years as a fugitive from one emperor or another. 16 Roman Emperors in all, he had to contend with, but in the end, he outlived them all.

There came a time, during his life long struggle to uphold the Biblical truth, when it seemed that all was lost; when even his friends would look at him with pity saying, alas, the world is against Athanasius. But he was never shaken, “and Athanasius is against the world,” he would answer.

Here is a man that proved that the whole world can be wrong! A man that took on the whole world and won it back to Christ.

His victory was in the end complete, and the last 7 years of his life were spent in peace, being consulted by other bishops around the world, who revered him and considered him “the bishop of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

## **MONASTICISM:**

Monasticism is another gift that the Copts gave to Christianity. To quote prof Aziz Attiya:

From its humble beginnings on the fringe of the desert, monasticism grew to be a way of life and developed into cenobitic communities which became the wonder of Christian antiquity. With its introduction into Europe, it was destined to become the sole custodian of culture and Christian civilization in the Dark Ages.

The founding of this way of life is generally ascribed to St. Anthony (d. 336) Anthony himself, while penetrating deeper and deeper into the Eastern Desert, assuming that he was in perfect solitude with the Lord, suddenly discovered St. Paul the Hermit at the age of 113 years already long established in that remote region.

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<sup>1</sup>Both Gregory Nazianzen and Basil addressed him in this fashion. Basil, writing to ask his advice, would address him, “Your Apostolic Holiness!” [Nicene fathers under Basil & Gregory]

As a twenty year old youth, Anthony heard it said one day in church: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19: 21). A fundamentalist, he did just that and crossed the Nile for the desert solitude where he spent eighty-five years of increasing austerity and asceticism. Though a solitary, he could not hide his light of sanctity under a bushel, and, when his fame had spread so as to reach the imperial court, Constantine wrote asking for his blessing. Even the great Athanasius spent two years with the Saint and composed his biography. Others followed this 'athleta christi' to the Red Sea Mountains and lived around his cave to seek his spiritual guidance. Thus the second phase in the evolution of the monastic rule arose in what may be termed "collective eremiticism" where settlements of solitaries sprang up around the person of a saint, not merely for initiation and orientation, but also as a measure of self-defence in the arid desert. A disabled anchorite in this distant wilderness could perish for lack of food and water, if he were not observed by another neighborly solitary. Such settlements began to multiply in other parts of the country. Besides Pispir in the Eastern Desert, others arose in the Thebaid in Upper Egypt as well as the Nitrean Valley in the desert to the west of the Delta of the Nile.

Subsequently at Tabennesis, the third stage in the development of cenobitic life was already taking shape under the rule of St. Pachomius (d. 346). Originally a pagan legionary in the armies of Constantine and Licinius, he was exposed to the goodness of Christian villagers during the wanderings of his battalion. They came to wash the soldiers' feet and broke bread with them despite their harsh tax levies. Captivated by their kindness to their oppressors, he decided, on his liquidation from the service, to become a Christian. After his baptism, he zealously followed a hermit by the name of Palaemon for training in the art of sanctity and asceticism. An educated man with a background of military discipline, he soon perceived that asceticism could not be the only way to heaven. This signalled the inception of one of the greatest cenobitic doctrines of all time. The new Rule of St. Pachomius prescribed communal life in a cenobium and repudiated the principle of self-mortification. Instead, the brethren should expend their potential in useful pursuits both manual and intellectual while preserving the monastic vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The Pachomian

system reflected the personality of the soldier, the legislator, and the holy man. Pachomius aimed at the humanization of his monastic regime without losing the Christian essence of Antonian or Palaemonian sanctity. Every detail of a monk's daily activities was prescribed within the walls of a given monastery. Each monk had to have a vocation to make himself a useful human being to his brotherhood; all must labour to earn their daily bread, without losing sight of their intellectual advancement; and each must fully participate in the devotional duties of monastic life.

Pachomian monasteries multiplied rapidly in their founder's lifetime, and all were enriched through wise administration as well as honest and selfless labor. In his famous work entitled "Paradise of the Fathers," the fourth-century Bishop Palladius states that he found in one monastery fifteen tailors, seven smiths, four carpenters, fifteen fullers, and twelve camel drivers besides unspecified numbers of bakers, cooks, basket and rope makers, millers, weavers, masons, instructors, and copyists of manuscripts - all living in complete harmony and perfect discipline within a structure that looked like a vast Roman fortification.

The fame of Pachomian foundations spread far and wide, not only within Egypt but also throughout the world. Monks came to live with the fathers of the desert from many nations. Greeks, Romans, Cappadocians, Libyans, Syrians, Nubians, and Ethiopians, to mention a few of those on record - and Pachomius devised a system of wards for each nation within every monastery.

The Coptic cenobitic rule became the wonder of ancient Christendom. The planting of the Coptic system in Europe and other continents of the Old World was achieved by some of the greatest divines of the mediaeval world. To quote some of the illustrious names who made extended pilgrimages to the Coptic fathers of the desert, we must begin with St. Jerome (ca. 342 - 420), who translated the *Regula Sancti Pachomii* into Latin, which version must have been used by St. Benedict of Nursia (ca 480 - 550) in composing his famous Rule. Others included St. John Chrysostom (ca 347 - 407); Rufinus (ca. 345 - 410), the renowned ecclesiastical historian; St. Basil (ca. 330-79), the founder of a Byzantine monastic order on the model of the Rule of St. Pachomius; St. John Cassian (ca 360 -435) the father of monasticism in Gaul, who is known to have spent seven years in the Thebaid and Nitrea; Palladius (ca 365 - 425), Bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia, who

compiled the lives of the desert fathers in "The Lausiaca History"; St. Augen or Eugenius of Clysma (d. ca. 363), the father of Syrian asceticism; and many more from other parts of Europe in addition to some lesser known persons from Ethiopia, Nubia, and North Africa.

### **THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS:**

The Copts were very active in the ecumenical councils of the church. They were well represented in the first three councils (the only ones they recognize) Saint Athanasius was the undisputed star of the first council at Nicaea (325 ad) while Saint Cyril the Great (24<sup>th</sup> pope of Alexandria) was the undisputed star of the third council held at Ephesus in 431. The council refuted the heresy of Nestorius, who emphasized the dual nature of Christ and refused to accept that the one born from the Virgin Mary was the incarnate Logos. He refused to call her Theotokos. The council condemned this teaching and affirmed the title Theotokos.

Unfortunately, at the council held at Chalcedon in 451, the church universal was fractured. The Copts out of loyalty to their hero's (St. Cyril the Great) formula of the "one nature of God incarnate" refused to accept the "Tome of Leo" bishop of Rome which emphasized the two natures of Christ after the union, which really aroused their fears of Nestorianism. The Copts together with the Syrians, the Ethiopians, the Armenians and the Indians were separated from the rest of the church (Rome and Constantinople). As Christians look at this division today, many realize that it was a misunderstanding, that both parties had the same faith expressed in different terminology.

The result was disastrous, St. Dioscorus the 25<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria was deposed and exiled, to die two years later. For the next few hundred years, the Copts had to resist repeated attempts to force the formula of Chalcedon down their throats. They had to live with two heads for their church, one appointed by the emperor called the "Melkite" Patriarch and another one who was the rightful successor of Saint Mark the Apostle, the first prelate of the Coptic church.

Persecuted by their Byzantine brethren, the Copts remained obstinate and went into a cocoon, choosing to live in isolation rather than lose their identity and their tradition.

By doing so, the Copts kept for the whole of Christendom a picture of Christianity as it was practised in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

## **THE ARAB INVASION:**

It was in the context of this state of affairs that an army of some 4,000 Arabs, led by Amr ibn al-As, was sent by the Caliph Umar to spread Islam in the land of the ancient pharaohs. The Arabs crossed into Egypt from Palestine in December 639 and advanced rapidly into the Nile Delta. In less than a year and with some reinforcements, the Arabs conquered the whole of Egypt. The Melkite Patriarch Cyrus who held both the civil and religious reigns accepted a large bribe to surrender the country.

The invaders were not interested in the theological discussions. They restored the banished rightful pope Benjamin to his position and gave him back the churches that had been forcefully usurped by the Melkites.

In the beginning of their rule, the Arabs were more interested to raise money to finance their military expansion, so they were content with collecting the head tax they levied on non Muslims. But, in later years, as the Islamic empire was well established, they started pressuring the Copts to convert to Islam as we shall see.

## **THE FATIMID DYNASTY: ( 909-1171)**

The Fatimids were Shiite Muslims who wrestled Egypt away from the Khalif in Baghdad. They would not put their trust in the Sunni Muslims of Egypt, who were loyal to the Khalif (the rightful successor of the Prophet Mohamed) So they patronized the Copts. Well educated and ambitious Copts were handed the civil service positions. Many Copts became rich and famous. However, this newly acquired affluence led to many cultural changes among the Copts. Polygamy is allowed in Islam but not in Christianity. Some of those novoux riche Copts started to have second wives. Those who shied away from this started to have concubines or a small “harem” like their Muslim neighbours. It was not uncommon for a Coptic treasurer to have a dancer entertain him while having dinner, things that were totally alien to Christian ethics to which the Copts adhered throughout their history. We gained knowledge of these excesses from sermons by leading bishops or Popes of this era, who were rebuking the Christians for their behaviour.

## **THE CRUSADES: (1096-1270)**

These religious wars were a disaster for the Copts. Since it was Christians from Europe that came to invade, the Muslims looked with

suspicion on the Christians of the Middle East (including the Copts) They all were identified with the Crusaders, and this ultimately led to waves of severe persecution.

### **THE MAMELUKES: (1250-1517)**

The word Mameluke is Arabic for slave. These Mamelukes were kidnapped children from Europe that were brought to Egypt and Northern Africa. They were indoctrinated in Islam and trained to become mercenaries. In the course of time, they revolted against their Masters, slaughtered them and became the rulers of the land. They expanded their territory even unto the Caliphate in Baghdad.

The Mameluke era was one of the worst periods as far as the Copts were concerned. They were brutal. They gave the Copts one of three options: either to pay a very large head tax that only few could afford, or conversion to Islam, or beheading. Many were martyred, much more converted. There came a time during this era that the number of Copts dwindled to 10,000.

### **THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: (1517-1798)**

The Ottomans were no better than the Mamelukes. They were very repressive of the Christians. Laws were passed that made it impossible to build a new church and even repairing a church needed an edict from the Sultan (which was almost never given). Some of these laws are still in effect in Egypt even today. Human rights advocates often embarrass the government because these laws have not been repealed.

One of the negative effects of the Turkish era was that the Copts started to use Turkish names, like Hikmat, Sarwat, Ezzat, instead of venerable Coptic names like Wisa, Tadros and Pakhom

### **THE FRENCH INVASION: (1789-1802)**

Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1799. Perhaps the most important thing about this is the discovery by french archeologists of the Rosetta stone, which made possible the deciphering of Hieroglyphics for the first time in history. Written in two Egyptian language scripts (hieroglyphic and Demotic), and in classical Greek, it was discovered by the French in 1799.

The French expedition gave the western world a new look at a long forgotten church. The isolation of the Coptic church that started in 451



gave way to new interest by scholars to re-discover this ancient church that lay hidden in its cocoon for many centuries. Many scholars started looking for manuscripts and studied them. Those scholars became known as Coptologists.

### **THE BRITISH INVASION: (1882-1952)**

The British invasion of Egypt introduced the many western missionaries (Anglicans and Presbyterians) that came to convert the Copts to Christianity! Those people forgot the fact that 15 centuries earlier, Coptic monks went to England to convert the British to Christianity.

### **THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:**

The twentieth century saw many changes in Egypt. Emancipation of women started to make an impact on the Egyptian society, with many women advancing into careers that were considered “men only”. Political drives for independence from the British started. Communism as well as Fascism attracted many. The Copts became very active in these political movements. One of these Copts, Boutros Ghali even became prime minister of Egypt between 1908-1910. He was unfortunately assassinated. One of his grand children became the Secretary General of the United Nations.

### **THE NASSER YEARS: (1956 -1970.)**

Nasser came to power after a military coup. He established a dictatorship based on appealing to Arab nationalism rather than Egyptian identity. His social reform policy which involved nationalization of many industries and confiscation of agricultural lands from large owners affected many Copts, who lost their properties. The feeling of belonging that swept Copts during the thirties was lost to this Pan Arabism that Nasser preached. Many Copts felt that they were not welcome in this society that put Arabic nationality above Egyptian Nationality. Many started to emigrate to the West, something that the Copts had never done before in their long history. The sixties witnessed the first wave of emigration to the West. Today Coptic communities, churches and monasteries are all over the world, in Canada usa, Australia, South America.

## **THE SADAT YEARS: (1970-1981)**

Sadat became president after the death of Nasser. He fought a war with Israel which was in part a victory. He knew well that the USA will not allow him to have a complete victory over Israel and he wanted to have peace with Israel in return for some lands that Israel had won in a previous war. Sadat was a shrewd politician. He knew that this would be very unpopular with the mainly Muslim population of Egypt. Seeking some support from a faction of the society, he started to befriend the Copts. Shortly before his now famous (or infamous) visit to Israel, he visited the current Pope of Egypt (Pope Shenouda) offering concessions in the building of churches, in the hope of having the support of the Copts for his “peace initiative” which was very unpopular. Neither his peace initiative nor his cosying to the Copts brought him any favour with the rising Islamic extremist movement. In order to appease them, he reversed his policy, putting the Pope under house arrest, and imprisoning many bishops, priests and prominent Copt. He declared himself a Muslim Fundamentalist himself. He was however assassinated in 1981 by an extremist group. Ayman Zawahry was one of those who plotted his assassination.

What Sadat did, however, did a lot of damage to the Copts. It was a signal that persecuting the Copts was OK. Extremist groups started burning churches, killing priests, kidnapping and forcefully converting girls to Islam and the like.

## **THE COPTS TODAY:**

Today many Copts feel that they are foreigners in the land of their fore-fathers. The recent American military adventures in the middle East and beyond have adversely affected the Coptic minority. Muslim extremists who are frustrated by what happened in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, tend to lump the Christian West with the Christian minority. The political activism of the last century has given in to political apathy and a sense that nothing will change. The Copts however are survivors, their number went down to 10,000 in the time of the Mamelukes, there are now 10 million of them. A large number of those are, however, no more living in the land of the Nile.

*For an audio recording of this lecture, please go to:*

<http://www.stmaryscopticorthodox.ca/content/sermons/frathanasius/misc/laurier08.mp3>



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## **TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF SERVICE**

### **Father Athanasius Iskander**

The year 2006 marks 25 years in the priestly service of Father Athanasius Iskander. A short history of these years will be given in the following pages.

Born Adel Iskander on March 9, 1938 in Shoubra, he grew up in this district of Cairo, which is notable for its abundance of Coptic churches. He was accepted into Ain Shams University Medical School at the age 15. While there, he had two distinguished classmates, Emile Aziz (currently H.G. Bishop Moussa) and Emile Maher (currently Fr. Shenouda Maher, serving in Rochester, New York).

After graduating in 1962, he worked as a doctor in Egypt and East Africa before immigrating to Canada in 1968. He served as a deacon with Father Marcos Marcos at Saint Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church (Scarborough).

On August 1, 1970, he married Odette, a Sunday School servant and a final year Engineering student at the University of Toronto.

He earned his licence to practice Medicine in Canada in July 1971, and worked as an Emergency Physician in Hamilton, Ontario till 1981.

On March 27, 1981, he was ordained, "Athanasius, a priest for the holy Orthodox altar of the Christ loving city of Mississauga, Canada."



Ain Shams University Anatomy Lab, 1955: Adel Iskander (centre), Emile Aziz (right). At the back, the late Prof. Shafik Abdel Malek.



Abu Simbel (Egypt), November 1966: Dr. Adel Iskander, then resident physician to the project for the relocation of the temples of Nubia, takes one last look at the temples before leaving Egypt for Europe, then Tanzania. He returned to Egypt 15 years later to be ordained.



Toronto Airport, March 1981: Dr. Adel Iskander, his wife and two children on their way to Egypt for the ordination. To his right: Mr. Sorial Sorial. In front: two nephews.



Saint Mary's Chapel, Anba Reweis, Cairo, Friday, March 27, 1981:  
Ordination of Father Athanasius Iskander.

## **THE CHURCH OF VIRGIN MARY & ST. ATHANASIUS MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO, CANADA**

Father Athanasius was received by the small Coptic congregation of Mississauga on May 14, 1981 (the eve of the feast of Saint Athanasius).

In the beginning, services were held in rented school gymnasias, but efforts to find a permanent place of worship started diligently almost from the beginning. In October 1982, less than one and a half years after the commencement of Father Athanasius' service, the grace of God presented the congregation with a four-acre parcel of land in central Mississauga. An old school on the land (7,200 sq. ft.) adequately accommodated all the church's regular services as well as hosting a day care facility.

Plans to build a church on the land started almost immediately. An architect was hired and a design concept was agreed on. His Grace Bishop Reweis, who annually celebrated the feast of Saint Athanasius with the congregation, supported the project vigorously.

On May 15, 1983 (feast day of Saint Athanasius), His Grace blessed the foundation stone of the new church. On May 15, 1984, His Grace celebrated with the congregation the ground breaking ceremony.

On February 12, 1985, Father Athanasius visited His Holiness Pope Shenouda, and obtained his blessing for the building of the new church.

By the end of February, 1985, through the grace of the Lord, the mortgage on the property was fully paid.



Mississauga,  
May 14, 1981:  
Reception of  
Father  
Athanasius by  
the  
congregation  
of Church of  
Virgin Mary  
and Saint  
Athanasius



May 15, 1983: Blessing of the foundation stone for the new church. First person on the left is Samir Matar (currently Fr. Moussa Matar).



May 15, 1984: Ground breaking ceremony for the new church. First person on the right is Mahfouz Awad (currently Fr. Reweis Awad).

## **BUILDING THE NEW CHURCH:**

The architect estimated the cost of building the church to be in the neighbourhood of one million dollars. Accordingly, the Board of Deacons started approaching financial institutions for a loan. Most of them declined, based on the fact that there was no down payment (except for the paid-up land) and that a small congregation of seventy families could not possibly pay back such a huge loan!

Again, the grace of the Lord did intervene, and by the end of March, 1985, The Royal Bank of Canada decided to extend the church a line of credit of one million dollars.

The next challenge was finding a contractor. Again, several were approached, but most of them quoted us figures in the neighbourhood of two million dollars. Frustration and discouragement reigned for a little season.

On his annual visit to the congregation in May 1985, His Grace Bishop Reweis inquired anxiously if there was any good news to celebrate on the feast day of Saint Athanasius that year, but the answer was no.

The feast of Saint Athanasius was celebrated quietly, and both His Grace Bishop Reweis and Father Athanasius went to visit Fr. Marcos Marcos. A short while later, the phone rang and Mr. Nashaat Iskandar, the chairman of the building committee, asked to speak to Fr. Athanasius. The news? A contractor had just submitted in writing an offer to build the church for one million and seventy thousand dollars! His Grace commented, "It seems Saint Athanasius will not allow us to do anything except on his feast day!"

Three weeks later, on Monday, June 3, 1985 (first day of the Fast of the Apostles) the contract was finalized.

## **HAIL TO MIKHAIL!**

It was June 19, 1985 (feast day of Archangel Michael). The Divine Liturgy has just ended at 10:00 a.m. and the worshippers were leaving the church, when everybody, including Father Athanasius was overcome by the surprise: Huge earth-moving machines were ripping up the parking lot! Tears were streaming down uncontrollably, and so back inside they went for another veneration (tamgeed) of the great Archangel Michael.





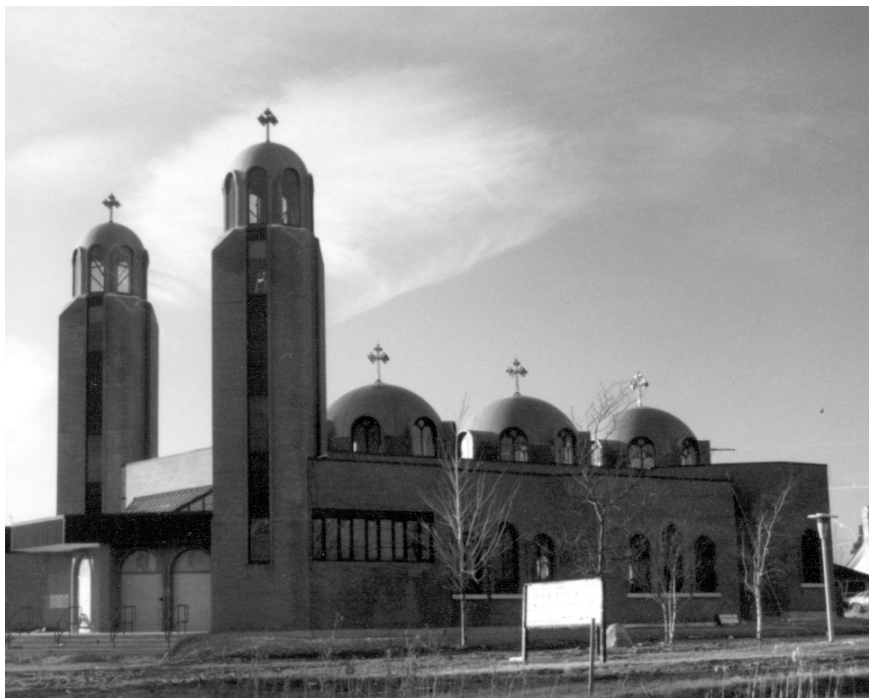
June 19, 1985 (feast day of Archangel Michael): The foundations of the new church were laid. To the left of the picture is the old building which was used for the services throughout the construction.

### **THE DAY THAT THE LORD HATH MADE:**

It was Sunday, June 8, 1986, and, to everyone's amazement, the new church, fully carpeted, with pews in place, a temporary iconostasis and walls adorned by icons of the saints, was finally ready for its first Divine Liturgy.

Bishop Reweis had been invited to attend but he apologized that he could not come. Then, he was summoned by His Holiness to go to Montreal on urgent business.

Upon learning that the church was almost ready for occupancy, His Grace worked very hard at his busy schedule, and, by the grace of God, he was able to travel to Mississauga in time to celebrate with the congregation of the Church of Virgin Mary and Saint Athanasius, the first Divine Liturgy in their new church. (June 8 is historically, the date on which the Nicene Creed was published by the Council of Nicea.)



June 8, 1986  
The new church is finally ready for the celebration of the first Divine Liturgy.

## **PHASE II OF THE CONSTRUCTION:**

It was agreed upon that, as soon as the church was completed, and services moved to the new building, the old building, which had served us well during the construction, would be renovated to match the new one.

The design process was started in September 1986, and was completed and approved by the Board of Deacons in March 1987. Consent to begin the construction was given by the General Assembly on May 10, 1987.

On July 1, 1987, renovation of the old building began. It was carried out in two stages in order to allow for use of part of the old building while the rest was being renovated.

By January 1988, the Sunday School section was completed and work started on the hall, which was completed by March 1988.

Now we had a large hall with an adjoining fully equipped kitchen, eight Sunday School rooms, a library, storage spaces, offices, and a playground.

## **THE ICONOSTASIS:**

Not long after the completion of phase II of the construction, a member of the congregation of Saint Mark's Church in Scarborough approached Father Athanasius proposing to cover half the cost of an iconostasis and icons if the congregation would pay the rest.

The proposal was conveyed to the congregation after a fundraising dinner. Fifty thousand dollars were collected on the spot and the work was ordered. The iconostasis and icons were shipped from Egypt in the summer of 1989. Work continued until early September, just hours before the church was to be consecrated.

On Sunday, September 3, 1989, His Holiness Pope Shenouda blessed us by consecrating the three altars and the icons. The central altar was dedicated to Virgin Mary & St. Athanasius, the northern to St. Pishoy & St. Paul and the southern one to St. George & St. Maurice.

The total cost of the project, including the price of the land and the iconostasis with its icons now approached two million dollars. By the time of the consecration, more than half the cost of the new church had been paid off by the zealous Copts of Mississauga.

On Tuesday September 5, 1989, Father Athanasius was transferred to St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in Kitchener.

## **SAINT MARY'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA**

Father Athanasius was no stranger to St. Mary's church in Kitchener. In the late 1970s, he accompanied Father Mittias El Souriany (His Grace Bishop Reweis before his ordination as a bishop) occasionally to celebrate the Holy Liturgy for the families in Kitchener.

In 1980, he was serving at that church as a deacon and secretary of the Board of Deacons, under the late Father Ibrahim Attia of blessed memory.

In December 1980, three month before his ordination, Father Athanasius and the late Rifaat Zakhary, the Treasurer, concluded a deal for a small church in the neighbouring city of Cambridge at a price of \$82,000. They also negotiated a Bank loan at prime rate. The church was prepared and was ready for use by Christmas Eve 1981.

It was to this church that he now returned as a priest on September 5, 1989. The congregation was small, about 36 families from various cities. Families came from Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph, London, and Brantford. The income was hardly enough to cover the expenses and the attendance was poor because people had to travel from various cities to Cambridge.

By the end of 1990, the number of the families had more than doubled, and the donations had tripled. An ambitious program of church renovation was completed during 1990. A new Sunday School room and an office for the priest were built and equipped. A small room behind the Sanctuary was renovated into a confession room, a closet for the Liturgical vestments was also built in that room.

The outdated electrical wiring was replaced. The ceiling, the flooring, doors and windows were replaced. The church was completely painted and new furniture purchased to replace the old.

The congregation continued to grow, and it soon became apparent that a church with a capacity for 80 occupants cannot accommodate a congregation of 80 families.

In 1992, search for a new church started. This continued until 1994, when a large church in the city of Kitchener (where most of the congregation lived) was available. It was purchased for \$585,000 on June 10, 1994. The first Liturgy was celebrated on June 12, 1994.



August, 1994:  
Fr.  
Athanasius,  
His Grace  
Bishop  
Moussa and  
His Grace  
Bishop  
Thomas in  
front of the  
new church in  
Kitchener.  
In 1994, Saint  
Mary's church  
hosted the  
Coptic Youth  
East Canada  
Convention.

### **THE FIRST RENOVATION PROJECT:**

The church building had problems. It was oriented to the West, had no sanctuary or centre aisle, and on the whole looked quite Protestant! Plans for a major renovation were started. The work commenced in the spring of 1996 and was concluded by the end of that summer.

The church was reoriented to face East. A sanctuary, a niche and a second altar were added. The whole church was repainted and carpeted. The walls were covered with wood panelling. An iconostasis, complete with icons was built.

A new air conditioning system was installed, and imported chandeliers were hung from the 55 foot high ceiling.

The pews had to be practically redone in order to allow for a centre aisle. The bathrooms were completely renovated and the boiler was replaced by a new one.



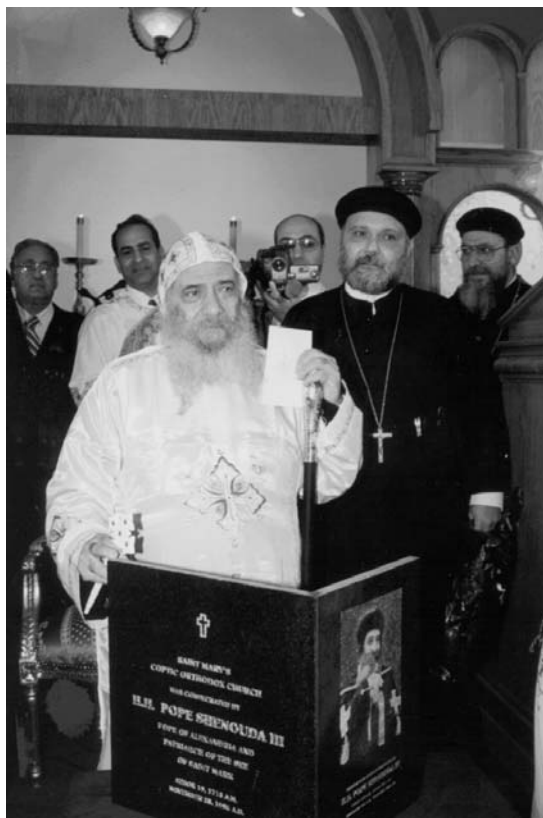
May 15, 1996: His Grace Bishop Reweis inaugurates the renovation project for the new church in Kitchener.

The shovel His Grace used was the same one he had used 12 years earlier, on May 15, 1984 at the ground breaking ceremony for the hurch of Virgin Mary and St. Athanasius in Mississauga.

Below:

The church after the renovation was completed.





November 28, 1996: His Holiness Pope Shenouda consecrates the corner stone for the newly renovated church in Kitchener. The corner stone was done using a computerized sandblasting technique in order to imprint His Holiness picture on the granite.

Below:  
His Holiness consecrates the new altar dedicated to Saint Athanasius that same day.





His Holiness grilling Father Athanasius about the translation of the consecration service that he had prepared. In the end, His Holiness was pleased and asked for a few copies to use in future consecrations.

Below (left):  
His Holiness consecrating the icon of Saint Athanasius.

Below (right):  
His Holiness delivering the sermon.





## **THE SECOND RENOVATION:**

Soon after it became apparent that, with the continued growth of the congregation, the hall and the Sunday School classrooms were becoming too crowded. Accordingly, an addition was considered. The extension would increase the size of the hall and add four more Sunday School classes to the existing eight.

The project was started in August 2001 and was completed in May 2002. Together with the addition, the whole church was upgraded for wheel chair accessibility. This included a new wheelchair entrance, a lift, and a washroom for the disabled. The total cost of the renovation was \$600,000.

## **THE PROPERTIES NEXT DOOR:**

Barely six months after the second renovation was complete, our neighbour to the north approached us with a proposal to sell his house to the church. The property was acquired on December 9, 2002.

Nine months later, the neighbour to the south of the church made us the same offer. The deal was signed on October 5, 2003, the feast day of Saint Maurice according to the Coptic Calendar. The land is large enough for the eventual construction of a chapel named after Saint Maurice.

## **THE CHURCH RETREAT:**

On September 3, 2005, the church acquired a 90-acre parcel of very scenic land with tree-covered hills and ravines. There are several existing buildings on the property, including a gymnasium, a dining hall adjoining a large kitchen, a large swimming pool with a “wash house” containing change rooms, showers and toilette facilities for men and women, a small office, and a “nurse station.”

There are also 12 cabins arranged in three clusters of four cabins each. Each cabin has 12 bunk beds. There is a basketball court on the property and a winding gravel road that leads from the main road which is paved. The property is within the city limits of Cambridge, which is located within an hour’s drive of most of the Coptic churches of Southwestern Ontario.

Over the next two years, we expect to spend over a million dollars to upgrade the facility and make it available to all of our sister churches in the region.

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF  
THE CHURCH OF SAINT PAUL THE ANCHORITE  
LONDON, ONTARIO, CANADA  
BY: FATHER ATHANASIOS ISKANDER**

The city of London is 100 km west of Kitchener (one-hour drive). It is a major Canadian city of 300,000 and is home to a top university.

In August 1990, less than a year after my transfer to Kitchener, I accompanied His Grace Bishop Reweis on an outreach tour of the Coptic families in London. I suggested that they start a local Liturgy service once a month. It took a while to find a temporary place to hold the services. In November 1991, the first Liturgy of the Eucharist was celebrated in the chapel attached to Saint Joseph's Catholic Hospital in London.

By 1993, the families numbered 12, and I suggested that they register a church. Registration was completed in December 1993. The church was named after Saint Paul the Anchorite.

In 1995, the number of families became 18, and they had some money in the treasury, so, I proposed that they begin looking for a permanent church to purchase. In the beginning, there was a lot of hesitation and concern about financial aspects, however, these concerns disappeared completely, after a spectacular miracle was performed, through the prayers of the great saint (see below).

We found a church by the end of 1995, took possession on January 10, 1996, started immediately to modify it according to the Coptic style, and a month later, on the feast day of Saint Paul the Anchorite, His Grace Bishop Reweis was delegated by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III to celebrate the first Liturgy of the Eucharist in the new church.

On Thursday, January 21, 1999, His Holiness consecrated the altar of the church. On November 11, 1999, Fr. Moussa Matar was received by the congregation as the first permanent priest of the Church of Saint Paul the Anchorite.

There are currently close to 60 families in London, served by Fr. Johannes Awadalla.

Now, it is time to ask, why did we name the church after Saint Paul the Anchorite? To answer this, we have to go back to an incident that happened in 1983, while I was serving in Mississauga.



February 10, 1996 (feast day of Saint Paul the Anchorite): The newly purchased Church named after the great saint is ready for the first Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Below:

January 21, 1999: His Holiness Pope Shenouda III consecrates the Altar of the church of Saint Paul the Anchorite



One of the members of the congregation was seriously ill in a hospital in Mississauga. I visited her frequently, carrying communion to her, but she had lost all hope of healing. One day she told me, "I feel I'm going to die, so please hurry and bring me communion before I'm gone." I tried to console her, but I did what she asked me to do. I brought her communion on the next day, but what I saw and heard on that day became indelible in my memory.

I found her sitting on the edge of the bed, dressed in her normal clothes (not in the usual hospital gown). I gave her communion, then asked her, "What happened?" She replied, "I'm going home today! I'm cured!" In amazement, I asked her, "How come?" She told me, "A man came to my room today. I was fully awake, so it could not have been a dream. He was very old with white hair and a long white beard which reached down almost to his feet. And he was dressed in a '*shewal*,' (Arabic for sack) with an opening for his head and two openings for his arms, which were raised up toward heaven. He sat on my bed, then he stood up and started looking around as if he was searching for something. I asked him, 'What are you looking for, Abouna?' And he replied, 'I am looking for an altar, my daughter! I can't find an altar!' He then disappeared and I felt that I was cured!"

The lady went home that same day, and I kept pondering the matter for a few days. An older, more experienced priest came to visit me, and I told him what happened. He said, "It must be Saint Paul the First Hermit." He asked me if I had any of his icons in the church, but sadly, we had none at the time. He advised me to find a small icon for the great saint, to visit the lady, give it to her and watch her reaction. I phoned the priests of the churches near by, looking for such an icon, and finally, Fr. Pishoy Saad of Saint Mark's Church in Montreal sent me a few small hand-painted icons of Saint Paul the Anchorite. I went to visit the lady that had been cured, and after concluding the visit with prayer, I gave her one of the icons as a gift. As soon as she saw the icon she said, "This is the man who came to me in the hospital!" Then, looking me in the eye, she asked, "Are you going to build him an altar?" I said, "Yes, God willing, we will."

I gave the remaining icons to other people who were seriously ill, with miraculous results. Soon the story became known and people were asking for the intercession of this great saint, and those who believed, were healed according to the will of God.

When the time came to register the church in London, Ontario, the question of a patron saint came up. There were many proposals. They asked me my opinion, and I told them about Saint Paul's miracles in Mississauga. I then added, "Here is a great saint that has no churches named after him outside his monastery. If you name your church after him, he will be your saint, and will perform his miracles among you." They unanimously agreed, and so it was.

### **THE MIRACLE OF ROSE:**

One day in February 1995, a few days after the feast day of Saint Paul the Anchorite, Rose (not her real name) discovered a lump in her breast. She saw a surgeon who took a biopsy of the lump. The result was very tragic: It was found to be malignant.

Rose, who worked as a pathologist and a member of the teaching staff at the University of Western Ontario Medical School in London, Ontario, reviewed the slides made from the tumor with the other members of the Department of Pathology, including the head of the department. The verdict was definite malignancy.

In relating the story to me, she said, "Abouna, not only is it malignant, but the kind of malignancy is such that it would kill within one year." I believed her, for she ought to know.

A dark veil fell over the whole family. Rose's husband broke down, the children aged 9, 11 and 13 were devastated. Rose tried to put on a brave face, but seeing the condition of her husband and children, she too broke down.

One time, she came home, unnoticed by her children, and found them kneeling, with tears in their eyes, sobbing and pleading, "Please God, don't take our mom from us." She went into her room, locked the door and cried her heart out. She repeatedly told me, "I don't mind going to be with Christ, but I feel sorry for my husband and the children."

Rose prayed a lot, but in the end she surrendered her fate to God and accepted His will. One day, while sitting in the living room of their house in London, she confided in me, "When I'm gone, please help Adel (not her husband's real name) find a suitable wife. He cannot cope with the children alone." I fought very hard to conceal the tears in my eyes by pretending to look at the wall across from me. It was then that I noticed an icon of Saint Paul the Anchorite, in whose name the

Coptic church in London had been registered. “Where is your faith Rose?” I asked. “This is your saint (pointing to the icon); ask him to perform a miracle.” I continued, “Let us make a deal with him: If he would cure you, then you would buy the furnishings of the sanctuary and altar of the church we will buy or build in his name.” I then added jokingly, “And if he doesn’t cure you then we should change the name of this church to Saint Mena’s !” That conversation took place on the eve of the operation to remove her breast.

On the morning of the operation, Rose was very calm. She was even joking with every one around her. She had faith that God, through the prayers of Saint Paul the Anchorite, could cure her. Most importantly, she had completely surrendered her will to the will of God.

On the operating table, her last words to the surgeon before being put to sleep were these: “The slides look very bad, but there is still room for a miracle.”

Under anesthesia, the surgeon re-examined the lump. He was surprised to find that it had shrunk in size. It was also freely moving in the breast and not fixed. As usual, he opened the breast, removed the lump, sent it to the lab for confirmation of the diagnosis, and waited.

We were waiting outside, her husband, myself and a few friends of the family. Suddenly, the head of the Department of Pathology, a sweet elderly lady, rushed into the waiting room with a perplexed look on her face: “I can’t understand it ! It is not malignant. But how can this be? I was very careful examining the slides before the operation.” Seconds later, the surgeon joined us, still in his operating gown, with his surgical mask hanging around his neck, declaring, “It’s a miracle! She asked for a miracle and she got one! I have never seen anything like this in my life.”

There was total confusion, a dozen people talking at the same time, some yelling, some crying, everybody was hugging the person next to him, sobbing and laughing at the same time.

We were told she could go home! Her husband rushed to bring the children from their schools in order to take Mom home, the same Mom they had entreated God not to take away from them.

For one week after the operation, every pathologist around reviewed the slides trying to find errors in the initial diagnosis, but there were none. Grudgingly, they had to admit: “It’s a miracle!”

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF  
SAINT MENA'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH  
HALIFAX, NOVASCOTIA, CANADA  
BY: FATHER ATHANASIOS ISKANDER**

One day in December, 1983, during my service in Mississauga, I received a call from Dr. Magdy Mansour (Currently, Fr. Marcus Mansour, serving in Arizona) concerning seven families that lived in Halifax, in the province of Nova Scotia in Eastern Canada. They needed a priest to celebrate the Liturgy for them.

My relationship to Dr. Magdy went back to 1970s, when I was practising Medicine and he was pursuing his PhD in Engineering. At that time we co-operated in holding a Bible study for the Copts in Hamilton, Ontario.

The first liturgy was held in January 1984, on the Saturday following Christmas. This was followed by three other visits throughout 1984. The service increased gradually to become once a month.

By 1993, the number of families had reached 28. It was then that I suggested to them to register a church. They agreed, and chose to call their church after Saint Mena. Registration was approved by the Province on June 22, 1995 (the feast of the dedication of the church of St. Mena). By that time several other priests had joined in serving the congregation.

On November, 1996, a church building was purchased and to the credit of the good Copts of Nova Scotia, it was bought for cash, without the need for a mortgage. In August 2001, Father Daniel Rizg started serving the congregation as a full time priest.



December 19, 1997: Some members of the congregation of Saint Mena's church in Halifax receiving Fr. Athanasios at the airport during a visit to the church, which he had served for 14 years.





Father Athanasius during one of his many visits to Saint Mena's Church



His Grace Bishop Reweis during a visit to the congregation of Saint Mena's Church in Halifax with Father Athanasius. The person in white shirt behind Father Athanasius is Michele Fam (currently Fr. Mikhail Fam, serving in Ottawa). The lady in orange jacket to the right of His Grace is Dr. Lilian Fam (currently Tasoni Lilian). The congregation of Saint Mena's Church, Halifax gave us also Fr. Marcus Mansour.



**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF SAINT MAURICE  
SAINT JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND, CANADA  
BY FATHER ATHANASIUS ISKANDER**

Newfoundland is the easternmost part of North America. It is a province with rugged terrain and harsh weather, with a small population that depends almost entirely of fishing. Until recently, it was the poorest province, with unemployment approaching 25%.

It is not surprising that few people would want to live there, especially among Copts, who are usually content to concentrate in urban areas rather than tackle the frontiers.

Yet, some did, out of necessity. Because of the undesirability of the province, a chronic shortage of medical practitioners has forced the authorities to relax the rules for foreign medical graduates, and some Coptic doctors took advantage of this.

Starting in the late 1980s, a trickle of Coptic doctors sought positions in Newfoundland. One of the earliest was Dr. Samir Yassa, a urologist, who moved there in 1989 together with his wife and three children.

It was in the summer of 1991 that Dr. Yassa phoned me, to tell me that he had identified six Coptic families in Newfoundland, and to ask if I would hold a Liturgy for them. I had known Dr. Yassa from earlier years, when I was serving in Halifax.

At the time Dr. Yassa phoned me, I was still involved in the service in Halifax (one Saturday a month). I was also serving a similar small Coptic community in the city of London in the Province of Ontario, (one Saturday a month) besides my own congregation of Saint Mary's Church in Kitchener. I decided to go there on a trial basis.

I went one Friday evening, where I met the families at Dr. Yassa's house in the town of Grand Falls. It was there that I realized the needs of the Copts for service by any priest who could invest the time and the effort. One of the families had to drive for seven hours to attend the Liturgy. They told me that they had not confessed or taken communion for three years. Another family had a two year old baby, who had not had communion since she was baptized (neither had the rest of the family.)

We had a long confession session on that night and the next morning we held the Liturgy in the house of Dr. Yassa.

A few months later, we discovered more Coptic families in Saint

John's, the capital of the province. I started to visit those families on an occasional basis, as well as those in Grand Falls. During that time, we realized that the number of Copts in Newfoundland was greater than anticipated with more doctors working in remote areas of the province.

Another thing that we started doing was to encourage Coptic doctors in the more habitable parts of Canada to seek employment in Newfoundland. The fact that other Copts had survived there for years, coupled with the knowledge that a Liturgy was held there once in a while encouraged many to take the plunge!

As the numbers grew, we decided to rent a church instead of using the houses for the service. A small chapel in a Catholic church in St. John's was available and we started using it. The service became regular, once a month on a Saturday.

By 1996, the number of families had reached 25. I then proposed that they register a church, so that they could begin collecting donations among themselves to cover the travelling expenses and the church rental, and later on to save for the purchase of a permanent church.

When I was asked to suggest a name for the new church, I proposed Saint Maurice, an almost forgotten Coptic martyr from the third century, who is well known all over the world—with about a thousand churches and altars dedicated to him— except in his own country.

In May 2000, His Grace Bishop Reweis visited St. John's and celebrated the Eucharist with many of the Copts of Newfoundland. His Grace was totally convinced of the need for a permanent church and a permanent priest for that province. (Picture below)



After several attempts to purchase a church, we finally found a small building, that had been built two years earlier as a computer training school. The price agreed on was \$176,000, with a closing date of January 15, 2001.

Unfortunately, just two weeks before closing, the owner reneged on the deal and forfeited one thousand dollars paid with the offer!

Services went on in rented places, while the search for a permanent building continued.

In January 2002, Fr. Daniel Rizg, by that time settled in Halifax, started to serve the two congregations of Newfoundland. His Holiness Pope Shenouda, however, directed that I continue to be in charge of finding a permanent church.

Towards the end of 2004, we found a small church in Saint John's. After lengthy negotiations, the church was purchased on January 19, 2005 for the incredible price of \$82,000!

His Grace Bishop Reweis, was in Canada at that time, celebrating the feast of St. Paul the Anchorite at his church in London, Ontario. When His Grace knew that we had bought a church, he came to celebrate the first Liturgy in the new church on Saturday February 12, 2005, together with myself and Fr. Daniel. (Picture below)



During the next several months, the church underwent major renovations. An iconostasis complete with icons, pews, an altar and lecterns were shipped from Mississauga, where they were manufactured, and were installed by workmen that flew from Ontario.

By the end of 2005, the church was completed. His Holiness Pope Shenouda delegated Fr. Mikhail Sedrak to celebrate Christmas 2006 with the congregation in their new church (pictures next page).



## SAINT MENA & SAINT ABRAAM CHURCH, TORONTO BY FATHER ATHANASIUS ISKANDER

In 1985, while serving in Mississauga, a new service was started for Copts living in the downtown area of Toronto. These people were either new immigrants struggling to find work, who had no car, or seniors who do not drive. Because they depended on public transportation, they were cut off from the two churches serving the area, which were located in the suburbs of Mississauga and Scarborough.

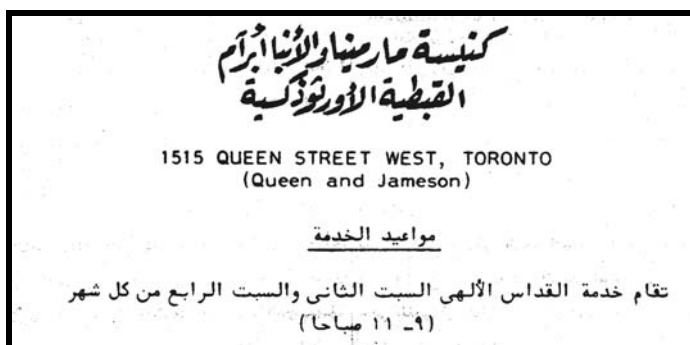
Deacon Samir Matar (currently Fr. Moussa Matar), then serving with me in Mississauga, asked if I could pray a Liturgy with these Copts once in a while. I agreed and asked them to look for a church to rent.

A Lebanese church was found with a bus stop in front of it. We decided to rent it twice a month on Saturday. At that time I had two other Saturdays committed to service in remote communities: Halifax, and Sudbury, a Northern Ontario town with four Coptic Families.

Servants from both Mississauga and Scarborough volunteered as deacons, and a female servant from Scarborough offered to start a Sunday School class for the “angels”. Others followed and we had a budding Sunday School service.

More families were identified in the downtown core, and by 1989, I had decided to suggest to His Holiness to consider a full time priest for the church of Saint Mena and Abba Abraam.

Unfortunately, when I started my service in Kitchener in September of that year, this important service, which catered to “those who have no one to remember them,” was neglected. In a few short months, sadly, the church of Saint Mena and Abba Abraam ceased to exist.



## **A CHURCH FOR THE COPTS OF WINNIPEG**

### **BY FATHER ATHANASIUS ISKANDER**

The city of Winnipeg is the capital of the province of Manitoba in Central Canada. The Copts of Winnipeg have a church registered as Saint Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church. They used to hold a Liturgy once a month in a rented church.

In the fall of 1992, Dr. Amazis Louka, a prominent member of the congregation, phoned me to ask if I would visit them once a month to pray an English Liturgy. I accepted.

By 1994, I started to explore with them the idea of buying their own church, in the hope of having a permanent priest to serve them.

In March 1995, a church was found for \$150,000. I consulted His Grace Bishop Tados who asked me to put the matter to the congregation in a secret ballot. This was done on Saturday, June 17, 1995 after the Liturgy. The congregation overwhelmingly approved. I worked with them to arrange a mortgage.

The church was ready by September 1995. His Grace Bishop Tados was invited to celebrate the first Liturgy in the new church.

The congregation is currently served by Father Marcos Farag, who was ordained by His Holiness for that church.



## **SAINT PHILOPATER MERCURIUS CHURCH, GUELPH**

### **BY FATHER ATHANASIUS ISKANDER**

Guelph is a university city that is situated 30 km East of Kitchener. Early in 2001, some of the Coptic families there requested to meet with me. On February 11, 2001, a meeting with His Grace Bishop Reweis was held. It was attended by ten families. They asked me to help them set up their own church, like I had helped other congregations!

His Grace Bishop Reweis, a great admirer of Saint Mercurius, suggested that the church be named after the great martyr.

A church was rented and I celebrated the first Liturgy with the congregation on Saturday, March 10, 2001.

On June 18, 2002 the church was registered as a charity with the provincial and federal governments. By that time, services were being held two Saturdays a month.

Currently, services are held every Saturday, with the participation of Father Morcos Hanna and Father Johannes Awadalla.

His Holiness delegated priests from Egypt to celebrate Easter 2005 and Christmas 2006 with the congregation.

We hope, by the grace of God, to purchase a permanent church for the congregation of Saint Philopater Mercurius in Guelph.



March 10, 2001, father Athanasius celebrates first Liturgy in Guelph.

## **SERVING COPTS NEAR THE NORTH POLE!**

### **BY FATHER ATHANASIUS ISKANDER**

The Yukon Territory is the Canadian counterpart to Alaska, with which it shares a border. It lies at the northwestern corner of Canada, close to the North Pole. Because of this, the year is half winter, when the sun rises at 10 a.m. and sets at 3 p.m., and half summer, in which the sun does not seem to set!

The territory is sparsely populated, mainly with aboriginals. Few people would adopt it as a home except by necessity. Like the Province of Newfoundland in Eastern Canada, the Yukon has a chronic shortage of doctors. For this reason, from time to time, the rules are relaxed in order to attract more doctors, especially among foreign graduates.

In 2000, seven Coptic families lived there. Two of these families were known to me, and they phoned me asking if I could go there once in a while to celebrate the Eucharist for them and their children. I procrastinated a little, until the mother of one of the lady doctors there saw me during a service in Halifax, where her other daughter lives. She politely but firmly convinced me to treat the Copts of Yukon the same as I treat those of Halifax! I promised her I would.

During 2001-2002, I travelled to Whitehorse, the capital city of the Yukon four times to celebrate the Eucharist with our Copts who, for a season, lived in the Land of the Midnight Sun. (Picture below)





## TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATIONS

Father Athanasius has been active in the field of translation, particularly in liturgical texts. In 1990, His Holiness Pope Shenouda appointed a committee for translating the Liturgy. Fr. Athanasius and Fr. Antonios Henein shared the secretariat of that committee. His Holiness' directions to the committee were to use old English for the translation. Father Athanasius remains committed to His Holiness' directions. Some may argue that old English is not spoken today, yet in celebrating the Arabic Liturgy we use classical Arabic which is different from spoken Arabic, a similar situation.



Abba Pishoy Monastery, May 1990, committee for translating the Liturgy. Second from left is Dr. Emile Maher (currently Fr. Shenouda)

### TRANSLATIONS BY FATHER ATHANASIUS:

These include all three liturgies, the Lakkane service, the Kneeling service. The Agpeya and the Liturgy of Holy Matrimony were translated in collaboration with Fr. Ammonius Guirguis. Father Athanasius was the first to translate Midnight Praise (Tasbeha) and record it in English. Liturgy of Holy Pascha and of Joyous Saturday as well as numerous other liturgical services were also translated.

In November 1997, His Grace Bishop Serapion and His Grace Bishop Youssef formed a committee to revise the earlier translation of 1990. Father Athanasius was invited to participate in the committee.

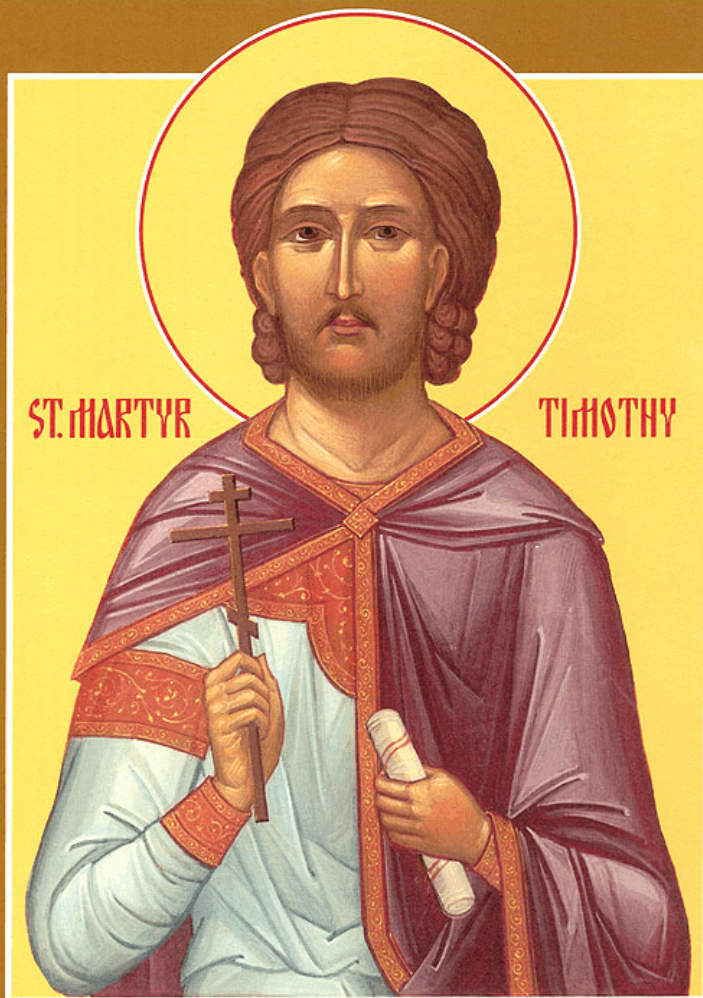


### **BOOKS BY FATHER ATHANASIOS:**

1. Understanding the Liturgy: Step by step explanation of the Liturgy and its ritual according to the writings of the Fathers of the Church.
2. The Abomination of Desolation: A book about Antichrist and the end of the world according to the sayings of the Fathers of the Church.
3. Practical Spirituality: A book about applying the spirituality of the Desert Fathers to life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The book is based on sermons given by Father Athanasius. Audio recordings of these sermons found their way to the Internet and became popular with the youth. Permission was given for the book to be reprinted and distributed in Australia.

Father Athanasius is appealing to all his friends and relatives, not to send him any personal gifts on the occasion of his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A small donation may be made instead, towards the Church Retreat project. No exceptions please!

# SAINT TIMOTHY AND SAINT MAURA



**ST. MARY'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH  
KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA**

## SAINT TIMOTHY AND HIS WIFE MAURA

Saints Timothy and Maura suffered for the faith during the persecution under the emperor Diocletian (284-305). St Timothy came from the village of Perapa, near Antinou (Egyptian Thebaid), and was the son of a priest named Pikolpossos, who brought up his son in Christian piety.

Timothy from his first years as a youth served during his father's term in the rank of reader and the keeper of liturgical books. St. Timothy read sacred books daily at home. But he read them with special inspiration in church assemblies on Saturdays and Sundays. For his distinct, intelligent and reverent reading during the divine services St. Timothy was respected by Christians.

Another obligation of his rank as reader, was the writing of sacred books. For Timothy, the writing of sacred books was not only an obligation but also was a hobby. He called the copied books his children, his expensive treasure that he also shared with the Christians of his church community.

St. Timothy married a 17 year old maiden Maura, a devout Christian woman from a very pious and prosperous family. He found in her who also had a distinguished Christian education a friend for life, capable of empathizing with his moods. She respected the calling of her husband and she empathized with him, inspiring him with what he read in the sacred books in the church. She also liked to read sacred books, knew them so well that she could expound their sayings by heart.

St. Timothy was known for his great piety and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Many times at night after the day's work, villagers would gather around Timothy where he would read to them from the Scriptures.

After only 20 days of marriage, a terrible trial came to them: the persecution of Christians had arrived. Diocletian made a decree that required the confiscation of sacred books from Christians in order to burn them. Timothy was summoned to the pagan governor Arianos, to be brought to trial for his Christian teaching and missionary work. At first, he was asked to surrender all of his sacred books in order for them to be destroyed. Timothy refused, for he knew their value and power. "If a father who loves his children," he said, "and who obeys the natural law does not deliver up to death his fleshly children, how can I give over

my spiritual children, the sacred books, into your polluted hands?"

Arianos subjected the saint to horrible tortures for his refusal to obey the command. They shoved two red-hot iron rods into his ears, from which the sufferer lost his eyesight and became blind. He regarded the tortures as honours, since they would bring him eternal bliss.

St Timothy bravely endured the pain and he gave thanks to God, for granting him to suffer for Him. The torturers hung the saint head downwards, putting a piece of wood in his mouth, and they tied a heavy stone to his neck. St Timothy's suffering was so extreme, that even those who tortured him implored the governor to ease up on the torture.

About this time they informed Arian that Timothy had a young wife named Maura, whom he had married only twenty days before. Arian ordered Maura to be brought, hoping that with her present, they could break St Timothy's will. She was asked to use her "womanly gifts" to persuade her husband to deny Christ. At the request of Maura, they removed the piece of wood from the mouth of the martyr, so that he could speak. St Timothy urged his wife not to fear the tortures, but to follow his path. St Maura answered, "I am prepared to die with you," and she boldly confessed herself a Christian. Arianos commanded that the hair be torn from her head, and to cut the fingers off her hands.

St. Maura underwent her tortures with joy and even thanked the Governor for the pain which she endured so that her sins might be forgiven. Arianos then gave orders to throw St. Maura into a boiling cauldron, but she did not feel any pain and remained unharmed. Suspecting that the servants had filled the cauldron with cold water out of sympathy, Arianos ordered the saint to splash him on the hand with the water from the cauldron. When St. Maura did this, Arianos screamed with pain and drew back his scalded hand. Momentarily admitting the power of the miracle, Arianos confessed God in Whom Maura believed as the True God, and he ordered her to be released.

However, the devil still held great power over the governor, and soon he again began to urge St. Maura to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. Having gotten nowhere, Arianos was overcome all the more by a satanic rage, and he came up with new tortures. The people then began to murmur and demand a stop to the abuse of the innocent woman. But St. Maura, turning to the them, said, "Let no one defend me. I have one Defender, God, in Whom I trust."

During all of these tortures, the saints both saw visions of angels which comforted them. As they were both led to their death by crucifixion, they both kissed their crosses on which they were to be martyred. Nailed to their crosses facing each other, each comforted the other for nine days as they hung. During the 9 days of suffering on the cross they courageously preached Christ, talked about the Lord and eternal life.

After nine days of hanging on their crosses glorifying the Lord, these newlyweds gave up their souls and entered eternal life. They beheld a vision of angels pointing to thrones in heaven next to Jesus Christ waiting for them.

These events occurred in 286. Later, a solemn celebration of the holy martyrs Timothy and Maura was instituted at Constantinople, and a church was built in their honour.

## **FEASTS OF THE SAINTS:**

Anglican: May 3

Eastern Orthodox: May 3 (May 16 for Old Calendar)

First Sunday of July: Discovery of miracle working icon.

Catholic: March 16

Coptic: There is no definite feast for the martyrs in our Synaxarion but there is a brief entry of the “Commemoration of the martyrdom of St. Timothy,” on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Athor (November 14/15)

## **HYMNS OF VENERATION:**

### **ANGLICAN:**

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God,  
Who didst strengthen thy blessed martyrs Timothy and Maura  
With the virtue of constancy in faith and truth:  
Grant us in like manner for love of thee  
To despise the prosperity of this world,  
And to fear none of its adversities;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **EASTERN ORTHODOX:**

### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Your holy martyrs Timothy and Mavra, O Lord,  
Through their sufferings have received incorruptible crowns from  
You, our God.  
For having Your strength, they laid low their adversaries,  
And shattered the powerless boldness of demons.  
Through their intercessions, save our souls!

### **Kontakion (Tone 4)**

You accepted many humiliations,  
And deserved to be crowned by God.  
Great and praiseworthy Timothy and Maura,  
Intercede with the Lord for us:  
That we may celebrate your most pure memory;  
That He may grant peace to our land and people,  
For He is a powerful stronghold for the faithful!

## **SLAVIC RITE:**

Let us assemble, all who love the martyrs!  
Together let us praise with faith today  
Maura and Timothy, courageous among martyrs.  
They suffered greatly and slew the enemy.  
They loved Christ and hated the world.  
They are worthy citizens of the spiritual Zion!

Timothy, your body was tied,  
Your eyes gouged out and spikes driven into your ears.  
You were weighed down with a heavy stone.  
Thus you threw down the enemy  
And were carried up to divine glory, glorious one!  
Therefore we come together with faith  
And praise you with entreaties,  
Glory and boast of the martyrs!

You suffered in purity, glorious Maura,  
With brilliant radiance you cast the enemy into darkness!  
You were trampled by horses and your fingers cut off.  
You were crucified and burned with torches.  
You passed over to divine rest  
Where the choir of martyrs ever rejoices

It is sad that there is no doxology or a veneration for these holy martyrs  
in our Coptic church, their own church!

### **ST. MAURA'S CHURCH:**

A church dedicated to St. Maura can be found on the island of Zakynthos, Greece. St. Maura's miracle-working icon is located there. The icon was originally from Egypt. In Zakynthos, a shepherd had found the icon in a small ravine when he saw a bright light emanating from the area. Three times he took the icon with great reverence back to his village but each time it would miraculously return to the spot where he had found it. It was determined that it should be left there and a church should be built on that spot, where it still stands today (the village of Maherado).

The present church was rebuilt in 1631 after a great earthquake destroyed most of the original church. In 1953 another great earthquake damaged the church, but it was rebuilt by the devout Christians of the island. Along with the feast day on May 3, the island of Zakynthos also celebrates another feast for the saints on the Sunday after Pentecost.



**The church of St Maura at the  
village of Macherado, Zakynthos,  
Greece**



**SAINT MAURA**  
**A POEM BY THE BRITISH POET CHARLES KINGSLEY**  
**(12 June 1819 – 23 January 1875)**

Thank God! Those gazers' eyes are gone at last!  
The guards are crouching underneath the rock;  
The lights are fading in the town below,  
Around the cottage which this morn was ours.  
Kind sun, to set, and leave us here alone;  
Alone upon our crosses with our God;  
While all the angels watch us from the stars.  
Kind moon, to shine so clear and full on him,  
And bathe his limbs in glory, for a sign  
Of what awaits him! Oh look on him, Lord!  
Look, and remember how he saved thy lamb!

Oh listen to me, teacher, husband, love,  
Never till now loved utterly! Oh say,  
Say you forgive me! No—you must not speak:  
You said it to me hours ago—long hours!  
Now you must rest, and when to-morrow comes  
Speak to the people, call them home to God,  
A deacon on the Cross, as in the Church;  
And plead from off the tree with outspread arms,  
To show them that the Son of God endured  
For them—and me. Hush! I alone will speak,  
And while away the hours till dawn for you.  
I know you have forgiven me; as I lay  
Beneath your feet, while they were binding me,  
I knew I was forgiven then! When I cried  
'Here am I, husband! The lost lamb returned,  
All re-baptized in blood!' and you said, 'Come!  
Come to thy bride-bed, martyr, wife once more!'  
From that same moment all my pain was gone;  
And ever since those sightless eyes have smiled  
Love—love! Alas, those eyes! They made me fall.  
I could not bear to see them, bleeding, dark,  
Never, no never to look into mine;

Never to watch me round the little room  
Singing about my work, or flash on me  
Looks bright with counsel.—Then they drove me mad  
With talk of nameless tortures waiting you—  
And I could save you! You would hear your love—  
They knew you loved me, cruel men! And then—  
Then came a dream; to say one little word,  
One easy wicked word, we both might say,  
And no one hear us, but the lictors round;  
One tiny sprinkle of the incense grains,  
And both, both free! And life had just begun—  
Only three months—short months—your wedded wife  
Only three months within the cottage there—  
Hoping I bore your child. . . .  
Ah! husband! Saviour! God! think gently of me!  
I am forgiven! . . .

And then another dream;  
A flash—so quick, I could not bear the blaze;  
I could not see the smoke among the light—  
To wander out through unknown lands, and lead  
You by the hand through hamlet, port, and town,  
On, on, until we died; and stand each day  
To glory in you, as you preached and prayed  
From rock and bourne-stone, with that voice, those words,  
Mingled with fire and honey—you would wake,  
Bend, save whole nations! would not that atone  
For one short word?—ay, make it right, to save  
You, you, to fight the battles of the Lord?  
And so—and so—alas! you knew the rest!  
You answered me. . . .

Ah cruel words! No! Blessed, godlike words.  
You had done nobly had you struck me dead,  
Instead of striking me to life!—the temptress! . . .  
‘Traitor! apostate! dead to God and me!’—  
‘The smell of death upon me?’—so it was!  
True! true! well spoken, hero! Oh they snapped,

Those words, my madness, like the angel's voice  
Thrilling the graves to birth-pangs. All was clear.  
There was but one right thing in the world to do;  
And I must do it. . . . Lord, have mercy! Christ!  
Help through my womanhood: or I shall fail  
Yet, as I failed before! . . . I could not speak—  
I could not speak for shame and misery,  
And terror of my sin, and of the things  
I knew were coming: but in heaven, in heaven!  
There we should meet, perhaps—and by that time  
I might be worthy of you once again—  
Of you, and of my God. . . . So I went out.

Will you hear more, and so forget the pain?  
And yet I dread to tell you what comes next;  
Your love will feel it all again for me.  
No! it is over; and the woe that's dead  
Rises next hour a glorious angel. Love!  
Say, shall I tell you? Ah! your lips are dry!  
To-morrow, when they come, we must entreat,  
And they will give you water. One to-day,  
A soldier, gave me water in a sponge  
Upon a reed, and said, 'Too fair! too young!  
She might have been a gallant soldier's wife!  
And then I cried, 'I am a soldier's wife!  
A hero's!' And he smiled, but let me drink.  
God bless him for it!

So they led me back:

And as I went, a voice was in my ears  
Which rang through all the sunlight, and the breath  
And blaze of all the garden slopes below,  
And through the harvest-voices, and the moan  
Of cedar-forests on the cliffs above,  
And round the shining rivers, and the peaks  
Which hung beyond the cloud-bed of the west,  
And round the ancient stones about my feet.  
Out of all heaven and earth it rang, and cried,

'My hand hath made all these. Am I too weak  
 To give thee strength to say so?' Then my soul  
 Spread like a clear blue sky within my breast,  
 While all the people made a ring around,  
 And in the midst the judge spoke smilingly—  
 'Well! hast thou brought him to a better mind?'  
 'No! He has brought me to a better mind!'—  
 I cried, and said beside—I know not what—  
 Words which I learnt from thee—I trust in God  
 Nought fierce or rude—for was I not a girl  
 Three months ago beneath my mother's roof?  
 I thought of that. She might be there! I looked—  
 She was not there! I hid my face and wept.  
 And when I looked again, the judge's eye  
 Was on me, cold and steady, deep in thought—  
 'She knows what shame is still; so strip her.' 'Ah!'  
 I shrieked, 'Not that, Sir! Any pain! So young  
 I am—a wife too—I am not my own,  
 But his—my husband's!' But they took my shawl,  
 And tore my tunic off, and there I stood  
 Before them all. . . . Husband! you love me still?  
 Indeed I pleaded! Oh, shine out, kind moon,  
 And let me see him smile! Oh! how I prayed,  
 While some cried 'Shame!' and some, 'She is too young!'  
 And some mocked—ugly words: God shut my ears.  
 And yet no earthquake came to swallow me.  
 While all the court around, and walls, and roofs,  
 And all the earth and air were full of eyes,  
 Eyes, eyes, which scorched my limbs like burning flame,  
 Until my brain seemed bursting from my brow:  
 And yet no earthquake came! And then I knew  
 This body was not yours alone, but God's—  
 His loan—He needed it: and after that  
 The worst was come, and any torture more  
 A change—a lightening; and I did not shriek—  
 Once only—once, when first I felt the whip—  
 It coiled so keen around my side, and sent  
 A fire-flash through my heart which choked me—then

I shrieked—that once. The foolish echo rang  
So far and long—I prayed you might not hear.  
And then a mist, which hid the ring of eyes,  
Swam by me, and a murmur in my ears  
Of humming bees around the limes at home;  
And I was all alone with you and God.  
And what they did to me I hardly know;  
I felt, and did not feel. Now I look back,  
It was not after all so very sharp:  
So do not pity me. It made me pray;  
Forget my shame in pain, and pain in you,  
And you in God: and once, when I looked down,  
And saw an ugly sight—so many wounds!  
‘What matter?’ thought I. ‘His dear eyes are dark;  
For them alone I kept these limbs so white—  
A foolish pride! As God wills now. ’Tis just.’  
But then the judge spoke out in haste: ‘She is mad,  
Or fenced by magic arts! She feels no pain!’  
He did not know I was on fire within:  
Better he should not; so his sin was less.  
Then he cried fiercely, ‘Take the slave away,  
And crucify her by her husband’s side!’  
And at those words a film came on my face—  
A sickening rush of joy—was that the end?  
That my reward? I rose, and tried to go—  
But all the eyes had vanished, and the judge;  
And all the buildings melted into mist:  
So how they brought me here I cannot tell—  
Here, here, by you, until the judgment-day,  
And after that for ever and for ever!  
Ah! If I could but reach that hand! One touch!  
One finger tip, to send the thrill through me  
I felt but yesterday!—No! I can wait:—  
Another body!—Oh, new limbs are ready,  
Free, pure, instinct with soul through every nerve,  
Kept for us in the treasures of God.  
They will not mar the love they try to speak,  
They will not fail my soul, as these have done!

Will you hear more? Nay—you know all the rest:  
Yet those poor eyes—alas! they could not see  
My waking, when you hung above me there  
With hands outstretched to bless the penitent—  
Your penitent—even like The Lord Himself—  
I gloried in you!—like The Lord Himself!  
Sharing His very sufferings, to the crown  
Of thorns which they had put on that dear brow  
To make you like Him—show you as you were!  
I told them so! I bid them look on you,  
And see there what was the highest throne on earth—  
The throne of suffering, where the Son of God  
Endured and triumphed for them. But they laughed;  
All but one soldier, gray, with many scars;  
And he stood silent. Then I crawled to you,  
And kissed your bleeding feet, and called aloud—  
You heard me! You know all! I am at peace.  
Peace, peace, as still and bright as is the moon  
Upon your limbs, came on me at your smile,  
And kept me happy, when they dragged me back  
From that last kiss, and spread me on the cross,  
And bound my wrists and ankles—Do not sigh:  
I prayed, and bore it: and since they raised me up  
My eyes have never left your face, my own, my own,  
Nor will, till death comes! . . .

Do I feel much pain?  
Not much. Not maddening. None I cannot bear.  
It has become like part of my own life,  
Or part of God's life in me—honour—bliss!  
I dreaded madness, and instead comes rest;  
Rest deep and smiling, like a summer's night.  
I should be easy, now, if I could move . . .  
I cannot stir. Ah God! these shoots of fire  
Through all my limbs! Hush, selfish girl! He hears you!  
Who ever found the cross a pleasant bed?  
Yes; I can bear it, love. Pain is no evil  
Unless it conquers us. These little wrists, now—

You said, one blessed night, they were too slender,  
Too soft and slender for a deacon's wife—  
Perhaps a martyr's:—You forgot the strength  
Which God can give. The cord has cut them through;  
And yet my voice has never faltered yet.  
Oh! do not groan, or I shall long and pray  
That you may die: and you must not die yet.  
Not yet—they told us we might live three days . . .  
Two days for you to preach! Two days to speak  
Words which may wake the dead!

Hush! is he sleeping?  
They say that men have slept upon the cross;  
So why not he? . . . Thanks, Lord! I hear him breathe:  
And he will preach Thy word to-morrow!—save  
Souls, crowds, for Thee! And they will know his worth  
Years hence—poor things, they know not what they do!—  
And crown him martyr; and his name will ring  
Through all the shores of earth, and all the stars  
Whose eyes are sparkling through their tears to see  
His triumph—Preacher! Martyr!—Ah—and me?—  
If they must couple my poor name with his,  
Let them tell all the truth—say how I loved him,  
And tried to damn him by that love! O Lord!  
Returning good for evil! and was this  
The payment I deserved for such a sin?  
To hang here on my cross, and look at him  
Until we kneel before Thy throne in heaven!

Eversley, 1852.



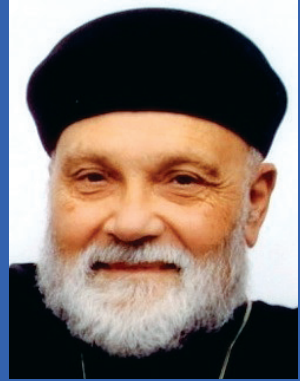
**Miracle working Icon of Saint Maura (Coptic)  
At her church in the island of Zakynthos**



## THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Students of early church history often disagree, but there is one thing they all agree upon: the early church was consumed by earnest expectation of the imminent "Parousia" (the Lord's second coming). Some even say that this expectation was the driving force behind the fervor that the early church exhibited in its practices.

Maranatha! exclaims St. Paul at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians (1Co 16:22), and even though the letter was addressed to a Greek community, yet he includes this Aramaic word - no doubt part of the earliest Liturgy - that meant: Come Lord !



The day of the Parousia - we are told by our Lord - is known only to God the Father (Mat 24:36). It comes suddenly, like lightning (Mat 24:27) and unexpectedly, like the day Noah entered into the Ark and the flood came suddenly and took the whole old world by surprise. People were eating and drinking and even getting married when the flood came. (Mat 24:38,39). Hence the Lord's advice to the church: "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Mat 24:42).

Our Coptic Church, so faithful to the traditions of the old church, keeps this tradition alive in its practices. The same two chapters mentioned earlier (Luke 12 and Mat 25) are appointed to be read as part of the canonical hours of the midnight prayer.

Another tradition also kept by our church, is the vigil on Great Saturday (Saturday before Easter) when the whole church keeps vigil all night, praising the Lord and meditating on the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelations), which - more than any other book in the Bible - speaks to us about the Lord's Parousia (second coming).

"Behold I come quickly." "Seal not the sayings of the prophesy of this book, for the time is at hand...and behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." "Surely I come quickly. Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev 22: 7, 10, 12, 20).