

**INTRODUCTION**  
**to the**  
**COPTIC CHURCH**

**by**

**IRIS H. ELMASRY**



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**DEDICATION**

**to all those who aspire towards**

**FRATERNITY AND GOODWILL**

**in Africa and throughout the World**



## INTRODUCTION

History is life, consequently it should be the story of the people wherever they are; it should recount the struggle of the nations for freedom and dignity, their aspirations and their heroic achievements. This yearning after the Ideal is the goal of our study of the Copts<sup>(1)</sup> and their Church. It is, therefore, essential to know from the outset that they have a strong leaning towards the mystical and the spiritual. Even before the Advent of the Christ, the Egyptians conceived of a triad of gods and a judgment of their worth by their god Osiris according to which they received their just due in the hereafter. These beliefs helped them to glimpse the Light of Christianity beforehand. Little wonder that the prophet declared: "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Hosea 11 : 1) In due season the Word was sown in Egyptian hearts, bearing fruit thirty, sixty, and an hundredfold. (Mark 4 : 8).

JANUARY 1977

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(1) Copt: common term meaning Egyptian, but by common usage became the designation of a Christian Egyptian.

## **PART I — THE STORY**

### **1. ST. MARK**

To Christians, all the world over, St. Mark is one of the four writers of the Gospel. To the Copts, he is the Bearer of the Good News, the Founder of their Church, and the first Pope of Alexandria. Born in Cyrene <sup>(1)</sup> (in North Africa), he was attracted to return to his native land and preach the Good News. Accordingly, he first went to the pentapolis where he started the first African christian community. From thence, he came to Alexandria in 61 A.D. This great metropolis dazzled him by its splendour and beauty; it filled him with unutterable sadness by its sin and waywardness. Towards the evening of his first day, the strap of his sandal was torn, and he turned to the first cobbler he met. As Anianus (the cobbler) was working, the awl pierced his hand. He lifted it up, exclaiming : "O, One God !" The Apostle healed his wound and, taking his clue from the exclamation, gave Anianus the Good News. That day the Seed was sown: the cobbler and his family were the first fruits of the Church founded by St. Mark.

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(1) This is the city of Simon who bore the cross of the Saviour on the way to Calvary (Matt. 27:32) ; it is also mentioned in connection with the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). The Pentapolis form (with Cyrene) five cities in the present-day Lybia, North Africa.



During his ministry, St. Mark ordained Anianus Bishop, thus consecrating the first African Bishop. He also ordained with him twelve priests and seven deacons who, with their Bishop, formed the first group of African clergymen; they carried on the work of sowing the Seed proclaimed by the Evangelist. To fortify the newly-born Church, St. Mark founded the Catechetical School in Alexandria, which is the first theological college in the whole Christian world; wrote his Gospel at the request of the believers, and legated to them the Liturgy (now known as the Kyrillian).

In the year 68 A.D., the eve of the feast of the god Serapis happened to coincide with the eve of Easter. The crowds who gathered for the former feast were fanned to a frenzy by their leaders. Hardly had they ended their celebration, than they rushed to the church, seized St. Mark, tied a rope round his neck and dragged him through the streets. In a short time, his head was severed from his body. They left him and dispersed. The believers came and lifted him up, putting his head in a casket which they put in the Church they called after him where it is still treasured. His body was placed in a church by the seashore. The Venetian merchants stole it in the ninth century where they put it under the altar of the grand cathedral named after St. Mark whom they declared the Patron Saint of their city. In June 1668, after a period of negotiations, Pope Paul VI (of Rome) gave the Evangelist's relics to Pope Kyrillos VI (of Alexandria) on the occasion of celebrating the passage of nineteen centuries since St. Mark's martyrdom. A grand cathedral had been erected for the occasion, and below its altar a reliquary. The relics arrived

home on the 24th. of June; for three consecutive days, the Coptic Church celebrated this supreme commemoration. Members from all churches throughout the world, the Egyptian Government and emperor Haile Selasie of Ethiopia shared in the celebrations. Then St. Mark's relics was carried in a procession and placed in the reliquary.

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## 2. THE CHAIR OF ALEXANDRIA

The Seed sowed by St. Mark took root and grew into a great tree (Mark 4 : 31, 32 and Luke 13 : 19). During the Apostle's lifetime, a church was built; at his martyrdom, it was given his name. The present-day cathedral of St. Mark in Alexandria stands on the very same site whereon this first church built on Egyptian soil stood Anianus, having been ordained by the evangelist-martyr resumed the guidance of the believers. From then onwards, the line of his successors continues unbroken. At present, his Successor is Abba Shenouda III, the hundred and seventeenth Pope of Alexandria.

The title "Pope" was used to designate St. Mark's successors from the time of Anianus. In its Coptic form, it is "Papa" or "father of fathers". Some of the most illustrious Fathers of the Church Universal are among the Popes of Alexandria. A few examples will be cited here :

ABBA DEMETRIUS : (12th Pope, 199-232 A.D.), entitled "the Vinedresser" who computed the Epact by which the date of Easter was calculated, and can be fixed unto eternity. It was used by the Church Universal until 1582 A.D.

ABBA DIONYSIUS : (14th Pope, 249-270 A.D.), entitled "A man of universal learning", and an oecumenical teacher. His arbitration was sought by two candidates for the Chair of

Rome, and his response aimed at keeping the peace and unity of the Church.

ABBA PÉTROS I : (17th Pope, 293-303 A.D.), martyred by emperor Diocletian because of his daring to withstand him for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the Faith and sustaining the hearts of the believers. The laws he set down for accepting repentant renegades are marked by Christian charity and paternal solicitude. They are revered by the Church Universal.

ABBA ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC : (20th Pope, 326-372 A.D.), known for his intrepidity in defending Orthodoxy against all deviations to the extent of earning the epithet "Athanasius versus the world".

ABBA KYRILLOS I : (24th Pope, 412-443 A.D.), entitled "the Pillar of Faith" and "St. Mark's Cub", for elucidating the Orthodox Doctrine and withstanding Nestorianism.

ABBA DIOSCORUS I : (25th Pope, 443-458 A.D.), whose intrepidity in the council of Chalcedon caused emperor Marcianus to banish him. He died in exile rather than forego one iota of the spiritual legacy entrusted to him.

ABBA THEODOSIUS : (35th Pope, 519-536 A.D.), whom both emperors Justinian I and II tried to bribe into submission by promising to make him ruler over all their African domain. He refused and was, consequently, imprisoned in Constantinople for twenty eight years, till he died.

**ABBA BENJAMEN I** : (38th Pope, 625-664 A.D.), he succeeded in shepherding his people during the fall of Constantinople and the Arab conquest. After the entry of the Arabs, he rebuilt the destroyed churches, and collected the Church laws which he wrote and promulgated among the believers for their edification.

**ABBA MIKHAIL I** : (46th Pope, 743-766 A.D.), who maintained the Orthodox Doctrine and practises, accepting imprisonment, scourging, threat of death, and payment of exorbitant sums of money rather than bow before the temporal powers.

**ABBA SHENOUDA I** : (55th Pope, 858-869 A.D.), who despite severe persecutions, dug canals under the streets of Alexandria through which fresh waters could be available to the sorely stricken people.

**ABBA MIKHAIL IV** : (68th Pope, 1092-1102 A.D.), who mediated between the Sultan of Egypt and the king of Ethiopia, thus evading war and leading to amical relations between the two.

**ABBA KYRILLOS III** : (75th Pope, 1226-1234 A.D.), whose letters and books of catechism and concerning the doctrine show him as a vigilant Shepherd mindful of his people in Damascus, Nubia and Ethiopia. He is the first Successor to St. Mark who ordained a Coptic Archbishop over Jerusalem for shepherding the Copts throughout the Middle Eastern countries.

**ABBA MATTHEOS THE GREAT** :-(87th Pope, 1378-1409 A.D.), in whom shown all the Apostolic gifts: he healed

the sick, he cast out the devils and he raised the dead (Matt. 10-8). He was also given the gift of prophecy and wielded great influence on the Mamluke Sultan Barkook. One of the most touching stories about this man of God shows his influence over the wild beasts. While yet living in the desert, he was walking one day from a cell to another. A mother hyena came and walked beside him and carried for him his bundle of clothes. He felt that she must be in some need and left her to walk at her will. They came to a deep chasm, and she stood still lifting up her eyes to him as if imploring him. He descended into the chasm and found her cub fallen at the bottom. Putting it on his shoulder, he climbed up and delivered it to her. In gratitude, she licked his feet and went away. Next day, he heard a scratching on his door; opening it, he found yesterday's hyena with another mother hyena bringing her blind cub. He knelt on the sand beside them, put his right hand on the eyes of the cub and prayed. The eyes opened. The two brutes lay at his feet licking them. Père Chéneau d'Orléans commenting on the power of the saints on the beasts of the wild says that God granted them that power which He had bestowed on Adam before his fall.

Contemporary with this man of wondrous spiritual gifts is a man who is himself a miracle : he is

ABBA ROWEISS : He was a poor illiterate peasant who had to toil for a living from his tender years, and had to flee from his village before drastic tortures at the age of twenty. Yet, such was his love for the Christ and for his sorely afflicted co-religionists that he journeyed from town.

to town, and from village to village in order to enthuse the faint hearted with courage, and inflame the spirits with ardour. For a few years, he lived this errant life, then settled on what has since then become known as the Abba Roweiss ground. Many youths came to him for council and guidance, and became his disciples. And such is God's assessment of human worth that He bestowed upon this man — shorn of all worldly advantages — rare spiritual gifts. He endowed him with the ability of seeing the invisible, of foretelling the future, of ransoming erring youths, and of journeying in the spirit. One example of ransom is that of a handsome young man from a well-to-do family who was seduced by the Sultan to deny the Christ and marry a royal princess. Two years later, he came to Abba Roweiss saying : "O man of God, what can I do, for the devil has vanquished me ?" Hearing his whole story, the saint advised him to go and live in St. Anthony's monastery adding : "The devil vanquished you in the first round and you will vanquish him in the second." The erring man remonstrated : "Suppose the Sultan knows where I am and tortures the monks because of me..." Abba Roweiss replied : "You go, and I shall ask God to make the Sultan forget you." The youth obeyed, and the Sultan did forget him.

As for his ability to journey in the spirit, it is demonstrated by the following incident : A Copt was the treasurer of the Mamluke Prince Mintach who took him with him to Syria. They remained there longer than was anticipated. The Copt's wife, alarmed at his delay, went to Abba Roweiss. Then, it seemed to her that he went into a trance, and came to himself half an hour later saying : "Your husband was in danger but is now safe, and arrive tomorrow". The woman took his

word implicitly and went home comforted. The following day her husband came. He told her that when they were half way on their journey back, the Prince outran them, leaving him with the soldiers who wanted to snatch from him the box wherein the Prince's money was kept. At his opposition, they threatened to kill him. Suddenly a man appeared and saved him, accompanying them till they reached the outpost of Cairo then leaving them as suddenly as he appeared.

In acknowledgement of his services and his spiritual worth, the Church entitled him "Abba" — a term used only to designate popes and bishops.

ABBA YOANNIS XIII : (94<sup>th</sup> Pope, 1483-1526 A.D.), whose awareness of his great duties necessitated that he write letters of edification to his flock in Cyprus, and that he donate church-books to the bishop whom he consecrated over this island for their service. It should be noted that when the Turks conquered this island, they massacred all the Copts there including the bishop. A monastery, still stands on the slopes near Nicosia where Armenian monks now live, retaining its original name — that of St. Macari the Great.

ABBA YOANNIS XVI : (103<sup>rd</sup> Pope, 1676-1718 A.D.), whose papacy can best be described in the words of the psalmist, "thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. 103 : 5). For despite famines, plagues and persecutions, he succeeded in rebuilding the monasteries of the Eastern desert, as well as in repairing and reconstructing numerous churches. His sympathy was such that he decreed that the priests are to take the Communion to the sick who are unable to go to church.



ABBA KYRILLOS IV : (110th Pope, 1854-1861 A.D.), known among the Copts as "Father of Renaissance" because he opened several schools (in the modern sense of the word), one of which was for girls; he revived the Coptic language, organized the work of the deacons, and bought a printing press — the second in Egypt, the first being that bought by Mohammad Ali Pasha. He aspired towards a unity of the Orthodox churches but did not live to achieve it. Abba Kyrillos was expressly asked by the Khedive Saïd Pasha to mediate between him and the Ethiopian emperor. His mediation led to the establishment of peace between the two countries.

ABBA KYRILLOS V : (112th Pope, 1874-1927 A.D.), under whose direction, the Sunday Schools spread from Alexandria to Aswan, and into the Sudan. He opened the present Theological Seminary and a technical school in Boulak (one of the poorest suburbs of Cairo). His pastoral tour comprised the Sudan, during which he consecrated several churches. Having been a scribe while a monk, he encouraged contemporary authors, and during his papacy countless books were published. Being ardent patriot, he supported Arabi and Zaghlool in their revolutions for national independence.

ABBA KYRILLOS VI : (116th Pope, 1959-1971 A.D.), who was graced by God with the power of healing and of casting out evil spirits, as well as by clairvoyance and clairaudience. He began rebuilding St. Mena's monastery in Mariut but did not see its completion. However, his people respected his will, and bore his body to the sacred spot after its completion where he was buried under the sanctuary of the big cathedral there. What is more, he brought his negotiations with Paul VI to a

successful end, and was consequently vouchsafed the joy of receiving St. Mark's relics, consecrating a grand cathedral in his name, and a reliquary under its sanctuary wherein the Evangelist's relics were placed. God's Grace abounded in that the Blessed Virgin appeared over the church named after her in Zeitoun (Cairo); beginning on Monday 2nd. of April 1968 and continuing for little over two years; hundreds of thousands — literally — felt the ecstasy of seeing Her. Muslims and Copts, Europeans, Americans and Africans crowded the streets round the Church nightly, from sunset to sunrise. Among the thousands thus blessed was President Nasser, who was the personal friend of Abba Kyrillos VI. And it is worth-noting that St. Mark's Cathedral wherein the Prayers for commemorating the martyrdom of St. Mark were held was not built by the Copts alone : the Egyptian Government as well as churches from the four corners of the earth contributed their share.

### 3. THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA

The popes can be likened to the apex of the pyramids which however lofty, can not but rest on the solid edifice below it. The peoples together with their lay-teachers, their priests and their bishops form this grand Pyramid. Foremost among the supporters of St. Mark's Successors, were the deans and the teachers of the Catechetical School of Alexandria founded by the Evangelist himself. Again, we find some of the most illustrious names in Christendom. Here is the witness of a present day writer : "The battle was fought, not in Smyrna nor in any of the seven churches of Asia, but in the theological school of Alexandria, the most civilized city of the time, where Jews and Christians met on equal footing, Origen and Clement of Alexandria were the protagonists in the drama. They wrestled with angels, delved into the mysterious origins of Christianity, consulted the oldest books, hurled anathemas on the pagans. When they completed their work they had laid the foundations of the faith, and built up its doctrinal structure almost to the height which it reaches today." Adding elsewhere : "Alexandria was the nerve-centre of Christianity." (1)

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(1) R. Payne : "The Holy Fire", pub. in New York 1957, pp. 22 & 171.

Here, it is imperative to mention but one more masterlight: he is Didymus entitled "The Blind Seer of Alexandria". For though he lost his eyesight at four, he prayed for inward Light. His prayers received God's Uplift, endowing him with such steadfast faith as enabled him to become one of the foremost erudites even in Alexandria. Such was his sparkling that Abba Athanasius the Apostolic appointed him Dean of the School of Alexandria. He invented a method by which the blind could learn : carving the letters on wood so that they could feel them with their fingers and thus read them. In this method, he anticipated Braille by fifteen centuries. But the wars, the persecutions and the great upheavals which overtook Egypt, obliterated his method alongside with many of the great creations of the mind.

This school continued to be the Lighthouse of Christian Learning until A.D. 451, when the first split between the churches happened as a result of the nefarious council of Chalcedon. Consequently, the emperors of Constantinople, in their persecutions against the Copts, closed the school, carrying to their own capital whatever books they could lay hands on. Those responsible for the Coptic Church took whatever remained of the books, and set up the centre of learning in the monastery of the great St. Macari (Macarius of Egypt) in Wadi n-Natrun in the western desert where it continued for several centuries. But the numerous raids and massacres recurrent in that area by the nomadic tribes gave little rest to the monks and their monasteries so that the Great Light gradually became like unto that of a candle. Nevertheless, God's Grace kept it alight for the ages to come. One of the most touching incidents of the Unconquerable Buoyancy of the

human spirit is that towards the end of 1970, there were five aged monks in St. Macari's monastery. One evening, the five of them sat reproaching the great saint that shortly his monastery will be closed since they were all well advanced in years and no new blood seems to be forthcoming. A week elapsed after this reproach of love when lo ! eight young men rang the bell of the monastery. They walked in declaring to the five elders that they came to live with them and learn from them. Since then, their number grew to thirty two. New cells and guest houses were built on what used to be the rampart of the monastery. The ardour and the kindness of these monks attract hundreds of peoples to visit the monastery especially during Advent, Lent, and the days commemorating the Saint's departure from this world, the building of the first church in his name, or some specific he performed. The continued Divine Providence has made the western desert to become once more a sanctuary of learning and intense spiritual zeal. And the School re-opened by Kyrillos V has gained momentum under the impetus of Kyrillos VI, and Shenouda III (present-day Pope).

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#### 4. PERSECUTIONS

During the first few centuries, Christians were persecuted wherever they lived. But in Egypt, persecutions raged on and off incessantly. After the martyrdom of St. Mark in 68 A.D., the Church which he founded enjoyed unbroken peace until A.D. 202. God, in His infinite Mercy, granted Her these years thereby enabling Her to withstand the ever-recurring onslaughts of persecutions, and to face with daring the various heresies. From 202 — 642, namely during the Roman-Byzantine period, twenty one persecutions overtook the Copts. The seventh among these persecutions inflamed by emperor Diocletian, burned for ten consecutive years. So much so, that Mgr. Guérin (a French Cardinal) says in his "Dictionnaire de Dictionnaires" under the word "martyre" that the number of those martyred is estimated at eight hundred thousand, the last of whom was Abba Petros I, who is therefore entitled "the Seal of the Martyrs". Preceding him were six bishops whose dignity was no deterrent to the persecutor.

In these twenty one persecutions, men, women and children alike, were tortured and killed most ruthlessly. And it should be noted that the Copts never painted a picture of torture, nor raised a statue depicting them. The only reminder is the calendar by which they made the year 284 A.D. (the first of Diocletian's reign) the beginning of their era. Thus the year

of Grace 1975 is the year 1691 A.M. (Anno Martyro). They were content to leave persecutor and persecuted alike in the Hand of God.

The Roman-Byzantine persecutions could be counted because they were declared by imperial edicts, and were also given the semblance of legality as the Copts were dragged before the magistrates where they were cross-questioned, sentenced to tortures then death. But from A.D. 642 to the coming of Mohammad Ali Pasha in 1805, the persecutions recurred incessantly though they cannot be numbered. For during the Middle Ages no edict ever proclaimed a persecution, and on very rare occasions was the persecuted tried. The whim of a ruler, the calumniation of a jealous courtier, the stray word of a fanatic and the lust for money — all these singly or together were good enough reasons to ignite the fire of persecution. Thus the Church of St. Mark lived continuously on the "Line of Confrontation". The wonder of it is that inspite of all trials and tribulations, of buffetings and scourgings, She not only lives, but is at present enjoying an exhilarating Renaissance: not only within the boundaries of her native-land, but across the continents also. She can be truly described as "the living Mother of the Martyrs".

## 5. MONASTICISM

Such is the unconquerable buoyancy implanted by God within the Coptic Church that, while facing dangers and temptations, She could outswim the tide. One of Her most far-reaching and sweeping influences on the whole of Christendom is monasticism. The enemies of such life of sanctity presume that monks were escapists. But a close scrutiny will reveal the authentic goal of these "Athletes of God". First, it should be remembered that the ancient Egyptians regarded the desert as the domain of the god of evil to which he was banished by the god of good. So that we can liken the monks to the parachutists who dare to fight the enemy within his own territory. Second, countless of the Masterlights among them were of the rich and influential class who could live in luxury despite persecutions. Third, whenever persecutions or plagues raged, these desert dwellers left their abodes and went into the cities to face torture with their brothers in the world. Last but not least, the persecutors marched into the desert and did not hesitate to kill the monks despite age, sex, and sanctity. Thus, we can see that those who left the world sought seclusion with God. All the early writers describe them as "God's Athletes" seeking to be "alone with the Alone".

Monasticism passed through three stages :

(a) COMPLETE SOLITARINESS : the man (or woman) seeking a life of prayer fasting and meditation, went alone into



the desert, found some natural cave or dug one for his purpose and lived therein for the rest of his life; unknown, unought and completely by himself. The most outstanding solitaire among men is St. Paul the first hermit who lived ninety years in utter obliviousness — having left the world at twenty. Only one week before his death, the Angel of the Lord disclosed his secret to St. Antoni who sought him out and heard from him his own story. A monastery still stands in the Eastern desert which bears his name — it is in the vicinity of the cave wherein he lived. As to the most outstanding woman, she is Mary the Errant (or the Repentant). She was of great beauty, and like the Magdalene spent the first part of her life in riotous living. Overcome by remorse, she went into the desert by the Jordan at twenty nine. There she lived in utter solitariness for forty five years. Then she was discovered by Zosima, an Abbot of a monastery in the Eastern desert. She confessed to him her life-story begging him to bring her the Eucharist the following year, and he complied with her request. A year later, he went to see her expressly, but found her dead with a slip of paper beside her on which were these words: "Return unto the earth what belongs to the earth, and pray for me". The reason for calling her "the Errant" is because she did not restrict herself to a certain cave, but wandered throughout the desert.

(b) THE ANTONIAN RULE : When St. Antoni returned to the desert, he assumed that he would be left alone like unto those who went before him. But he was not left to enjoy the silence of solitude for long. The multitudes went to see him. Naturally the majority sought him for spiritual counsel or for physical healing. But the few were so magnetized by his per-

sonality that they desired to stay with him. He advised each to find a cell for himself in which to live from Sunday evening to Saturday noon. On Saturday, at midday, they all gathered round him, and together they spent the time until Sunday evening. He taught them that each must work with his hands, alternating prayer with handwork. "For", said he, "a monk must earn his living. Also, if many devils beset the idle, one only besets the worker". He, also, set for them a specific garb: a white robe of flax reaching halfway between the knee and the ankle, with a wide leather belt tightened round their waist to keep them alert. Whenever any of them went to a town to sell their work (or for any other purpose) he wore a cape of the same material in summer, or a sheepskin (or any other skin) in winter. (The present day black robes worn by the Coptic monks and clergy were imposed by Sultan Al-Hakim in 979 A.D.) This rule of five and a half days in solitude, and one and a half in companionship is known as the Antonian monasticism. And because Abba Antoni was the first desert dweller to have disciples whom he taught and directed he is known as "The Father of Monks".

(c) COENOBITICAL OR COMMUNAL LIFE : This was inaugurated by Abba Pakhôm whose very life is a miracle. Born of pagan parents, he was mobilized at twenty by emperor constantine. One evening, he and his companions were made to encamp outside the city of Esnah (just north of Aswan). To his astonishment, he found some Esnites coming out to them with food and water. They washed for them their hands and feet, then offered them the food and waited on them as though they were their servants. Amazed by this kindness, he asked

why. One of his companions answered: "They are Christians, and their Christ enjoins them to love all people". Pakhôm meditated on this answer, and said within himself : "If this be the commandment of the Christ, then I must be a Christian should I return safely from war". On his return, he went straightway to Esnah where he found, in the nearby desert caves, an aged ascetic called Palamon with whom he lived for three years. At the end of these years, the Saintly man advised him to find a cave in which to live alone. He obeyed. Being of a very sensitive and sympathizing nature, he began to meditate that surely there are many who desire to give themselves wholly to God, but cannot endure solitude. So he set himself to pray for all these. In answer to his prayers, he was guided by the Angel of the Lord to build a monastery in which he will gather those seeking to live in prayer and devotion but are unable to live alone. Thus, he built the very first monastery throughout the world for men in a place called Tabennis near Dendarah in the Upper reaches of the Nile. Few months later, his sister Mary came to ask about him. Charmed by this mode of life, she asked him to build a monastery for women. Some of his monks built it for her in the same vicinity.

St. Pakhôm's monasteries did not attract the Egyptians only — men and women from different countries came to live with them. Some lived for the rest of their lives; others lived for some years then returned to their respective home lands to start monastic life according to the Pakhômian Rule. In Egypt, the Pakhômian Rule is the only order of monasticism, whereas in the West numerous orders evolved, yet they all sprouted from the same Rule. Hence St. Pakhôm is entitled "Father of the Coenobites".

The most outstanding of God's Athletes are : **Abba Macari the Great** (known as Macarius of Egypt), foremost among St. Antoni's disciples. He lived in the region of "She-heat" (or Scales of the Heart) in Wadi n-Natrun in the Western desert, and is known among the Copts as "Father of the She-heat desert"; and entitled by the historians "Father of the Patriarchs" because a preponderent number of Alexandrian Popes were selected from among the Macarians. His monastery still flourishes.

**ABBA PISHOY** : After whom one of the Wadi n-Natrun monasteries still extant is called. He is described in the Liturgy with the words "the perfect man, beloved of Our Good Saviour". His monastery has been repaired by the present Pope, Abba Shenouda III, who also revived it by encouraging a number of fine young men to enter it.

**ABBA YOANNIS KAMI** : Founder of the monastery now known as "As-Suriani" in Wadi n-Natrun. It is the monastery in which Abba Shenouda III lived before his papacy. Also, at present, Bishops Samuel for Public Relations and Social Service, Athanasius of Beni Suef, Domadius of Giza, Yoannis of Gharbeya, and Pakhômîus of Beheira and the Pentapolis, all lived in this monastery.

**ABBA SHENOUDA THE ARCHIMANDRITE** : Reckoned by the West to be the foremost leader to free the Egyptian from the shackles of Byzantium. He lived during a good part of the fifth and on to the sixth centuries as he attained the age of an hundred and eighteen years. And such was paternal solicitude that when the Bagat tribes marauded the region, capturing twenty thousand people and seizing their wealth, he crossed the Nile and met the leader of the marauders and said to him: "Keep the

spoils but give me the people". He, then, took his relieved compatriots to his white monastery (near Sohag in Upper Egypt) where he kept them for three months. He relegated the sick to his doctor monks, and placed the aged and the children under the care of the educators and social workers (monks). During these three months ninety four died and were buried in the monastery cemetery; and fifty two babies were born. These freed captives were kept until Abba Shenouda found work for the men by which to support their families.

**THE SPIRITUAL FATHER MARCUS THE ANTONIAN :**  
(late 14th and early 15th century.). He was born in a village near Sohag in Upper Egypt of poor hardworking peasants. Orphaned of his father at ten, he had to toil in the fields to earn a living for himself and his mother. He noted that his mother was an extremely generous soul despite their poverty, never refusing anyone. If some beggar knocked at her door when she had no money she would give him an egg or a cup of milk or a loaf of bread, she could never send him away empty. She was also an example in prayer and fasting: persevering in all these practises. Consequently at twenty three, Marcus disclosed to her his wish to become a monk. She replied: "Go in peace, my Son. Be steadfast and diligent; remember that our Lord said: 'No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of god'. (Luke 9 : 62)". He joined the monastery of the great Luminary of the Eastern desert, St. Antoni. In due time, he became guide and teacher to the monks of that monastery. They so revered him that they called him "spiritual father". And God granted him a long life (nearly a century) during which he set his face steadfastly forward that he may be fit for the kingdom of God.

**MOSES THE BLACK.** : In his youth, he was a slave; tall and heavily built, he had the strength of the brutes. And so wild and unruly was he that his own master chased him away. Glad in his release, he became the terror of the region in which he took his abode: killing, pillaging, getting drunk and committing all the evils of which depraved man is capable. Yet in the midst of this abyss, the Divine Spark hounded him. At times, he would walk out into the open, look up at the sun and say: "Are you God?" if not, where is He? One day as he repeated this obsessing question, he heard a Voice saying: "If you would know God, go to She-heat where the holy men will tell you." Immediately, he buckled on his sword, out of shere habit, and went straightway to the designated spot. There he was met by Isidorus, the Priest of She-heat who was frightened by his sight. Moses quietened his fears by relating to him why he came. Isidorus took him to the Great Macari who put him under his own tutelage. And God's Grace shone in this fallen sinner transforming him into a great saint, so much so, that he became abbot of a monastery wherein three hundred monks lived under his guidance. One day as they sat conversing with Abba Macari, the Great Luminary said: "I can see the Crown of Martyrdom on the head of one of you!" Moses replied: "This must surely be me, for our Lord said (they that take by the sword shall be taken by the sword)." Few days later, the Monastery was raided; seven monks were killed one of whom was Moses the Black whom the Church describes with the word "the Strong", for he succeeded in climbing from the depths of the abyss to the heights of sanctity.

At present, there are four monasteries in Wadi n-Natrun; they are those of : Abba Macari the Great, Abba Pishoy, As-

Suriani, and Al Baramus. Two monasteries within the region of the Red Sea; they are those of St. Antoni and St. Paul the first hermit. One in central Upper Egypt, near Fayoum called after a prominent Confessor, Abba Samuel of Kalamon. One South of the city of Assiut in Upper Egypt called Al-Moharraq, enclosing a church named after the Blessed Virgin and built over a spot wherein the Holy Family spent some time during their stay in Egypt. One in the desert of Mariut, near Alexandria, named after the martyr St. Mena. It was once in the centre of a big city comprising a hospital run by the monks, and a well from which pilgrims carried water back to their homes. Ampullae on which St. Mena's icon is engraved were found in Dongola (in the Sudan) and in Marseilles (in the South of France) denoting the great popularity of the saint. The church and the whole city were destroyed in the Middle Ages. Then, when Abba Kyrillos VI became Pope of Alexandria in 1959, he succeeded in getting from the Egyptian Government the right to build a new monastery within sight of the old one. Now it stands comprising within its walls: cells for monks, a grand cathedral, two churches, and a guest house. The belfry of its first-built church is high and can be seen from afar — a Lighthouse to the wayfarer, and a spearhead towards heaven. These nine are all for men. As for the women's convents there are seven of them, they are those of: The Blessed Virgin and St. George at Haret Zeweila; St. George, and St. Mercurius of the two swords in Old Cairo; and Prince Theodorus at Haret ar-Rum. These five are in the Cairo area. There is one convent named after the Archangel Mikhaïl near the city of Tanta; and one near the city of Mansoura named after the Virgin-Martyr Dimiana. Both these cities are in the Delta.

## 6. FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

God's Athletes in the desert waged an incessant war in the realm of the spirit ; they travailed mightily in prayer for the world. Meantime, their brothers who lived in the cities and the villages were striving daily keep the Torch of Faith aflame. From the Arab Conquest to the coming of Mohammad, 'Alī to power, twelve dynasties succeeded one another in ruling the Nile Valley. Naturally, each ruler had his personal method of holding the reigns, yet some dynasties are known to have been benevolent on the whole such as the Ayyubids whose greatest figure is Salah ed-Din (Saladin). Other dynasties ruled ruthlessly such as the Turks. In between, there were those during whose time benevolence alternated such as the Omayyads. Throughout the changes of dynasties, during wars famines and pestilences, or in the short lulls of peace, the Copts were convinced that they must face "the music", be it harmonious or discordant. It must be added that the Crusaders were fierce and cruel to Muslims and Copts alike. Also, during the French expedition and the British occupation, all the Egyptians were sorely pressed, and we can feasibly state that the Copts were more so. True, there were the renegades who through fear or lust for power forgot their Saviour. Yet, if their majority had not tenaciously upheld their Faith through thick and thin, the Church would have ceased to be.



## PART II — THE DOCTRINE

### A. THE CREED

When the Apostles of the Christ preached the Good News, they gave those who accepted them definite teachings about God, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, together with certain others relevant to them. As the churches grew in size and number, they were bound to meet opposition from the pagan as well as the Jewish teachings. But opposition from without is quite different from that which is within. And because the real spiritual import of Christianity is beyond human reasoning and logic, there arose from the ranks of the believers those who thought they could encage God's Grace within human limitations. Thus, there grew certain sects whom the Church opposed to maintain the integrity of the Faith. These deviating Christians proclaimed diverse contrary teachings, but here we will limit our record to the most glaring ones which were condemned by the Church Universal as heresies. They center mainly on the Incarnation: impalpable and ineffable; and are Arianism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism. One other heresy was against the Holy Spirit and was propagated by Macedonius.

1. **ARIANISM** was started by a Libyan priest called Arius who denied the divinity of our Lord. He was under the jurisdiction of Abba Alexandros (19th Pope of Alexandria, 303 — 326 A.D.). This outstanding Prelate was considered

“Perfectly irreproachable” by all the churches. He tried by patience and Christian Charity to convince Arius to repentance, but all his efforts were in vain. Consulting with Hosius, Bishop of Cordova and the envoy of emperor Constantine, Abba Alexandros sought the meeting of an oecumenical council. Consequently, the emperor invited the bishops of Christendom to meet at Nicea in A.D. 325, thus forming the first oecumenical council. Three hundred and eighteen bishops — from Iran in the East to Spain in the West — accepted the invitation. Thence forward, it became the prerogative of the Constantinople emperors to invite the bishops to convene in the oecumenical councils.

The first aim of this first council of Christendom's bishops was to put in crystal-clear expression their belief in the Incarnate Word. They disputed for this supreme task Abba Alexandros, his deacon Athanasius (afterwards the Apostolic), and Leontius, Bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia — namely two Egyptians and one from Asia Minor, (now Syria). These three worded the needed belief which became known as “the Creed”. It was signed unanimously; it ended with the phrase “we believe in the Holy Spirit” (will be recorded in the end). Having signed the Creed, and decreed the excommunication of Arius for his heresy, the assembled Fathers discussed the following problems :

(A) **ONENESS OF BAPTISM** : During the persecutions, some Christians denied the Christ, then repented. The Alexandrian Fathers emphatically declared that they should be examined, and if found sincere, accepted without re-baptism. “For”, said they, “Baptism is a birth, and as the physical birth

happens but once, so does the spiritual birth. It is also a death — the old man dies and the new is born. Once again, physical death happens once, and likewise the spiritual. Besides. Baptism is a Seal by which the Effigy of the Christ is stamped upon the spirit of the baptized. This seal, however, effaced It may become, will remain to witness for or against him who is thus sealed” For all these reasons, Baptism is to be administered once in a lifetime. The Nicean Fathers listened to these reasons and accepted them unanimously.

(B) MARRIAGE OF PRIESTS : Some clergymen had suggested the imposition of celibacy on all those desiring the priesthood. Abba Paphnuti, Bishop of the Thebaïd (Luxor region) spoke as follows : “Among the Apostles, there were the married and the celibate. Those called while married continued in their marital state; those celibate maintained their celibacy. Therefore, we follow Apostolic pattern declaring that a man desiring to marry should do so before being ordained. Once ordained while celibate he should thus continue. Let us not, then, impose a yoke which is unbearable to many.” And because Abba Paphnuti was a monk of impeccable character who had lost his right eye and his left leg in the Diocletian persecutions, the whole council listened to him with reverence and accepted his verdict in unanimity.

(C) DATE OF EASTER : In the first centuries, the difference over the date of Easter was to the fact that it had to be celebrated after the Jewish Passover. There were two main reasons for that: a spiritual and a historical. The spiritual is that the Christ was considered the Paschal Lamb in the prophecies, and thus declared by John the Baptist: “Behold the

Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The historical is that the Crucifixion of our Lord happened after He had eaten the Passover Supper with His Apostles. The problem, however, lay in the fact that the Jewish calendar is lunar, and to fix the date of the Passover, the Jews celebrated it with their offering of a sheaf of the first fruit of their harvest. (Lev. 25 : 11 — 12). In this way the Passover was celebrated within the period between the first week of April and that of May. To solve this problem for the Egyptians, Abba Demetrius the Vinedresser calculated the Epact by which Easter came to be celebrated between the first week of April and that of May, and always after the Passover Feast. This set the Copts at rest, but not their co-religionists elsewhere. At Nicea, the subject was discussed and the assembled Fathers decided to adopt the Epact decreeing that when the Pope of Alexandria wrote his Paschal Epistle, he was not to confine it to his own jurisdiction, but was to send it to all the churches including those of Rome and Constantinople. This decree continued until 1582 A.D.

2. MACEDONIANISM : This was started by Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople; he denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. To refute it, Treodosius I invited the bishops to a second œcumenical council which convened in his Capital in A.D. 381. After discussing the subject, the assembled Bishops added to the Creed the last clause. Having asserted the Consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son, the second œcumenical council excommunicated Macedonius for persisting in his heresy.

3. NESTORIANISM : This too, was promulgated by the Bishop of Constantinople — Nestorius. With the Creed declaring

most lucidly that the Christ is God Incarnate, Nestorius could not deny His Divinity. So he said that the Christ was not God-man but God and man. And since the Divine could not be touched by suffering, the crucified was the man apart from God. Of course, the Church regarded this a heresy totally undermining the Divine Plan of Redemption. For if the man apart agonized on the cross, why should the Only Begotten of the Father descend from heaven, live the life of a poor man who had no where to lay His Head? So, emperor Theodosius II decided to invite the bishops to a third œcumenical council which actually convened in Ephesus in A.D. 431. Two hundred bishops assembled. They selected Abba Kyrillos I to preside over them. In his endeavour to expound the unity of "the Word made flesh" (John 1 : 14), he gave the following symbol: "When the smith is shaping the iron into a certain object, he heats it to white heat then strikes it into the desired shape. The unity of our Lord's Divinity with His Humanity can be likened to that between the fire and the iron. For though, fire and iron are united, neither of them changes nor mixes nor is fused into the other. When the smith hammers the iron into shape, his hammering falls on it while it is united with the fire. True, the fire does not feel the hammer blows, nonetheless it is united with the iron while it is being beaten. Thus, the Divinity of our Saviour is like unto the fire, and His Humanity like unto the iron; the beating and scourging fell on the Human in Him which was incessantly united with the Divine. And though the Divine did not bleed nor sweat, nonetheless. It remained united to that which bled and sweated. Their unity began within His Mother's womb, and continues unto eternity, for the Christ ascended up

to heaven with His Body." After this elucidation, Abba Kyrillos I worded an introduction to the Creed (recorded at the end), which was unanimously accepted. The heresiarch — Nestorius — was excommunicated.

4. EUTYCHIANISM : Some fifteen years later, Eutyches — an abbot of a monastery in Constantinople — was convicted of the heresy of denying our Lord's Humanity, pretending that His Body was ethereal. He was condemned and excommunicated by a local council presided over by Flav'ianus Bishop of Constantinople. During the sessions, a letter came to the assembled bishops from Leo I of Rome known as the "Tomos of Leo" as it was an expression of his belief in the Incarnate Word. The wording of the Tomos savoured of Nestorianism, and so did the wording of the verdict against Eutyches. This roused the anger of the Constantinople populace. Eutyches who was a skiful juggler with words, capitalized this popular anger. He asserted that he was innocent, and pleaded with emperor Theodosius II to invite the bishops of other churches to come and judge between him and his condemners. The emperor complied, and decided on Ephesus again as the place for the council's convening in A.D. 448. It was to act as a "Court of Appeal". At this council, Abba Dioscorus Pope of Alexandria, Guvenal Bishop of Jerusalem, and Domnus Bishop of Antioch were appointed by the emperor to preside. One hundred and thirty bishops assembled. Eutyches presented to them a confession of his faith in his own handwriting and signed with his own signature. This confession, the council found to be wholly in conformity with the Creed set by the Nicean Fathers and confirmed by those of Constantinople and Ephesus. The assembled bishops acquitted

Eutyches in their unanimity. And since excommunication is a two edged sword rebounding against him who decrees it unjustly, Flavianus and those who convened with him together with Leo of Rome were excommunicated. Emperor Theodosius ratified the council's decrees and banished Flavianus and his Eastern Colleagues. The monk selected in place of Constantinople's Bishop was Anatolius, a former deacon from Alexandria.

Emperor Theodosius died heirless. His eldest sister Pulcheria had the lust for power. So jealous was she over her father's throne that she imposed the nuns vow on herself and her two younger sisters lest any husband would usurp her brother's rightful throne. When, despite her efforts, her brother had no heir, she renounced her vow and married Marcianus, General of the army whom she raised to co-rule with her. She could not find among all the bishops of Christendom one who will sanctify her marriage except Leo of Rome who thus became a friend to her and to her husband. Meantime, she was insensately jealous of the authority wielded by the Pope of Alexandria. All these elements: psychic, political and personal led emperor Marcianus to invite the bishops to a council at Chalcedon which met in A.D. 451. There is no room here for recording the prevarications and the intrigues which led to the first rupture in the ranks of the Church Universal. Sufficient to say that empress Pulcheria and her partisans succeeded in letting emperor Marcianus ratify the decree of exile issued by the Chalcedonians against Abba Dioscorus who was thus banished to the isle of Gangra off the coast of Asia Minor. Unsatisfied with this injustice, the emperor unleashed a fury of persecutions against the Coptic Church. He, and the majority

of his successors desired to submit the Copts to their Principles. Meeting with their adamant will to maintain their religious freedom the emperors not only tortured St. Mark's flock, they also imposed their own minions on his August Chair. What is more, they blackmailed the Popes of Alexandria pretending that they were Eutychians. Yet in the very first session of the nefarious council of Chalcedon, when Abba Dioscorus was asked what his verdict would be on Eutyches if he denied the confession submitted at Ephesus, he immediately and emphatically replied : "If Eutyches has denied the Orthodox Faith registered in his own handwriting, and has strayed from the teaching of the Church, I do not only judge that he be excommunicated, I would say he should be burnt also." Despite this drastic emphasis, Abba Dioscorus, his successors and his Church are regarded heretic by many well meaning Christians who are ignorant of these facts. The plain fact is that they are Orthodox since the foundation of their Church until the present.

It should be noted, that the policy set down by emperor Marcianus finally led to the fall of the Eastern empire by the onslaughts of the invading Arabs.



## B. THE SACRAMENTS

A sacrament is an invisible Grace given under a visible sign; it should be administered by an ordained priest. Under no condition can a lay person perform it.

The sacraments are seven; they are :

1. **BAPTISM** : Is a spiritual birth which is invisible, its visible sign is the water. The Coptic Church decrees infant baptism by complete immersion. Consequently, the baptized must have a Godfather (or Godmother) who pledges to bring him up in the Christian Principles. The Baptism acknowledged by the Coptic Church is that administered by an ordained priest through a specific Ritual. This is true of all the other sacraments. The only baptism other than this acknowledged one is the baptism by blood. This means that a person martyred in the Name of the Christ without having been baptized is esteemed a member of the Church: his blood as it was shed became his baptism.

2. **THE CHRISM (CONFIRMATION)** : By which the Holy Spirit indwells the spirit of the baptized. Its visible sign is the special mixture of spices and olive oil called "the Chrism". It differs from any ointment in that its very first ingredients were put on the dead Body of our Saviour. After His glorious Resurrection, these spices were divided among the

Apostles. In the beginning, they put their hand on the head of the baptized who thus received the Holy Spirit. When the number of the believers grew and men were ordained, the Chrism began to replace the laying-on of hands. St. Mark brought to Egypt his share of Chrism. Across the generations, wherever St. Mark's Successor finds the amount running low, he invites his bishops, and together they get the needed spices and olive oil, then chant the Ritual set for its consecration using the amount remaining as a leaven. This Ritual is called "Cooking the Chrism". This is the only sacrament over whose Ritual the Pope must preside. And since the Holy Spirit appeared over the Head of the Christ as He was coming out of the Jordan after His Baptism; and since the Apostles unvariably laid their hands on the baptized immediately after their baptism, the Coptic Church follows their example administering the Chrism to the baptized as soon as he is lifted out of the baptismal font and dried. Also since the baby as soon as he emerges out of his mother's womb must breathe else he will die, so the newly born of the Spirit must breathe spiritual air. This is possible only through the Holy Spirit. Therefore the Chrism follows the Baptism immediately. This is the Confirmation in the Coptic Church.

3. THE EUCHARIST : This is esteemed the sacrament of sacraments, or according to the Coptic Church expression "the mystery of mysteries". For in this sacrament the very visible sign — the bread and wine — become transubstantiated in very deed. Each communicant partakes first of the Body then of the Blood separately. The baptized and chrismed infant is given of the Blood only, and will not partake of both Elements until he can chew. He communes even in his infancy because

he has become a member of the Body of the Christ, and as such must be given the means wherewith to respire the spiritual air. At the same time, we are told in the Acts time and again that a man was baptized he and his household which signifies that babies were included. It should be noted that after Communion, a Copt neither genuflects nor bows because he has the Christ within him.

4. CONFESSION OR REPENTANCE : Since human nature is prone to err, confession is the means by which the baptized can attain forgiveness of those sins committed after baptism. Confession is actually one of the most difficult duties for any human being because by means of it he avows that he is sinful. This necessitates humility, and humility is a virtue from which many shrink. In the Coptic Church, it is called spiritual medicine, and the father confessor a spiritual doctor. Therefore, each person chooses his father confessor just as he chooses his physical doctor. The priest must know the confessor who has to face him squarely. Because no doctor can administer any medicine to his patient without thorough examination in order to give him the medicine most suitable for his constitution. So the father confessor must know his "patient" for the same reason. For confession is not merely a recounting of sin, its goal is that the confessor will receive the direction and the guidance most suitable to him. To clarify this point: suppose two persons said a lie, one of them brought up by God fearing parents who educated him and the other is illiterate or uncared for. The sin is one, but the sinners are different. It is the duty of the father confessor to treat each according to his abilities. This is clearly indicated by our Lord in the parable of the talents, and in His saying to whom much is given much

will be asked" (Matt 25 : 15 — 28). The priests are the father-confessors because, through their ordination, they received that authority given by the Christ to His disciples "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). This authority, He Himself, respected as we can see from His order to Saul when He appeared to him on the Damascus road. For when the bewildered Saul asked: "What shall I do Lord?" The answer was: "go into the city and it shall be told thee". At the same time, the Lord appeared to Ananias and told him to go and direct Saul. (Act: 9 : 1 — 18). This authority is given them regardless of their worth, for the Christ bestows His Grace freely, and it is in His Name and Worth that all spiritual authority has its effectiveness. Consequently, when a person confesses, the father confessor, after giving the needed counsel, guidance or discipline, absolves the confessor.

A word, in passing, should be noted: when people refused the Principle of confession to a father-confessor, they resorted to psychiatrists who, despite their cleverness and their technical efficiency have not received the God-given power which gives that inward peace sought by the confessors as well as by the psychiatrist consultants.

5. THE UNCTION : This is a prayer chanted over oil by which the believer is anointed. It is built on the words of St. James: "Is any sick among you? let him call the priests, let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith shall save the sick ... and if he have committed sins they shall be forgiven him" (5 : 14 — 15). Thus

the oil is neither a simple ointment nor a mere massage — for had it been so, why should it be administered by a priest ? or how would it result in the forgiveness of sins ? Among the Copts, it is resorted to whenever there is any sick person or any worrying problem. The priest goes to the home of those who need it, prays there, anoints them at the end of the Ritual, and leaves to them whatever remains of the oil. Also, the Church chants this Service yearly on the Friday preceding Passion Week, at the end of which, each one present comes forward and is anointed by the officiating priest.

6. MATRIMONY : Marriage is a law instituted by God; in the sight of the Church it is a sacred tie symbolizing the union of the Christ with His Church. God created Eve to be Adam's "help meet" (Gen. 2 : 18), while in the New Testament the Christ attended the Wedding at Cana wherein He performed His first miracle. Then He emphasized its sanctity by saying "What God has joined together let no man put asunder. For this reason, Marriage is between one man and one woman throughout their life span. It is indissoluble that it will have the quality of security and durability". (Matt. 19:6). Our Saviour willed to make marriage a sacrament that He may bestow thereby, through His Grace, on the married couples, the power that will help them to perform their duties in the best way. The visible sign is the Ritual set specifically for administering it, and it should be celebrated in the church. The prayers comprise this idea: the priest says towards the end of the marriage ceremony, addressing the bride and groom "this holy marriage uniting you before the altar of God". In addition, the Church was consecrated through the set Ritual, the Chrism, and the prayers continually offered

within it, so it is the place most suitable for the fulfilment of this holy sacrament.

7. **HOLY ORDERS** : Our Blessed Saviour, by choosing His Apostles and disciples instituted the Christian priesthood. His choice meant setting some men apart and consecrating them for the Service of God and man. St. John Chrysostom (Bishop of Constantinople towards end of 4th century) says : "Look how the author mentions nothing in vain. For he said not how he was ordained, rather was he contented to say that he was ordained by prayer. Herein is all that ordination means: the hand is laid on the head of the man, and God does everything; that hand of man touches the head of the ordained, and God is the One Who performs this Grace through this human hand — if it is rightly done. See how among the Seven Deacons, one — Stephen — was given precedence. He had performed no miracles before that, but after his ordination he did — making clear that Grace alone is not enough and that the ordination is necessary too. For the Grace of the Holy Spirit was increased unto them for they were full of the Spirit before, yet that was the Spirit granted at the Baptism." (comment on Acts VI).

The hierarchy of priesthood comprises three degrees because the angelic hosts are divided into three orders: the first, includes the Cherubim (Exodus XXV : 18), the Seraphim (Isaiah VI : 2) and the Thrones (Colossians I : 16); the second comprises Dominions, Principalities and Powers (Colossian I : 16), while the third includes Authorities (1 Peter III : 22), Angels and Archangels (Romans VIII : 38 and 1 Thessalonians IV : 16). On this wise, the Church arranged three degrees of priesthood : first, the Episcopos comprising the bishops, the archbishops and

the patriarch (or pope); second, the priesthood including priests and chiefpriests; third, the diaconship comprising the deacons, the readers, and the cantors.

The visible part of the Holy Orders is the laying-on of hands and the prayers evident from the Scriptures and the Canons of the Apostles. But the invisible side of the priesthood is twofold :

1. it seals the person ordained with an indelible mark which lasts throughout life;

2. it bestows on him the Grace of God sufficient for the ministry for which he was elected. Again, St. John Chrysostom said : "Meditate on the great honour of the priesthood : beho'd men who live on earth and walk therein are charged with the administration of what is in heaven, and are given power denied to archangels."

The first six sacraments are administered by the bishops and the priests; only the seventh is the prerogative of the bishops, for they alone have the right of ordaining. One bishop is sufficient for ordaining the priests, but two, at least, are necessary for ordaining a bishop. Thus, by the power of ordination alone, are the bishops distinguished.

The priesthood is, also administered once in a lifetime. In order to gauge the loftiness thereof, it is sufficient to know that the Christ Himself is the Chief-Priest (or the Shepherd of Shepherds), and that the Christian Priesthood outflows from Him.

Once elected for any degree of Holy Orders, the ordained remains thus for life. This is upheld by the Coptic Church after the pattern of the Apostles and Disciples. Over and above, since It is a Christ-given Grace and stems from the Christ Himself, It should last throughout life.





### C. THE BLESSED VIRGIN

She was born like all other human beings, with the original sin. But the Scriptures tell us that God purged the sins of Isaiah, sanctified Jeremiah from the womb, and in selecting the Baptist, He filled him with the Holy Spirit while yet within the womb (Is. VI : 6-7, Jer. 1 : 5; Luke 1 : 15). If God so willed to sanctify His prophets thereby enabling them to carry out the mission entrusted to them, how much more will He sanctify Her Who was to bear the Word Incarnate within Her Womb ? And as the Coptic Church expresses it : if He so desired to fit His servants for their task, how much more will He fit the Queen for Her Rôle ? From her lifestory, we know that She was offered to the Temple when She was three years old, and lived therein until Her betrothal to Joseph. The high priests, through unaware of the Majesty of the Rôle She was to fulfil, regarded Her with great esteem. So much so, that when the time came for Her to be married they dared not follow to the letter the Law of Moses, but resorted to the method indicated by God to this prophet for the choice of Aaron to the high priesthood, (Numbers XVIII : 1-9). Consequently, they laid the rods of the men, decreed by the Mosaic Law eligible for Her, in the Temple; next morning, Joseph's rod was found budding. So they betrothed Her to him and entrusted Her to his charge (which was legal according to their Law).

St. Luke tells us of the Angel Gabriel appearing to Her, hailing Her with the words "... Thou art highly favoured, the

Lord is with Thee, blessed art Thou among women ..... ” (1:28-24). The Coptic Fathers assert that had not Mary so readily assented, declaring that She is “the handmaid of the Lord”, the Christ would not have incarnated through Her; accordingly, She had an active part in effecting the Salvation of mankind. As for St. Matthew, he tells us of the doubts which assailed Joseph and the appearance of the Angel to him to comfort him (1 : 19-21).

The Coptic Church believes that She is Perpetual Virgin, according to the Scriptures. To cite but a few passages as an example : King Solomon said of Her, “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up; a fountain sealed ...” (Song of Songs IV : 12). While Ezek’al describes how God took him to the gate that looks towards the east and “it was shut, and He said unto me, this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut” (XLIV:1-2). At the same time , when the Christ hung on the cross, He said to His Mother : “Woman behold thy son!”. then to His beloved disciple : “behold thy Mother”. And the Evangelist adds : “from that hour, that disciple took her to his own home”. Now, according to the custom of the East, the widowed mother lives with her son; if she has no son, she lives with her daughter. Under no circumstances does she live with relatives, still less with strangers, so long as she has sons or daughters. Our Blessed Saviour gave us the example of living according to the social customs which clashed not with His teachings. He certainly knew the prevalent custom on this matter and therefore would not have entrusted His Mother to His disciple who was a stranger. As for mentioning the Lord’s “brothers” and “sisters”,

that again has a special significance in the East, namely that all cousins are considered brothers and sisters — so much so, that in Egypt, it is common to call an uncle “father” (adding his name to it), and an aunt, “mother” with the same addition just to make the hearer realize that it is not the factual parent who is alluded to.

and just as the Blessed Virgin was born like the rest of the human race, so did she taste death in like manner. But, because God the Father overshadowed Her, and the Holy Spirit came upon Her, and the Incarnate Word dwelt within Her Womb taking from Her His flesh, Her body was not left in the earth to decay like those of others; it was carried away by the angels. This carrying away of Her body is termed “Her Assumption” and is celebrated by the Coptic Church on the 22nd of August (16th Messra in the Coptic calendar).

To express their esteem of the Blessed Virgin, the Coptic Fathers were the first to entitle Her “Theotokos” (or Mother-of-God). In addition, they call Her “Mother of the Light”, “Mother of the Mercy”, “Mother of the Grace”, “Ship of Safety” and numerous other epithets. Also, in imploring the saints to intercede for mankind, they mention Her first and last. While during the prayers presiding the Liturgy, there is a chant entreating the celestial beings to intercede for us. The Blessed Virgin takes precedence even over the celestial hosts; and the Coptic word used in petitioning Her is “Presira” which denotes that Her mediation is authoritative.

## D. FAITH AND WORKS

Faith is certainly the prime mover in spiritual life, but it must be endorsed by works. Our Lord gave us the commandment to work in accord with our faith on more than one occasion; besides, He gave us the parable of the talents, declaring to us that it is by our good works that others will glorify our Father Who is in heaven. The Disciples did not only teach, they were an example to be followed. We are told that faith without works is dead : "Thou believest that there is One God; thou doest well ... shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works ..." (James II : 14-26). And the cause for the rapid spread of Christianity during the early centuries lay in the lives of those who believed. Such was their example that it is recorded in the history of the Copts that when the Pagans found a person behaving courteously, talking politely and dressed decently, they would ask him "have you met a Christian today ?" insinuating that the mere meeting with a Christian was sufficient cause for such behaviour.

## PART III — PRACTICES

### A. PRAYER

From the very beginning, the Coptic Church was, and still is, essentially a church of Prayer. The tendency towards mysticism so marked within the Egyptians, found an ardent expression in Christianity. Hence, the numerous paths taken by the Fathers : Paths of devotion, adoration, gratitude, conversing and petitioning. These paths are :

(a) **THE LITURGY** : esteemed the summit of prayers, because it is the Ritual through which the Holy Spirit descends on the Bread and Wine turning them into the actual Body and Blood of the Christ, that is transubstantiates them. This conviction of the factuality of transubstantiation is emphatically expressed by the officiating priest at the end of each Liturgy, and just before he communes — he and the people. He declares : “Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe. I believe. I believe; and I confess to the last breath that this is the Lifegiving Body which Your Only-Begotten Son our Lord, our God and our Saviour, has taken from our Lady and our Queen — all of us — the mother-of-God, the Saint the Pure Mary He has made It one with His Divinity without mixing nor fusion nor change ...

The Liturgies extant in the Coptic Church are :

**THE KYRILLIAN** : according to tradition, it was handed orally by St. Mark himself, and continued to be orally legated

until Abba Kyrillos I wrote it down, putting it in its present form — hence its name. It is so spiritual that it is chanted specifically during Lent and sometimes during Advent too.

**THE GREGORIAN** : written by St. Gregory the Theologus (or speaker of things divine). He was Bishop of Sazima (Asia Minor) towards the end of the fourth century. This is used on diverse occasions and according to the desire of the officiating priest.

**THE BASILIAN** : written by St. Basil Bishop of Cappadocia and contemporary with Gregory. It is the one most commonly used.

And because the Liturgy is held in such high esteem, it is preceded by prayers termed “The Lifting-up of the Incense”, which is chanted at two different times : one in the evening and one in the morning. These prayers comprise petitions for the departed, the travellers and the offerings, followed by incensing and praying preliminary to reading the Gospel. After that, prayers are offered for peace, the fathers and all places wherein the Faithful assemble, the Nile, the plants, the wind and the fruits.

It should be noted that all prayers are commenced by the **Lord's Prayer**, the **Prayer of Thanksgiving** (recorded at the end), and **Psalm 51**. Also, before beginning the Liturgy, set portions from the **Epistles** (Pauline and general), the **Acts** and the **Gospel** are chanted in Coptic and read in Arabic. Preceding the Gospel, the priest reads from the **Synaxarium** the resumé of the

biography of the saint or (and) the martyr commemorated on that day, the sermon is delivered immediately after the Gospel.

All these prayers and readings are considered the means for climbing towards the height of the summit which is the Liturgy.

(b) THE HORLOGION : (or the Seven Canonical Hours)  
No one knows the exact date on which they were first used, but we know that the desert Fathers used them as far back as the third century, telling us that they received them from their forebears. These are seven prayers set for certain hours of the day. The Prayers are :

Mattins, said at dawn in commemoration of our Saviour's Resurrection.

Terce or Morning, said on waking-up in commemoration of Pilate's verdict condemning our Lord; also the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles and Disciples at this hour;

Sexte or midday, said in commemoration of the hour of the Crucifixion.

None or about four in the afternoon, said at the hour when our Redeemer commended His Spirit into the Hands of the Father;

Compline or evening, said at the hour in which the Body of our Lord was taken down from the Cross;

Sleep, said to commemorate the burial of the Christ, and also as a reminder of the end of life;

**Midnight**, said on three parts, — half an hour separating each — to commemorate our Saviour's agony at Gethsemane and His going thrice to see His disciples. In addition, the nuns and monks say a specific prayer for their inward peace called "The Prayer of the Curtain", recited after the Prayer of Sleep.

Each of the seven prayers is begun as usual by the Lord's Prayer, the Prayer of Thanksgiving and Psalm 51. Then each comprises twelve selected psalms; a set portion from the Gospel; petitions relevant to the hour; Lord have Mercy (föerty one times) — the number of beatings our Lord endured; the three "Hollies", the Lord's Prayer and a prayer of absolution — also relevant to the hour. There is a special petition said at the end of all these prayers.

(C) **KYAK** : This is the Coptic month ending on the eighth of January. According to Coptic reckoning, the Nativity took place on the 29th of Kyak. Consequently, there are prayers chanted on the eves of each Sunday of this month, the bulk of which is in praise of the Blessed Virgin. These prayers are called "seven and four", because on each Sunday evening, seven hymns are chanted in honour of the Mother-of-God, and four in praise of the saints or (and) the martyrs whose commemoration falls on that week. In these prayers, the Copts express their gratitude and their glorification of Her Who said : "from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed".  
(Luke I : 48).

(d) **PASSION WEEK** : Lent is highly esteemed among the Copts; it is a time for meditation, and for all those who are able, a time of abstinence from sunrise to sunset. Usually, very



frugal meals are served, even for those who cannot keep abstinence. There are additional chants in the Liturgy, and specific songs sung during Communion. The climax of the Lenten devotions is the Passion Week beginning on the afternoon of Palm Sunday and ending on Good Friday. During this week, the pillars of the churches are draped in black ribbons, while the vestments of priests and deacons have violet belt and shoulder straps. These are but the least signs of sadness, for the very tunes of the prayers express the deep sorrow of the Church for the Agony, Her Lord endured. Prayers are chanted every single day during two services : morning and evening. No Liturgies are chanted because the Saviour Whose Body and Blood are partaken of at the end of this Ritual is in the throes of His Agony which He voluntarily endured for the Redemption of mankind. The exception is Maunday Thursday on which the Lord Himself has pledged His Body and His Blood for our ransom. And as Passion Week is the summit of Lent, so Good Friday is the zenith of Passion Week. It is designated by two other names : Great Friday, and Sad Friday. The prayers during this very special day are held from morning till evening unbrokenly. The very last hour of the prayers is spent in taking down the Body of the Christ (represented by His Icon) from the Cross and burying It (on the altar) together with spices, incense and rose petals dipped in rose water.

Yet, when the Church has buried Her Redeemer, She does not go away and leave Him. The faithful go home at six and eat after the day's abstinence, then they can relax for the space of five hours. After which they go back to Keep Vigil. During this superb night, the whole of the Psalms and the Revelation are read, together with all the prayers recorded in the Old and

the New Testaments, as well as that section of Daniel recounting the Story of the three youths in the fiery furnace. All these readings alternate with church prayers of praise and glorification. For the Coptic Church never chants the sad tunes alone, or the joyful ones alone — rather in the midst of Her deep sorrow rings a note of joy, and at Her highest exultation rings a note of sadness. So the extremely sad tunes of Passion Week are intercepted with notes of jubilation. Accordingly the Saturday whereon the Church keeps vigil beside Her buried Lord is called “The Saturday of Joy”. This night vigil ends with the Liturgy which finishes about seven in the morning. The chanting of the Liturgy is resumed because the work of Redemption is consummated.

As for the Easter Service, it begins at seven in the evening and ends about two after midnight. In this grand Ritual, the Church expresses all Her joy and exultation. And during the fifty days, until Pentecost, the traditional greeting among the Copts is “Christos Anesti : Alithos Anesti” (or Christ is risen : He is risen indeed). At such is the joy at the resurrection that there is no fasting at all — not even on Wednesdays and Fridays until Pentecost is celebrated.

On Pentecost Sunday, there are specific prayers chanted in the evening called “The Prayer of Genuflection” which comprises, in addition to the gratitude and glorification, a special prayer for the Departed. It should be noted here that the Departed are mentioned even during the Christmas Service and the Wedding Ritual. Its significance is that the Church Triumphant is closely knit to the Church Militant, or as the saints expressed it : The Church is like unto an army whose vanguard stands before God, and whose rear is on this earth.

## B. FASTING

Our Blessed Saviour fasted before beginning His ministry. His command on fasting is clear : “when thou fasted anoint thine head and wash thy face ...” (Matt. VI : 16-18). He told His disciples when they were bewildered at their inability to cure the lunatick vexed boy : “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Mark IX : 29; Matt. XVII : 14-21). Throughout the Scriptures, fasting is practised preliminary to repentance, in anticipation of a feast, or before carrying out a specific mission. Besides, the very first command issued by God to Adam implied fasting; He said to him : “of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shall not eat of it”. (Genesis II : 16-17). And the fall of Adam and Eve was due to their inability to abstain from eating the forbidden fruit. Consequently, when our Saviour incarnated to redeem mankind, the first temptation attempted at Him by the devil was the temptation to eat : “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread”. And the Lord of Life shamed the tempter by His reply that man shall not live by bread alone (Luke IV : 3-4). In obedience to the Divine Command and the Divine Example, the Coptic Church practises fasting; She offers five reasons, they are :

1 — it is a means for purifying the body from heavy foods and sparing it gluttony;

2 — it is a practice in controlling bodily appetite (self discipline);

3 — it is a striving to recapture the state which Adam and Eve enjoyed before their fall;

4 — it is a spiritual preparation by which a person tries to make himself fit for coming near God — in this it can be considered an expression of man's love for God.

5 — it is the means by which to sympathize with the hungry by experiencing hunger and being bound by fasting to limit satisfying it.

Since fasts are a spiritual preparation, they invariably precede any feast, that the festive joyousness may be really felt. Hence, the fasts of Coptic Church are :

(a) **ADVENT** : preceding Christmas (forty three days) then the three days preceding epiphany;

(b) **LENT** : (fifty five days) — the forty fasted by our Lord, the Passion Week, and an extra week to make up for nonabstinence on Saturdays;

(c) **three days** in commemoration of Ninevah's accepted repentance;

(d) fast following immediately after Pentecost called **Apostles' Fast**, because the Apostles fasted as soon as they were filled with the Holy Spirit in preparation for their ministry and in remembrance of our Lord's answer to the Pharisees : "Can the children of the bride chamber fast ... the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then shall they fast in those days". (Mark II : 18-20). This fast is variable depending on Easter date.

(e) Fast ending with our Lady's Assumption, lasting fifteen days, hence, it is called "**The Virgin's Fast**". In addition, every **Wednesday and Friday** of the year (with the exception of the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost), are fast.

days. Because the Jews plotted against the Christ on Wednesday and crucified Him on Friday.

Fasting among the Copts means restricting their diet to the produce of the earth only. Even those who practise abstinence, eat either vegetables or fruits when they do eat, and no butter is used in cooking it.

With prayer and fasting comes :

### C. BIBLE READING

The Copts are enjoined to read the Scriptures each morning and each evening, or at least once a day. They, also have a custom of setting aside a special corner wherein an icon is hung, and a wicklight burning in front of it. This is to give the household members a chance for meditating, if but for a few minutes daily; or at least a constant reminder of the world of the spirit to which we belong.

Another custom is "The Agape" or love-meal. It was widely prevalent in the early days, then fell into disuse in the big cities but continued in the small towns and the villages. Now, it is being practised once more in the cities during Lent only. This custom means that, since the people go to church without having breakfast, they agree among themselves that a family (or group of families) supply the whole congregation with a meal at the end of the Liturgy. They take it by turn. The meal is served in a hall (or room) adjoining the church. And because it is a communal sharing, it is called the love-meal.

## D. INTERCESSION

In the first century, when Christians were not allowed to pray in churches, they prayed in the cemeteries. This, they did, to declare to the pagans their conviction that those who have gone on ahead are still alive though unperceived physically. They called the departed "The Church Triumphant", and those still here "The Church Militant". This firm conviction led them to two concomittant activities :

1. belief in the intercession of the saints;
2. prayer for the departed.

Intercession, to them, is the inevitable outpouring of love.

People, here on earth, who love one another pray for one another; that is, they intercede for one another. If then intercession is practised by those still bound within the body, how much more will it be practised by those who have become free spirits ? And if it is practised by those still under temptation and in trials, how much more effectively will it be practised by those "just men made perfect" ? (Hebrews XII : 23). And in the Liturgy, prayers are not offered on behalf of the sinners only, but on behalf of the saints as well. At the end of praying for the latter, comes a prayer which says : "We, O our Master, are not worthy to intercede for the bliss of those saints; but they who stand before the Throne of Thy Only — Begotten Son intercede for us because of our weakness and servility. Be a

Forgiver of our sins, O Lord, by their intercession, for the sake of Thy Holy Name by which we are identified. May their holy blessing be with us. Amen”.

The belief in intercession is naturally linked with having icons, or pictures of saints. We say picture, because an icon is not a portrait, rather is it an endeavour to portray a spiritual embodiment. The icon of a saint or martyr is to be regarded as a focus of a spiritual presence; it is a window opened on heaven; it is a reminder of a human dignity in its reality as it lifts the eyes of the onlooker from the earthly to the heavenly, and endeavours to make him live (even for a fleeting minute) in the world beyond to which he ultimately belongs.

## E. COMMEMORATIONS

The Church, desirous to guide Her children towards spiritual summits, ordered the reading of the "lives" of saints and martyrs after reading the Acts of the Apostles. These "lives" are compiled in "The Synaxarium" which is considered the continuation of the Book of Acts — this book being the only in the New Testament which does not end with the word "Amen" — implying its continuousness. Each day of the year has its saint or (and) martyr. The Church named after the saint or martyr to be commemorated holds a Liturgy on the day of his (or her) remembrance. Certain commemorations are celebrated widely such as the day on which the Holy Family set foot on Egyptian soil when they fled from Herod's wrath; or the day of St. Mark's martyrdom.

In addition, should any family desire to commemorate the departure of any of their members, they ask a priest to chant the Liturgy in his (or her) name. This Liturgy is sung when the church is free, and is attended only by this family and their friends, hence, it is called a "private" Liturgy. Such private Liturgies are also chanted for the bride and groom prior to their marriage ceremony that they may commune together and thus, give themselves the chance for receiving added Grace before embarking on their wedded life. They can also be chanted for those about to undergo examinations, operations, long journeys, new jobs, ... etc. Whenever anyone feels the need for specific spiritual sustenance, he has but to go to a priest and decide, with him, on the day and hour for a private Liturgy.



## PART IV

### 1. ADMINISTRATION

As mentioned before, the Holy Orders comprise three degrees, the bishopdom, the priesthood, and the deaconship. The pope is a bishop, but being bishop of the capital and St. Mark's Successor, he is given precedence. His precedence, however, is that of the elder brother. According to the earliest laws and regulations of the Coptic Church, the pope, as well as all members of the Holy Orders, are elected by those over whom they will preside. The election of the deacons and the priests is naturally, restricted to their own parishes; that of the bishops to their own dioceses; while the pope is elected by general vote. Also, there is no transference or resignation within the ranks of the Holy Orders, the only open possibility is that a priest can become chiefpriest, and a deacon an archeacon. This attainment, however, is within their own parish so that they remain serving their own people. As for the bishops, they remain as such for life. The relation of a bishop (or a priest) to his people is likened unto that of husband and wife. And since marriage in Christianity is monogamous and kept throughout life, it follows that clergymen must remain serving their own people throughout life. The reason why no bishop is transferred is that the Coptic Church maintains the Apostolic Tradition which appointed Matthias and Justus from the ranks of the believers, then prayed and gave forth their lots which resulted in the selection of Matthias (Acts I : 15-26). This casting of

lots happened only at this selection, precedent to the Descent of the Holy Spirit. After they were filled with God's Spirit, the Apostles relied on praying, discussing together then taking a decision. And because Matthias came from among the believers and not selected from among the disciples to take place among the Twelve, the Fathers of the Coptic Church followed their example. When the Successor of St. Mark goes unto his reward, bishops and layleaders confer; they select from among the monks those they deem most worthy of the august Chair. The number of candidates is not to be less than three nor more than eleven. At the appointed day and hour, the voters give their vote. He, who gets the highest number of votes is consecrated. This was the general method, but there are few exceptions. The three popes (from 1927-1956) were bishops raised to the Papal Chair. But their successor, Abba Kyrillos VI (116th Pope) was a monk. His election come first by vote; from among the eleven selected, the names of the three who got the highest votes, were written on three slips of paper and put on the altar while the Liturgy was chanted. At the end, a boy of seven was asked to pick one of the three slips of paper; it bore the name of the hermit Mena who was duly consecrated by the name Kyrillos.

The ideal of non-transference is upheld by the Coptic Church on the following grounds :

1. Bishopdom is an honour in itself conferred by the Christ, hence, every bishop is brother to the others regardless of any worldly grandeur. The scale of greatness set by the Christ for His disciples being that of Service : "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all". (Mark IX : 35).

2. The Bishop is considered as "the husband" of his See, and "the Father" to his flock.

3. To guard against any possible rivalry or use of the bishopry's money for any purpose other than the good of the people.

4. For the security, stability and durability within the churches.

In Addition, the Coptic Church has maintained that no man, whatever spiritual height he has attained, is infallible; consequently, She decreed that the Holy Council of Bishops should be the highest authority. This Council confers amicably with the layleaders, so that no man's point of view will be the only means of governing the Church. When the Council convenes and discusses any question, the voice of the majority is put into effect, even if the Pope happens to be with the majority. The only prerogative accord to him, is such stands, is that should the number of the members attending the Council be even, and they divide into equal halves, the Pope's vote is counted two. As for the layleaders, they express their views frankly in any discussion. Then their role is that of rendering whatever service with which the Pope or any of the Bishops charge them.

In the bishopries — including that of the Pope — there are always committees of laymen and laywomen for social service, ministering unto the sick and the aged, trying to find work for the unemployed, supervising arts and crafts centers and whatever service the Bishop demands. While in the parishes, each priest has his deacon and his lay assistants for the diverse projects run by the church. Thus, the laymen and the laywomen have their share in the Church life.

## 2. INSTITUTIONS

Under the guidance of Abba Kyrillos V (112th Pope), the **Theological Seminary** was reopened. It was housed in a building next to a church bearing the name of the Blessed Virgin surrounded by a big garden. Nonetheless, it was situated in one of the poorest suburbs of Cairo — that of Mahmasha. Then, in February 1953, it was transferred to the building situated on what is now known as the Abba Roweiss Ground. A year later, "**The Higher Institute for Coptic Studies**" was inaugurated in a building standing on the same ground. The difference between the Seminary and the Institute lies in that the former is restricted to student for the priesthood, and as such its syllabuses are highly specialized; while the latter is open for whomever desires to study and research into the Legacy of the Copts. The Seminary is divided into what might be termed two schools;

1. the day, which students enter after their secondary school Certificate (equals matriculation);
  2. the evening, whose students are university graduates.
- An off-shoot of the Seminary is the **Didymus School** in which the Cantors are trained.

As for the Institute, it comprises ten sections, these are : music; Coptic Language; Transitional period from Ancient Egypt to Coptic Era; History of the Coptic Church (with

reference to the General); African Studies; Art (including painting mosaics, glass-stain, sculptor and crafts); Law; Theology; Social Studies (with special emphasis on the Coptic community); Photography; then what are termed "assisting" studies, namely English, French and German, to assist the researchers in their readings.

There is, too, a Coptic Museum including a Library; it stands between two of the oldest churches : that of the Blessed Virgin known as "Al-Mo'allakah", and that of Abu Serga both in Old Cairo. The Museum started by the Copts and placed among two of their most cherished churches.

In 1933, it became part of the National heritage under the administration of the Government.

Beside the Library adjoined to the Museum, there are two Papal Libraries : one in Alexandria and one in Cairo. While each monastery and each convent has its library. Needless to say that the Theological Seminary and the Institute, each, has its own library.

It should be added that at the entury to the Abba Roweiss Ground, to the right of the entrant, stands "La Société de l'Archeologie Copte", founded in 1932. It publishes books, holds seminars and lectures, and has a well-sized library. It, also, succeeded in carrying out some excavations, unearthing the monastery of St. Phoebamon. From 1934-1952, it issued a yearly bulletin, since then, the bulletin appears whenever possible. Its articles are in Arabic, English, French, and German — oftentimes, the original Coptic is put side by side

with the translation. The Society has, moreover, published numerous books.

But the activity for which the Coptic feel great elation is that of the Youth. The Sunday Schools, started since the papacy of Abba Kyrillos V and extends now from Alexandria to Aswan, including the villages. It has become known as "The Schools of Ecclesiastical Education". They are held on Fridays after the Liturgy and in the afternoons, and on Sunday afternoons. The classes range from "the reception" class to the secondary school education. As for the university students, they have two kinds of meetings :

1 — one strictly parochial where each group meets within its own church;

2 — one entitled "the University families". These latter are formed by student of one (or more) college : for example the students of the Agriculture College (Ain Shams University) group themselves in "St. Athanasius Family"; on the other hand, the students of Commerce in both universities of Cairo and Ain Shams have banded themselves together to form "St. Paul's Family". There are more than fifty of these families in Cairo. They are all under the guidance of the Pope Abba Shenouda III. Each family meet once a week for a lecture or a discussion.

The latest offshoot, is the opening of "nurseries" for the children whose mothers work. These schools are usually in rooms adjoining the churches, or within the garden of a church which happens to have one. The supervisors are mostly volunteers working in collaboration with the priests and under their guidance.

Another revived custom is the incessant onflow of these groups — singly, together or with other groups — to the monasteries and convents. The diverse Church seasons and commemorations are capitalized for such “pilgrimages”. For example, Lent is a most appropriate time for all those inclined to meditation, and the long hours of prayers upheld in these sanctified retreats-offer them great satisfaction. Also, the week during which the commemoration of the martyrdom or death of a saint is a time for celebration : The Ritual invariably includes hymns of praise and processions overflowing with spiritual elation. There is, thus, an incessant contact between the desert dwellers and those living in the world. And, in all honesty, a day spent in one of these sanctuaries is impossible to describe; it has to be experienced.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident from the foregoing "story" that the Coptic Church is not a Church of the past alone, She is also a Church of the present : stretching across the generations from the moment St. Mark founded Her to the present day. She has conserved the Legacy bequeathed to Her most carefully; at the same time, encouraging the endeavours of the human mind in its search after Knowledge. This encouragement is clearly seen by the number of creative works still extant despite all the destructive forces. To prove this point, we will mention a few books from those little known ages termed "the dark".

One of the most touching flashes is given us in a few lines in a very dilapidated Arabic Ms. carefully preserved at the Bibliotheque Nationale which is a remnant from the eighth century. These lines (in translation) say : "There was a believer who sat at the King's table (Marwan last of the Ommayads); he was so favoured by the king as to be given the permission to visit the imprisoned pope and his fellow prisoners". Who could have been this favoured believer, and what caused him to attain such high favour is still unknown.

And while Ibn Tulun reigned (889-894 A.D.), he interviewed a hundred and thirty years old Coptic traveller who went as far as the mountains in the North of Ethiopia. During the interview, Ibn Tulun first asked about the places visited, and found that the centenerian had sailed the Indian Ocean



and seen Ceylon. He then asked him about the secret of his longevity. Smilingly, the seasoned traveller answered that he presumed it due to modernation and temperance.

Another prominent personality at the time is Ibn Katib'l Farghani. He built the mosque of Ibn Tulun still a standing witness to the skill of its architect. Before commencing the building, the governor wanted to be assured of its originality. Ibn Katib made for him a model in leather which he approved. This same architect built a palace for the governor in his new city, and erected an equeduct by which the Nile water could reach it. He is also the builder of the Nilometer still to be seen on the island of Rodah near Old Cairo.

During the thirteenth century, there were :

1. ABBA BOULOS EL BOUSHY, Bishop of Babylon (Old Cairo); he wrote,

(a) an epistle on "the Logical Proofs leading to the Knowledge of God";

(b) "The Teacher and the Student", written in the form of question and answer;

(c) "Man's Freewill versus Destiny" in which he argued that man is free, otherwise how can God compensate him for the good and punish him for the evil he does. It should be noted that one of the most remarkable traits of the time is the great desire to probe into spiritual subjects as is evidenced by the amount of books and epistles still extant. More

remarkable still is that these books show us the Muslims the constant questioners and the Copts the constant answerers. Abba Boulos is among the most outstanding answerers of the period.

2. THE MONK BOUTROS ES-SEDMENTI : concerning whom a Dutch Jesuit father — Van Ackberg — presented a thesis for which he got a doctorate. The Coptic monk has written fourteen books, thirteen of which are still in Ms. form. One, however, was published in Cairo in 1872 under the patronage of Abba Kyrillos V; it gives a lucid explanation of the prophecies and their fulfilment in the Incarnation of the Christ.

3. IBN KATIB KAISSAR : whose father was the private secretary of an Ayyubid prince. Ibn Katib preferred study and research to wordly honours. He lived in a monastery and gave us several books, one of which is a most skilful study of the Coptic grammar, and another is an endeavour to explain “the Book of the Revelation”.

4. IBN'L MAKEEN : another monk who legated to us four books, two of which are on history, one on landing the industrious and perseverant, while the fourth is a most erudite research on the Incarnation.

These writers, and others, together with a good number of medical doctors lived under the rule of the Ayyubids (noted for their benevolence) whose greatest figure is Salah ed-Din.

One great personality under the Mamlukes is IBN KABAR. He was private secretary to their most powerful Sultan —

namely Beibars. He, then, resigned his post became the priest of the Church of our Lady (Al Mo'allakah). During his priesthood, he wrote :

(a) a book on the freedom of man as against an inexorable fate;

(b) a Coptic grammar;

(c) an encyclopaedia on ecclesiastical matters;

(d) a book on "The Consubstantiality of the Trinity and the Incarnation". He also helped the Sultan, whom he had served, to write a history book well-known to the West entitled "Zibdo'l fikrati fi Tarikh'l Higrati".

As for the Turkish rule (1517-1805 A.D.), it was summed up in these terms : "From the time when the Turk assumed away in Egypt until the day he lost it, history and art, alike, cease". Yet, despite the ruthless brutality of the Turk, the Coptic Church continued in Her incessant striving to guard the spiritual Legacy entrusted to Her. And the wonder of it, is the number of Mss. extant which come to us from this era : La Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, the Library of the British Museum, New York Public Library, and similar institutions in the world's famous universities witness to this fact.

An outstanding personality worth mentioning, just as an example is Abu Dhakn'l Menoofi who legated to us a book on the history of the Copts, the Said (Upper Egypt) and Ethiopia. In his book, he describes the social customs and gives a comparison between the schools of the Copts and those of the Europeans. Over and above, he explains the Orthodox Doctrine upheld by St. Mark's Church.

An outstanding visitor to Egypt during the seventeenth century is a Dominican Father Vansleb. On his return, he wrote a history of the Coptic Church which is a magnificent witness to Her Fathers, and Her firm resolve to uphold the integrity of Her Orthodox Faith.

In addition, the number of Statesmen in the eighteenth century is certainly amazing. To name but a few, we cite;

RIZK AGHA; minister of finance to Ali Bey al Kabir who succeeded in making Egypt independent of the Turks for seven years (1769-1776 A.D.);

MALATI : chief judge of the Committee formed by Bonaparte;

IBRAHIM EG-GOHARI : minister of finance and assistant-governor to the two Mamluk princes Ibrahim Bey and Murad Bey . The well-known historian ad-Djabarti wrote a most flattering eulogy on him; his brother GIRGIS who lived through the Bonaparte expedition and served as Chief director of finance during the first years of Mohammad Ali Pasha's rule.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Copts shared with their Muslim compatriots the risks and vicissitudes of the three successive national revolutions : Arabi's, Zaghlool's and Nasser's. side by side, they withstood the Khedive then the British until they succeeded together in winning the independence of their beloved country. At present, they are not only cabinet ministers, but one of them — Foad Ghall is General of the Second Army.

It should be noted — before closing — that the Coptic Church became a member of the World Council of Churches since 1948. In 1954, Father Makari As-Suriani (now Bishop Samuel), Father Saleeb Surial, and Prof. Dr. A. S. 'Atteya attended its second General Assembly held at Evanston, Illinois, USA. Since then, She has sent Her deputies regularly to conferences and committee meetings. At the same time, She is member in the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches. In addition, Her deputies have been delegated to attend the Christian Peace conferences.

Also, due to the large scale immigration movement to the U.S.A., Europe and Australia, there are Coptic churches now in all these countries served by Coptic priests. While for France, Pope Shenouda III consecrated two bishops : Abba Marcus, and Abba Athanasius, his assistant. They were consecrated in the new grand Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo, on the Day of Pentecost (1st of June 1974).

This contact of the Coptic Church with the outside world is no new thing to Her; it is but a resurgence. Because the Alexandrian Fathers carried the Good news to diverse lands. Pantaenus, Dean of the School of Alexandria was deputed (about 199 A.D.) by Abba Demetrius the Vinedresser to go to South India and Ceylon. Finding there the Church founded by St. Thomas the Doubter, he journeyed to the North of Yemen where he sowed the Seed. The same venerable Pope sent Origen to Arabia, to the North of Iraq and to Achaia.

St. Mark, himself, had preached the world in the Pentapolis (five cities in Libya which kept close contact with

the Church of Alexandria. Many letters were exchanged between the bishops of these cities and the Successors of St. Mark. Of special interest are those exchanged between Bishop Synesius of Cyrenaica and Abba Theophilus — 23rd Pope of Alexandria, 384-412 A.D., and maternal uncle to Abba Kyrillos I the Pillar of Faith. He was noted for his zeal in building churches. Among the edifices which he erected is the monastery of Al-Moharraq. The Popes of Alexandria continued ordaining bishops for the Pentapolis until the Turks conquered it and massacred all the Copts living there).

Also, in A.D. 326, Abba Athanasius the Apostolic consecrated the first Bishop for Ethiopia. He was entitled by the grateful Ethiopians "Bearer of Light". The link between the two churches has continued across the ages.

During the sixth century, the monk Longinus carried the Good News to Nubia. His efforts bore such fruit as to necessitate the ordination of a bishop. Since then, the kings of Nubia become loyal subjects to the Successors of St. Mark. But here again, the ruthless Turk put an end to Christianity. Needless to say that both in the Pentapolis and Nubia, there were those who succeeded in finding refuge in Ethiopia and the Sudan where there are two Coptic bishops at present : one for Khartoum and its region, the other for Atbara and its provinces.

A point of interest to remark in passing : when scholars from different countries hastened to rescue Abu Simbel and other Pharaonic temples from the flooding of the High Dam, they discovered, inadvertently, a number of churches buried

beneath the sands, some of which were in a fair state of preservation, and interestingly enough containing a number of documents which scholars are busy translating in order to publish them.

These efforts of the Coptic Church among Her neighbours are known and their history recorded. But other efforts have been expended : For example in Glastonbury (north of England) influences of Coptic sculptor and carving have been found, but how and by whom they were carried is unknown. The same is the case with Lyons (in France), for its coat of arms has a palm tree with a lion crouching under it — both emblems of St. Mark. Whereas there are three heads of Coptic martyrs on the banner of Furich.

On the other hand, seven Coptic are buried in the isle of Iona (Ireland); while the word designating a monastery in that region is "desert", for example desert Olidh means the monastery of Olidh.

In addition, there is a Coptic woman — St. Verena — who was born and bred in Qoos (Kena) in Upper Egypt, who was trained to be a nurse. She accompanied the Theban (Luxor) Legion to the region now Switzerland when they were called for Service by emperor Maximus (co-ruler with Diocletian). Finding Christians, he massacred them to the last man. And it is still unaccountable why he spared the nurses. Verena reasoned within herself that God must have a purpose in allowing her to come all that way. So she remained in the region of the present-day Geneva. She taught the people

about the Christ, and also trained them to keep the hygienic method. When she died, she was buried under the altar of a church in the city of Zurzach built in her name. Her icon pictures her standing holding a comb in one hand and a water jug in the other. She is still commemorated by the people whose ancestors she served.

The flashes show us that the Coptic Church was, from the beginning, oecumenically minded. The isolation resulting from Byzantine policy in A.D. 451 was no choice of Her.



## EPILOGUE

### THE CREED

Worded at Nicea (325 A.D.)

Completed at

Verily we believe in One God, God the Father Almighty, Who hath created heaven and earth, that which is seen and that which is unseen.

Constantinople  
(381 A.D.)

We believe in One Lord Jesus the Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, Born of the Father before all ages; Light of Light; Very God of Very God; Begotten not created; Consubstantial with the Father; by Whom were all things made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven; He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary; And He became man; and He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures; He ascended up to the heavens; He sitteth at the right Hand of the Father; He will come again in

His glory to judge the living and the dead; of Whose kingdom there shall be no end.

Ye, we believe in the Holy Spirit

the Lord the Lifegiver Who proceedeth from the Father. We worship and glorify Him with the Father and the Son; Who spoke by the prophets And in One Holy Universal Apostolic Church We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. We await the resurrection of the dead and the life in the world to come. Amen.

The introduction to the Creed, worded by Kyrillos I at Ephesus (431 A.D.)

We magnify thee, O Mother of the True Light, and we glorify Thee O Virgin Saint Mother-of-God. For thou hast borne unto us the Saviour of all the world, He came and saved our souls.

Glory be to Thee O our Master and our King the Christ:  
the Honour of the Apostles, the Crown of the martyrs, the  
Joy of the righteous, the Stability of the Church, the For-  
giveness of sins. We evangelize and preach the Holy Trinity  
One Godhead. We worship Him and glorify Him.

Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord bless us.  
Amen.

## THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Let us give thanks unto the Doer-of-good, God the Merciful, the Father of our Lord our God and our Saviour Jesus the Christ. For He has covered us, supported us, sustained us, and brought us unto this hour.

Him, also, Let us ask that He guard us this holy day and all the days of our life in all peace — the Almighty the Lord our God.

O Master, Lord God, Almighty, the Father of our Lord, our God and our Saviour Jesus the Christ, we thank Thee on every condition, for any condition, and in whatever condition. For Thou hast covered us, preserved us, accepted us unto Thee, had compassion on us, sustained us and brought us unto this hour.

Wherefore we pray and entreat Thy goodness, O Lover-of-mankind, grant unto us to complete this holy day, and all the days of our life in all peace with Thy fear, All envy, all temptation, all the working of Satan, the intrigue of wicked people, the rising up of enemies hidden and manifest — Do Thou cast away from us — (here he can mention any special project) and from all Thy people.

As for that which is good and useful do Thou grant unto us. For Thou art He Who gave us authority to trample on

serpents and scorpions and every power of the enemy. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. By the Grace, the Tendermercies, and the Love-of mankind which belong to Thy Only-Begotten Son, our Lord, our God, and our Saviour Jesus the Christ. He it is through Whom is due all glory, honour, dominion and worship, to Thee with Him and the Holy Spirit Lifegiving and Consubstantial with Thee.

Now, at all times, and unto the ages of all ages. Amen.

**THE PRAYER SAID AT THE END  
OF EVERY CANONICAL HOUR**

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy. O Thou Who, at every time and in all hours, in heaven and earth, art worshipped and glorified; Thou Christ our Good Saviour Longsuffering Full of mercy Plenteous in tenderness, Who lovest the righteous and art merciful to sinners of whom I am chief; Who desirest not the death of the sinner but rather that he return and live; Who callest everyone unto salvation for the bliss to come.

Accept, our Lord, from us — at this hour and all hours — our supplications; make our life easy; direct us to behave in accordance with Thy commandments. Sanctify our spirits; purify our bodies; straighten our thoughts; cleanse our desires. Heal our sicknesses; forgive our sins; and save us from all evil sorrow and heartache. Surround us by Thy holy Angels that we be kept in their camp safe and guided, and may arrive at the unity of faith and the knowledge of Thy glory imperceptible and boundless.

For Thou art blessed unto eternity. Amen.

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المصرى .
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البرموسى .
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انثالث .
- ٥١ - اسنكسار .
- ٥٢ - الأجبية .
- ٥٣ - الكتاب المقدس بعهديه .

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION .. .. .	5
<b>PART I — THE STORY</b>	
1. St. Mark .. .. .	6
2. The Chair of Alexandria .. .. .	9
3. The School of Alexandria .. .. .	17
4. Persecutions .. .. .	20
5. Monasticism .. .. .	22
6. Fighting for the Good Fight .. .. .	30
<b>PART II — THE DOCTRINE</b>	
A. The Creed .. .. .	31
B. The Sacraments .. .. .	39
C. The Blessed Virgin .. .. .	47
D. Faith and Works .. .. .	50
<b>PART III — PRACTICES</b>	
A. Prayer .. .. .	51
B. Fasting .. .. .	57
C. Bible Reading .. .. .	59
D. Intercession .. .. .	60
E. Commemorations .. .. .	62
<b>PART IV —</b>	
1. Administration .. .. .	63
2. Institutions .. .. .	66
CONCLUSION EPILOGUE .. .. .	70
The Creed .. .. .	79
The Prayer of Thanksgiving .. .. .	82
The Prayer Said at the end of Every Canonical Hour	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY .. .. .	85



