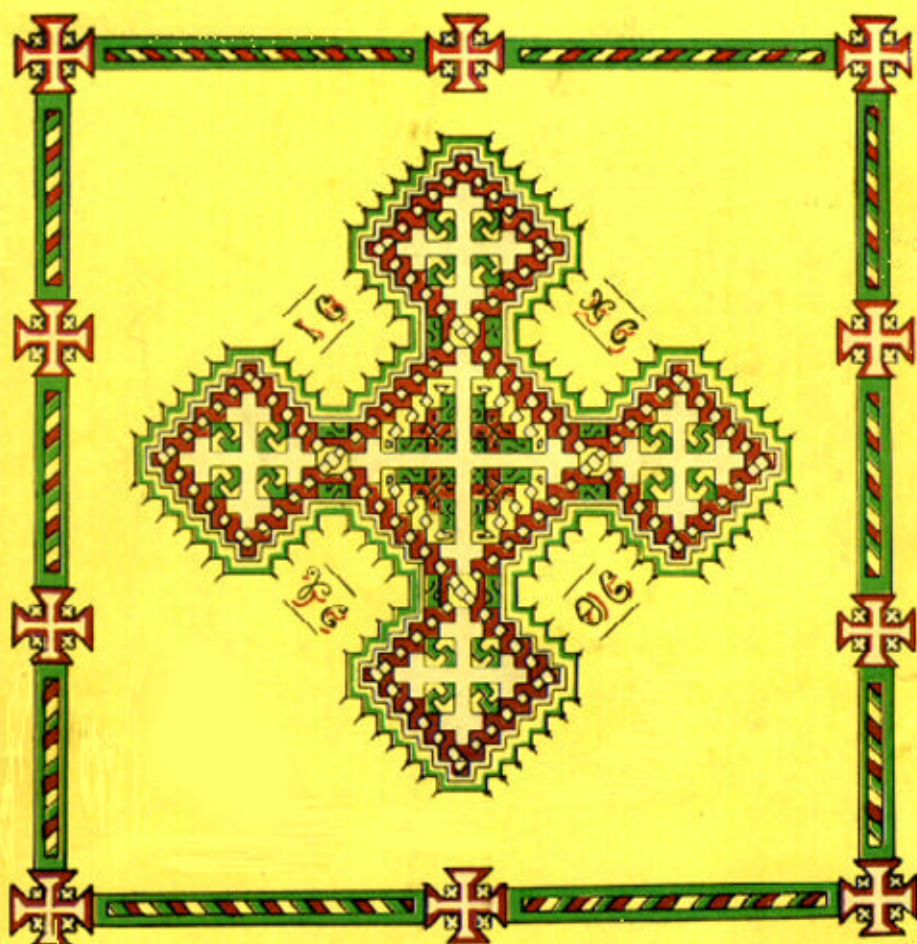


# THE STORY OF THE COPTS

THE TRUE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN EGYPT

by  
Iris Habib el Masri



## BOOK I

FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH  
BY SAINT MARK  
TO THE ARAB CONQUEST

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***BOOK 1***

**FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH  
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**Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ King of Kings and Lord of lords**



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of  
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

St. Anthony, Coptic Orthodox Monastery of Southern California, U.S.A., introduces "The Story of the Copts" by IRIS HABIB EL MASRI to all Christians and non-Christians; to old and young; men and women; ... to everyone, with or without an interest in studying religion; and to the public in general. Also, the Copts in Egypt and all over the world.

May God grant that the reader gain a true knowledge of the Copts and of the history of Christianity of Egypt.

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MMERRY SPRINGS, CA 923\$5**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is with deep gratitude that I offer my thanks to our Heavenly Father whose aid and guidance have been my lodestar throughout the years.

My thankful homage to the Spirit of my Father Pishoi Kamil whose encouragement by prayer, words and continued endeavour added to my zeal and fervour, and strengthened me to persevere on the path towards fulfilment.

My thanks are extended also to all my family circle and friends, with special appreciation to the budding artist Habib Amin el Masri, my nephew, for giving me some of his paintings to adorn this volume.

As for my sister Eva el Masri Sidhom, I consider her my co-writer; she and her husband Youssef did their best in editing and typing this work.

Side by side, with all those who encouraged me on this plane, are all those beloved ones who have gone on ahead and whose invisible help has been my sustenance as I pressed forward towards my goals.

*Iris Habib El Masri*

## *INTRODUCTION*

### *A. History is Life*

Not long ago, Providence so willed that I sit at table with a number of foreigners. During the conversation, my host asked: "Since when did you adopt Eutychianism?" <sup>1</sup> I answered: "We ever adopted it, nor ever will. We are Orthodox and have been so since Christianity began until now." My host resumed: "But I read somewhere that you have deviated from Orthodoxy." I rejoined: "We never deviated, nor ever will, by the Grace of God. But it happened, that when we went to Chalcedon . . . ." Here, one of the guests interposed: "When did you go to Chalcedon?" I answered: "We went in A.D. 451." At which all those present roared with laughter, then my host said gently: "To hear you speak thus, one would imagine that you went this year, or at most last year, and that you were among those who went." It was my turn to laugh as I answered: "Such are we Copts <sup>2</sup> -when one of us has attended, we have all attended. And there is no difference between the delegates attending in 451 or in any other year, because our history is one whole indivisible unit. Nay, it is life itself, and not some ephemeral pictures on a screen. The proof of this fact is that the three first ecumenical councils, the only ones acknowledged by the Coptic Church, have decreed laws by which we still abide. Also, we still suffer from the baleful consequences of Chalcedon. History is, therefore, indivisible, though it appears to us in diverse pictures; it is like unto matter which is never destroyed though its forms change."

Here, I found it compatible to quote the comment Dr.

Cyrus Gordon, the eminent contemporary American scholar, made once on our behavior at Chalcedon. It was: "When the Egyptians went to Chalcedon, they were proud of their Pharaonic heritage, and rightly so; they were proud of their Alexandrian Fathers, and rightly so; they frankly told the whole world what they believed, and, when the world refused to listen, they walked out, and rightly so."

And, since history is life, it is consequently the story of the people, wherever they are. For this very reason, it recounts the struggle of the nations for freedom and dignity; their aspirations towards liberty, and their heroic achievements. This yearning after the ideal should be the pivot of our study of history.

Moreover, to gain a full appreciation of the history of the Coptic Church, it is essential to know the prominent features of its adherents. The Copts have a very strong leaning towards the mystic and the spiritual. Sir Flinders Petrie depicts this leaning very aptly in the following words: ". . . a difference in the conception of a period before the existence of time would seem purely academic and indifferent to a Western mind . . . . To the Egyptian mind, however, this difference was in the essence of things. The distinction of eternity before time which the West could hardly grasp or feel to be of any importance has been fastened by the two Egyptian presbyters upon all later Christianity." <sup>3</sup>

Reflecting on the profound impact of the Coptic Church on the Church Universal, this same Egyptologist remarks: "If, now, we try our historical imagination by supposing that there never had been any of the refinements of the Trinitarian controversy; that no monastery had ever sterilized the best of the race; and that



the Madonna and Child were alike unknown to devotion and to art, we may gain some sense of what changes Egypt wrought in Christianity, and how utterly foreign to the Judaic origin was its influence.”<sup>4</sup>

*B. The Light that never Fades*

In the dawn of Creation, when Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of the serpent, the justice of God banished them into the earth. But His love necessitated that He redeem them. Thus was the promise of the Redeemer made by God to man.<sup>5</sup> This Divine Promise, being given to the father of the human race, was carried within its collective subconscious. Hence, we hear of the Messianic hopes among different groups of peoples, at different ages, and in sundry climes. The literatures, the wise sayings, the sacred writings, all reflect the hope of the Advent of the Redeemer.<sup>6</sup> Among the Hebrews, it attained its crescendo, while among other nations, it was sounded with varying strength, according to the temper and spiritual susceptibility of each group.

In Egypt, the people were given countless gods and goddesses to revert to for different needs, yet the priests and sages expressed their faith in the one God, and spoke of the coming Redeemer. They conceived of a triad of gods, and they worshipped the Mother Isis suckling the Child Horus. They, therefore, glimpsed the Light of Christianity beforehand, and many of their writings run parallel with those of the Hebrew prophets.<sup>7</sup> According to the measure given them, they were on the lookout for the Light. And when the Light did come to them, their hearts were filled with gladness. Their spiritual unfoldment

across the ages led to their acceptance of the New Faith, which was compatible with their sense of mysticism. This concord was doubtless due to their share in the legacy bequeathed by God to man. Because they kept their Inward Light burnished, they could easily perceive the True Light when it shone upon them: "The True Light which lighteth every man coming into the world. Little wonder then, that the Prophet declared, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."<sup>9</sup> Thus it was prophesied, and thus did it come to pass. No trumpet heralded the entry of the Christ Child into the Nile Valley. He came quietly and gently, as comes the dawn, to take refuge in Egypt when Herod wanted to kill Him.<sup>10</sup> Tradition says that as His foot trod on Egyptian soil, the idols in all the temples fell down before the eyes of their bewildered worshippers.<sup>11</sup> The import of this legacy lies not only in its veracity, but rather in the qualities of the national temperament which it uncovers—a temperament which could be imbued with such an interpretation.

In due season, the Word was sown in Egypt, and brought forth fruit: thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.<sup>12</sup>

Before beginning the story, however, one remark is necessary. James H. Breasted, the eminent American Egyptologist and one of the greatest historians of all times, said that what seems fabulous in other countries is natural in Egypt. Also, during the less complex and less sophisticated ages, man was in closer contact with God, and a sort of fellow-feeling bound them. With these two facts in mind, it is easier to comprehend the Copts and their history.

## NOTES

1. Eutyches denied the humanity of the Christ, pretending that His body was ethereal and not of flesh and blood like ours. This is a heresy, indeed, denying the very Incarnation. It shall be dealt with in its sequence of time.

2. The word "Copt" means literally, Egyptian. It is an echo of the ancient Egyptian name "Hakuptah," and the Greek name "Aegyptus," both used for Egypt. And since the Arab Conquest in 641 A.D., Copt was narrowed down to designate the Christian Egyptian.

3. In his book *Egypt and Israel*, London, 1911, pp. 135-6. The two presbyters he mentions are Athanasius the Apostolic, and most formidable champion of Orthodoxy, and Arius who denied the divinity of the Christ.

4. *Ibid*, pp. 137-8 and 140-1.

5. Genesis III.

6. James H. Breasted: *The Dawn of Conscience*, New York, 1934. Chapter XI.

7. Breasted: *ibid*, pp. 364-383. Amelineau, in his essay "Les Idées sur Dieu dans l'Ancienne Egypte" pp. 18-31 says: "On trouve dans les livres sacrés de l'Égypte, le péché originel, la promesse d'un Dieu Sauveur, la restauration future de l'humanité . . ." i.e., we find, in the sacred books of Egypt, the original sin, the promise of a Saviour God, and the future restoration of humanity.

8. John 1:9.
9. Matt. II:15 and Hosea XI:1.
10. Matt. II: 13-14.
11. Isaiah XIX:1.
12. Mark IV:8.



*THE BEHOLDER OF GOD  
MARK THE EVANGELIST  
SAINT AND MARTYR*

## ***I. ST. MARK***

1. His childhood.
2. His personality.
3. Alexandria in the First Christian Century.
4. St. Mark's arrival in Egypt.
5. Propagation of the Faith.
6. Mark's departure from Egypt.
7. His return, and his writing of the Gospel.
8. His martyrdom in 68 AD.

1. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His Glory..."* In Egypt, we beheld His Glory since the year 61 AD<sup>1</sup>, when St. Mark came to proclaim the Gospel in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

To Christians all the world over, St. Mark is the writer of one of the Gospels, but to us in Egypt, he is the bearer of Good News, the Founder of the Church, and the first Patriarch of Alexandria. St. Mark was born in Cyrene, of parents who were righteous, God-fearing and wealthy. While yet in his early childhood, nomad tribes invaded the region of his home town. They robbed and pillaged the whole place, carrying away with them all they could of herd and valuables. Mark's parents suffered the loss of most of their possessions, and so migrated to Jerusalem, where Mark was brought up. Little did they realise that this move brought them to where the Christ lived and taught, and that through contact with Him, their son was destined to become a Bearer of the Light.

2. St. Mark was one of the seventy chosen by our Lord<sup>2</sup> and is the man designated by the Christ as the one at whose

house the Passover was eaten<sup>3</sup>. This same house was the meeting place of the Apostles after the Crucifixion of Christ.<sup>4</sup> An upper room was the spot where the Holy Spirit descended on those gathered at Pentecost<sup>5</sup> and it is recognised as the first Christian Church<sup>6</sup>. When the Apostles met in Jerusalem about 52 A.D. - thus convoking the first council-Mark was present. The point to be settled at their meeting was whether the Gentiles were to be accepted into the Church without having to be circumcised. The apostle James presided at this meeting, and his verdict was that they should be accepted freely.<sup>7</sup> After the meeting, each Apostle resumed his work of evangelisation. At this time, Paul and Barnabas differed on account of Mark, who had separated from them before at Pamphilia.

Barnabas then, took Mark with him and departed to Cyprus, while Paul went with Silas, going through Syria and Cilicia.<sup>8</sup> After St. Mark worked for some time with Barnabas in Cyprus, he was guided by the Holy Spirit to go and preach the Word in Pentapolis, his birthplace, and from there he came to Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

3. At the time of his arrival in Alexandria, it was considered the most outstanding centre of culture and learning in the world. Its famous school and great scholars were sought by all who thirsted for knowledge. There, Greek philosophers, Hebrew rabbis, Persian and Indian seers, together with Egyptian hierophants pondered life's mysteries. The Museum and Library were not only imposing buildings, they contained the rarest and best of human achievements in the mental, spiritual and artistic fields.

At the same time, Alexandria was noted for its notorious living: its revellers and bravados, its wrestlers and charioteers were always parading the main streets-streets that were colonnaded and very wide, some up to two

hundred feet.<sup>10</sup> To this wondrous city came Mark the Apostle of Christ.

4. On the day of his arrival, he walked from street to street, utterly taken by all the splendour and beauty, and all the waywardness he beheld. He walked all day, heedless of hunger and fatigue. Towards evening, the strap of his sandal was torn, and he turned to the first cobbler's shop. As the cobbler was working, the awl pierced his hand, and he lifted it up, exclaiming: "Oh, One God!" Immediately the Apostle took some clay, spat on it and applied it to the wound, thus healing it. And taking his clue from the cobbler's exclamation, he started talking to him about God the Father and of His Son Jesus the Christ. The cobbler's heart was opened, and he took the Evangelist to his home to abide with him. That day, the Seed of the Good News was sown, and like unto the mustard's, it grew in time into a mighty tree. Anianus, the cobbler, and all his household were baptised-becoming the first fruits of the Church founded by St. Mark.<sup>11</sup>

5. Soon, many Alexandrians adopted the New Faith, and as their numbers grew, the authorities became alarmed, for the converts not only increased in number, but their conversion changed them so completely that they seemed as new people, and their newness was very attractive, and the means of winning more people to the Faith, so truthful, so honest, and so contented did they become. Any pagan, behaving in the same upright manner, would be asked: did you meet a Christian today? Implying that even the encounter with a Christian was incentive enough for a man to change his mode of life.



6. As the number of people joining the Faith continued to increase, the authorities sought to lay hands on the Apostle. When the brethren heard of it, they pleaded with St. Mark to leave Egypt for some time. Thereupon, he gathered the believers together, and ordained Anianus Bishop for them, and ordained with him twelve priests and seven deacons.<sup>12</sup> To these, he entrusted the direction of the Church.

Leaving, Alexandria, St. Mark went first to visit his Church in Pentapolis. From there, he went to Rome, in answer to St. Paul's invitation. Paul had already heard of Mark's ministry in the years which followed his contention with Barnabas over him, and he realised, with the spreading of the Church in Egypt, that Mark was intended by the Holy Spirit for work in the Nile Valley.<sup>13</sup> Hearing that Mark had left Egypt to keep away till the anger of the authorities against him abated, Paul sent for him to join him in Rome, and Mark hastened in response to his call.<sup>14</sup> Later on, Paul testified to Mark's usefulness in serving the Word.<sup>15</sup>

7. During the Apostle's absence, Anianus and his helpers continued his work. On his return, Mark found that they had already built a church near the seashore. On the other side of the Church, they had built houses for the poor and the strangers. The whole Christian community, at this early age, lived a communal life, sharing everything together: praying, fasting, and preaching the Word. The number of the Faithful kept growing, and the fold of the Good Shepherd increased every day. So as soon as St. Mark returned, they sought him, and eagerly asked him to write down for them the teachings of the New Way. Thus, in answer to their quest, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel according to St. Mark was written.<sup>16</sup>

8. The Apostle's zeal seemed to increase as his work flourished. This infuriated the nobles of the city all the more, and they decided that, this time, he would not escape them. It so happened in 68 A.D. that Easter fell on the same day as the feast of Serapis.<sup>17</sup> The crowds who gathered in the temple were, therefore, incited against the Apostle. Hardly was the festival over, than they went out, and headed straight for the Church. They seized St. Mark, tied a rope round him, and dragged him from street to street, and over the rocks on the seashore. In the evening, bruised and bleeding, he was thrown into a dark prison. As he lay there, scarcely conscious, an unwanted splendour brightened his darkness, and behold, the Christ appeared to him, apparelled in Celestial Light. He said unto him: "Be strong O my Evangelist, for tomorrow you shall receive the Crown of Martyrdom".

The next morning, the pagans came again. This time they tied the rope round his neck, and dragged him in the same manner, as on the preceding day. In a few hours, his head was torn from his body. Thus he attained three crowns: the crown of Discipleship, the crown of Evangelism, and the crown of Martyrdom.<sup>18</sup>

The mob, however, was not satisfied with this horrible ending; they wanted to burn the body. But, scarcely had they prepared the pyre, than Nature revolted in the shape of a storm, rain, thunder and lightning soon dispersed the frenzied mob.

When the tempest subsided the Believers came and took the Saint's body and head, put each in a cask alone and buried them in his Cathedral.<sup>19</sup> Years later, after the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), the body was removed to a Church pertaining to the Emperor's partisans, while the head remained in its place. Then, in the ninth century, some

Venetian merchants stole the Evangelist's body, and carried it to their home town, Venice, whose Patron Saint was Saint Mark. The body remained in St. Mark's Cathedral of Venice<sup>20</sup> until the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, 1968, when his relics were given by Pope Paul VI to Abba Kyrillos VI, Pope of the Coptic Church. Now, they rest in a reliquary built especially for the occasion under the altar of a new grand Cathedral bearing the name of the blessed Evangelist on a spot known as Abba Roweiss ground, in Abbasseya, Cairo. Special festive prayers were held then, as the Coptic Church was celebrating the nineteenth centenary of St. Mark's martyrdom.

## *I. NOTES*

1. This is the date recorded in the Coptic Annals; other historians say that it was about the year 55 A.D.
2. Luke X:1; Didascalia Book V section 57; "De Recta in Deum Fide" by Origin; the Book of Theotokeyas (or hymns of praise to the Blessed Virgin) pp. 175-7, and the section of hymns of praise to St. Mark; Epiphanius, Book 51 on heresy section 5; Chapiat: "Le Saint de Chaque Jour" p. 213; P. d'Orleans: "Les Saints d'Egypte" vol. 1 pp. 494-5 and vol. II p. 511.
3. Matt. XXVI: 1B; Mark SIV: 13-15; Luke XXII: 10-12; "Tuhfat'1 Geel fee Tafseer'1 Ingeel" by Mgr. Youssef ed-Debs (Maronite Bishop) p. 318 where he quotes Cardinal Baronius saying: "The words `such a man' at whose house the Passover was to be eaten, point to Marcus. Our Lord thus designated him, that Judas may not warn the chief priests, and they lay hands on Him before the Mystery of the Last Supper be instituted. As for the house of Marcus, it was the meeting place of the Christ and His disciples."
4. Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33; John 20:19.
5. Acts 1:13 and 2:1.
6. Acts 12:12.
7. Acts 15:1-30.

8. Acts 15:36-41.
9. Arabic Ms. by the monk Shenouda El Baramusi vol. I pp. 11-19; *Coptic Synaxarium*, vol. I, p.127 and vol. II, pp. 103-107; *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* by Severus (Bishop of Ashmunein in the tenth century) in his section on St. Mark; Eusebius book II, sections 15 and 16; "Akhbar'l Qiddeeseen" by Maximus Mazloum, vol. II, p. 552; and "Les Saints d'Egypte" by P. d'Orleans, vol. I, p. 500.
10. Ency. Brit., XIV<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. I, pp. 577-580.
11. Coptic Synaxarium under 30<sup>th</sup> of Parmouti (8<sup>th</sup> of May) - a synaxarium contains a resume of biographies of saints arranged for daily readings; each biography being written to be read on the day of the saint's commemoration.
12. Severus, Bishop of Ashmunein: op. cit., chap. on St. Mark.
13. That Isaiah's prophecy may be fulfilled which says "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt" (19:19).
14. Col. 4: 10.
15. 2 Tim. 4:11, and Philemon 1:24.
16. Eusebius: Book 5 section 8; St. John Chrysostom's "Works" translated into French by Father Bareille, vol. XIII p.163; St. Mark's Biography written under April 25, in the book "Vies de Saints Illustres" by the

Benedictine Father Monfaucon, where he says: "Marc, cedant aux desirs des fideles, prit la plume, et sous l'inspiration de l'Esprit-Saint gerivait les pages immortelles de son Evangile." This same author says in his *Diar Italic.* - chap. IV p.50 - that he saw the original Greek copy of St. Mark's Gospel at Venice, and observed that it was written on Egyptian paper (ie., papyrus). Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons, and disciple of Polycarpus (one of the disciples of John the beloved Apostle) affirms that Mark's Gospel was written after the martyrdom of both Peter and Paul the Apostles - cf. de Vaise "Explanation of the Bible," vol. XX p.428, pub. in Paris 1829.

17. A Graeco-Egyptian deity, an amalgam of two names: Ceres-Apis.
18. "Copto-Arabic Book of the Holy Psalmodia of the Year", arranged by the Fathers of the Orthodox Church, pub. in 1624 AM (1908 AD) Cairo, pp. 355-6.
19. The Cathedral of St. Mark in Alexandria stands on the same ancient site. Across the ages, it was rebuilt several times. The present building is very new, having been rededicated on Ascension Day, May 14<sup>th</sup> 1953.
20. Selim Soleiman: "Mokhtasar Tankh'l Omma'l Qibtiya" (Cairo 1914), p. 283.

## *II. THE CHAIR OF ALEXANDRIA*

9. The Apostolic Succession.
10. Traditional Rites.
11. Vigilant Shepherding.
12. Divine Providence.

9. Being the founder of the Church in Egypt, St. Mark is considered its first Pope, and those who sat on his chair after him are his successors. They have continued in unbroken line since his martyrdom until the present day. The present Pope, Shenouda III, was consecrated on November 12<sup>th</sup> 1971, the hundred and seventeenth Patriarch of the See of Alexandria. The very first successor to St. Mark was Anianus who was the first convert and who had been ordained by the Apostle himself.

The successors to St. Mark were the first to be entitled "Pope," which means "Father of fathers". This is clearly evident from the old manuscripts. The most convincing evidence is given to us by the Holy Liturgy legated by St. Mark himself and written down by Abba Kyrillos I.<sup>1</sup> Today the official title of the head of the Coptic Church is "Pope and Patriarch of the great city of Alexandria, all of Egypt, the Middle East, Ethiopia, Nubia and the Pentapolis".

10. For a few centuries, the first duty incumbent on each successor to the Evangelist after his consecration, was to perform three liturgies: one in the Church of the Evangelists, the second in the Church of the Archangel Mikhail, and the last in the Church of St. Mark (all in Alexandria). When he ended the third liturgy, the Alexandrian Prelate carried on his arms the cask containing the Apostolic head of the Beholder-of-God (as St. Mark is still entitled), and marched at the

head of a procession round the church, then stood before the sanctuary, and publicly stated that he would endeavour, to the best of his ability, to follow in the Apostle's footsteps.<sup>2</sup> This ritual was not performed by Anianus, as he had been consecrated by St. Mark himself. He, therefore, assumed the leadership after the Apostle's martyrdom immediately, becoming as mentioned, second Pope of Alexandria.

11. Anianus, and the nine prelates who succeeded him, had a similar record. It is stated that all of them were wise and good, meek and simple, and that they taught the people with diligence and singleness of heart. Because of the peaceful times they enjoyed, they succeeded in greatly increasing the number of the faithful. Theirs was a time when the Seed took root, and, without interference, grew in dimension, branched out, and, in time, gave shelter and security to mankind.

12. Rev. John Neale, in his "History of the Holy Eastern Church"<sup>3</sup> says: "It pleased God that the Church which was afterwards, to be exposed to such fierce persecutions from the pagan power, and to struggle for its very existence under two forms of heresy (namely Arianism and Nestorianism) should, in its infancy, be in great measure protected from the storms which fell upon its sister Churches. Time was thus given for its establishment and consolidation. The true Faith took deep root in the hearts of the people of Alexandria, and, in due season gave forth fruit to perfection. During the first two centuries, Egypt enjoyed unusual quiet, and little is known of its ecclesiastical history beyond the names of its Patriarchs".



## *II. NOTES*

1. "Prayer of the Fathers" from the Holy Liturgy of St. Mark known as "The Kyrillian," Eusebius: Hist. Eccles. VII, 4 and 7; R. Payne: "The Holy Fire" p.59; A. J. Butler: "The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt," vol. II p. 302 where he says: "The name `pope' or `baba' has given rise to much controversy, but may probably be derived from Coptic ' ΠιοΠι' (Pi-apa) or 'Πιοββ' (Pi-abba)"
2. Copto-Arabic Ms. no. 253 Lit., Coptic Museum Library, dated 1080 AM (1364 A.D.) folio 66r; "Book of Consecrations"-section on Patriarchs, copied from Coptic Mss. and pub. in Rome in 1761 A.D.
3. Vol. I, p.12.

### ***III. THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA***

13. Ptolemies encourage learning.
14. Mission of the School.
15. Hellenising aim behind learning.
16. School inaugurated by St. Mark.
17. Athenagorus.
18. Pantaenus.
19. Translation of Gospel into Coptic.
20. Clement of Alexandria.
21. Distinguishing traits of Clement's era.

13. While the Fathers of the Church were busy establishing the Faith, they were aided in their sublime task by the Teachers of the School of Alexandria and its eminent Deans. Alexandria, by then, could boast of a long history behind it. During this long history, it had attained unprecedented heights in civilisation. Its pre-Christian school had been founded by Ptolemy Soter in 323 B.C. When Ptolemy Philadelphus sat on the throne in 288 B.C., he not only encouraged the Greek philosophers, but extended his patronage to other nationalities. For it was during his reign that the translation of the Old Testament was accomplished. To his zeal for concentrating on Greek culture, the world owes the Septuagint - so called because seventy rabbis worked on it. They had been invited to come and settle in Alexandria where they diligently worked on this translation.

14. The School of Alexandria comprised the world-famous Library and Museum Judging the School by its prevalent trend of thought, modern scholars consider it as two schools, the one superseding the other: first a predominantly scientific and literary school, then a

philosophic and theological one. This latter transformation started even before Christianity. For the world to which the leaders of thought spoke had already begun to demand a doctrine of salvation to satisfy the needs of the human soul.<sup>1</sup>

15. The persistent zeal of the Ptolemies for Greek culture and the gathering together of seers, sages and philosophers, made Alexandria the foremost centre of learning. The Ptolemies thought that by so doing they could Hellenise Egyptian thought-the goal which Alexander the Great had aspired to after his conquest of the Mediterranean world. A casual student might think that they had succeeded, but any study in depth would show that, in Egypt, they failed completely. The Egyptians were too deeply rooted in the traditions of their own glorious past of culture and learning to change easily. They were willing to absorb and perfect other cultures but never at the expense of their own nationality, or the pride of their Egyptian heritage. This rightful pride in their brilliant past was far stronger than their love for Greek learning. Hence, a crisis was inevitable. Throughout the second century B.C., the Egyptians were in continuous revolt, and the country was a prey to fire and bloodshed. Little is known of these internal, local conflicts except that they were marked by severe pressures and even atrocities. In this sad venture however, the Egyptians, though, vanquished, were, nevertheless, not quite the losers. If they were not up to the task of overthrowing the yoke of Greece, they remained constantly faithful to their own heritage and never lost their national or cultural identity.

Realising that the spirit of Egypt was rebellious against them, the foreign rulers tried to soothe it by offering what they thought was the remedy: the attraction and appeal of a humane culture. But this humane culture was only

possible in big cities, where schools flourished and where commercial and social intercourse was inevitable and constant. In the rural areas, however, which contained the bulk of the population, the heart of Egypt remained untouched.<sup>2</sup> Nationalistic pride lay dormant in the subconscious, and only needed the necessary leader. to rouse it; such arousal finally took shape and was realised in the fifth century A.D. under the stubborn zeal of Abba Shenouda the Archimandrite.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian city dwellers enjoyed the retirement of Hellenistic culture, and a goodly number of them became steeped in Greek learning. They taught and wrote in Greek, so much so that they were mistaken for Greeks, and even up to the present, this misconception still prevails regarding some of the famous Egyptian personalities of those times.

Hellenism was, by no means, the only influential culture of the earliest Christian centuries, although it was the most marked. The impact of Hebraic teachings also was deeply felt and absorbed. The Jewish community of Alexandria was the most illustrious, and second only to that of Jerusalem, besides being the best organised community in the world. Apart from the great rabbis, there were great Hebrew philosophers, such as Philo, who is invariably called Philo of Alexandria.

16. Into this city of inter-racial culture, wherein Greek philosophies, Hebraic teachings and Oriental doctrines were equally familiar, Christianity was, in due time, introduced.

Once the Egyptians were converted to Christianity, they felt the urgent need for a school in order to preserve and help spread the teachings of the New Faith. They realised that if they were to convince and win men deeply learned in all that was highest and best, they had to be just as

learned and more erudite. To help them attain this erudition, St. Mark had opened for them the Catechetical School.<sup>3</sup> Now, during the first two centuries, catechetical schools were opened throughout the different countries into which Christianity was introduced. These schools, however, exercised a very limited influence; they offered only an elementary catechism to pagans and new converts alike. But, in Alexandria, the matter was altogether different. Its school soon became the centre of an intense intellectual life. The teachers who taught therein were scholars well versed in Hellenistic literature and philosophy as well as in the holy books bequeathed to the Church by the Synagogue. The students who thronged its halls were not only the catechumens and the neophytes, but were also learned men; dialecticians, rhetoricians, and jurists, before whom it was necessary to present Christianity in the form of knowledge, research and wisdom. Naturally, the bulk of the believers were mainly simple folk, but the scholars of Alexandria were assigned a role of greater significance than anywhere else in the world. They are the ones whose story can still be read through the works of such master-lights as Clement and Origen. As the seeker reads their works, he finds himself transported into a different world: a world of deep thinkers, reared in the schools of ancient wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

Little wonder, then that the School of Alexandria became the Lighthouse of Christianity, and throughout its life of five centuries, it maintained the same reputation of erudition and scholarliness.

17. The first Dean of the School was Athenagoras, an outstanding philosopher. He had studied Christianity so that he might be able to refute it all the better, but the deeper he delved into it, the more did it quench the thirst within his soul. His conversion was so whole-hearted that he wrote an

"Apology", which he addressed to the Emperors Marcus, Aurelius and Commodius.

Among the students of Athenagoras were Pantaenus and Clement, both of whom succeeded him as Deans of the School, but outshone him as leaders of thought.<sup>5</sup>

Athenagoras was succeeded by Justus who had been appointed by St. Mark himself and who, in due season, became the sixth successor to the Evangelist. On his accession to the Chair of Alexandria, Justus appointed Eumanius Dean, and he, too, became an Alexandrian Pope in turn. The tradition was repeated in the case of Marianus who took his office as fourth dean of the School of Alexandria, then had the honour of becoming the eighth head of the Church.

18. Towards the end of the second century, when Christianity in Egypt had already had a long and substantial history behind it, Pantaenus was selected Dean of the school of Alexandria. He had been a Stoic before his conversion to Christianity, and was deeply learned in the different philosophies. His zeal and his learning had won for him the appreciation of Abba Demetrius (12<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria) who singled him out for a missionary journey to India. He responded to this honour by readily accepting it, and entrusted the School to his illustrious pupil Clement.

Arriving in Southern India, Pantaenus found to his joy that the Gospel had already been preached to its people by St. Thomas the Doubter and that they had a copy of the Gospel of St. Matthew, written by the hand of the Evangelist himself. After spending some time there, the length of which is not definitely known, he returned to his home town Alexandria, bringing with him a copy of St. Matthew's Gospel.<sup>6</sup> On his way back, he passed by the land of Sheba

(in the north of Yemen).<sup>7</sup> Then, once more, he assumed the deanship of the School.

19. Meanwhile, the leaders of the Church felt the need of having the Gospel written in the native tongue of the land but in a script that would be within the grasp of the common man, and that he could comprehend and learn. Such was not the case of the hieroglyphic pictograph nor of the demotic script. According to tradition, Pantaenus and Clement cooperated to produce this new and easy script, to replace the ancient hieroglyphs. The fruit of their labour was the Coptic language: namely, the pharaonic speech written in the Greek alphabets with the addition of seven letters for sounds which did not exist in Greek, but existed in the Egyptian. About this transformation in the Egyptian writing, Sir Alfred J. Butler wrote in his book, "The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt".<sup>8</sup> "The romance of language could go no further than to join the speech of Pharaoh and the writing of Homer in the service book of a Christian Egyptian".

Pantaenus and Clement resorted to the Greek script for two reasons. first, Greek was the language of the cultured elite throughout the known world then, and hence was the language in which the Gospel was first preached to the Egyptians; second, it was actually familiar to many Egyptians. Through this new method of writing, the Gospel was preached and taught to the masses, and they adopted Christianity, with fervour. Their hearts and minds opened up to It for It embodied some of their already accepted beliefs, such as immortality, resurrection and the soul's judgment. Inscriptions in certain of the ancient Egyptian tombs, such as those written on the tomb of Petosiris, for example, ring with a note very reminiscent of certain Biblical passages.<sup>9</sup>

Having given the Egyptians this invaluable gift of a simplified method of reading and writing, Pantaenus and

Clement crowned their works with yet one grand service: they translated the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, into Coptic. Thus, they were the first scholars to translate the Scriptures, in their entirety, into their own native tongue. This work was the response of vigilant souls to the desires of their people.

20. When Pantaenus went unto his reward, his office was given to Clement, his illustrious disciple and collaborator. Clement was a born teacher and philosopher, and, to him, Christianity was the summit of all philosophy. From this standpoint his position is both profound and interesting, for he was an ardent admirer of all the noble efforts of thought which preceded Christianity. He was the first person to muster the evidence for Christianity from all the Greek cultural sources and all the speculations of the Christian heretics. He deeply meditated on the questions raised by the poets, philosophers, and heretic writers. To him, Christianity was the means of raising the people to the highest levels of spiritual living. Greek philosophy attained only fragments of the Truth, whereas Truth, as revealed in Christ, was perfect and absolute. All the stages of the world's history were, therefore, the means of preparing humanity for this full revelation of God.

To exemplify this belief, Clement captivated his listeners by reciting to them quotations from poets, philosophers, and orators; they were entranced as one familiar passage after the other fell on their ears. Then, before their elated souls, he expounded the Holy Scriptures. He delighted in guiding them, step by step, from the teachings they knew to the teachings they did not know, leading them in a triumphant procession to the conclusion that Christian Wisdom was more complete, more lofty and more magnificent than all the wisdom of antiquity.<sup>10</sup>



Clement built his belief on the thesis that Christ was the Source that enlightened the hearts and minds of wise men. all through the ages. Therefore, heathen philosophers were to be viewed with kindness. When Christ came into the world. He did so to free men from sin, lead them to a new kind of wisdom, and finally elevate them to the sublime position of God's children. Ultimately, in this life and beyond, the whole human race will attain the perfection designed for it by the Creator.

Clement possessed all the characteristics of the talented master: a flashing intellect, a fiery enthusiasm, and an ever youthful soul. He believed that teaching was a divine mission, and gave himself wholeheartedly to it. He went as far as opening his School to all who came, regardless of age and sex. And the people from all walks of life crowded to hear him: the rich and learned aristocrats; the women of high rank, powdered and perfumed; young "ne'er-do-wells", coming from sheer curiosity, philosophers and rhetoricians. A medley of a crowd, if ever there was one. A cynic, looking at such a crowd, might well have declared that it was void of all good. But Clement could discern the Divine Spark within each one of them – that spark for whose sake the Word incarnated. How well did Clement know that most people, under the semblance of indifference and sophistication, hid their inward longing after truth. He could glimpse behind the painted faces, troubled souls; and he could hear, amid the incessant babble, the unavowed questions.

The epithets he preferred to use for designating Christ were: "Teacher" and "Pedagogue". Clement took on himself to be teacher and pedagogue after the likeness of his Lord, educating all those who came to him: exhorting the pagans and convincing them of the baseness of their beliefs, and the shame of their immoral habits. And to an age which

despised chastity, and a public which had lost the sense of respect, he declared the grandeur of the Christian marriage, and the noble duties incumbent on both husband and wife. He frankly spoke of chastity and the sanctity of marriage without risking as much as a passing smile of disdain – for so effective were his teachings that he lifted his listeners to the heights he proclaimed, and taught with indefatigable patience and a radiant smile. Yet for all his radiance, he never compromised. He knew and recommended the practice of heroic virtues, and his teachings had the authority of unshakeable Faith. Thus he succeeded in turning the rich Alexandrians to Christians; and what was more, in transforming them into martyrs... for the happy years during which he tirelessly laboured came to a most tragic end: Emperor Septimus Severus declared persecutions on the Christians in the year 194 A.D.<sup>11</sup> Clement used writing as a means of education, yet unfortunately very little of his original writings remain, although they permeated the thoughts of all his contemporaries, and left a deep impression on successive ages. It is interesting to note that he was the first person to start the use of the word "Ikthoos", (meaning fish in Greek) as a symbol for Christianity. Each of the five letters forming the word was an initial of Christ's name and mission in Greek: i = Iesus; k = Kristus; th = theos (or God); oo = ooius (or son); and s = soter (or saviour).<sup>12</sup>

21. Clement was a remarkable representative of a remarkable age; an age in which men could still believe in a loving Father in spite of all the persecutions of Emperors, the raillery of philosophers, and the rancour of the pagan crowds.

It was an age in which the teachers of the Church could effect a reconciliation between Christianity and the wisdom of antiquity, and demonstrate how all the older

philosophies were but stepping-stones, leading up to Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Clement persevered in teaching and writing until the persecution of Septimus Severus put an end to all his activities. As the fury gained momentum, his friends persuaded him to leave his homeland and settle in Asia Minor. He died, however, shortly after, even while his compatriots were still in the throes of the persecutors. The School of Alexandria was virtually closed. Fire and sword held sway, sweeping all else before them, and the powers of darkness seemed for the moment victorious. But the martyrs who faced the fire and the sword, faced them with the firm faith that the Power of Light would doubtlessly overcome the power of darkness. As for Clement, he died in peace, away from his beloved Alexandria, and from the School he loved and served so well.

### *III. NOTES*

1. *Ency. Brit.*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. I, pp. 581-2.
2. "De l'Egypte Grecque a l'Egypte Copte" by Pierre Jouguet, pub. in "Le Bulletin de l'Association des Amis des Eglises et de l'Art Copte," vol. I (1935) pp. 1-26 where he says: "... un peuple qui a toujours, certes, attire les etrangers, mais qui, tres fier de ses propres traditions millenaires pour leur montrer une sympathie profonde, ne fera que res-sentir avec aigrcur le contraste, deja aperpu par Herodote, qui l'oppose aux Hellenes".
3. Eusebius: Book V, section 10.
4. l'Abbe Bardy: "Clement d'Alexandrie" (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Paris 1926) pp. 6-7; R. Payne: "The Holy Fire" (N.Y, 1957) p. 22, where he says: "The battle was fought, not in Smyrna nor in any of the seven churches of Asia, but in the theological schools of Alexandria, the most civilised 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 texts, hurled anathemas on 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.
5. Some writers consider Pantaenus-as they do other Egyptian leaders – Greek. The error of such

consideration is amply demonstrated in “The Evidence of the Oriental Church” pub. in Rome 1702 by the followers of the Greek School, who say that the Oriental Fathers were recognised as Greek, because they wrote in Greek.

6. Eusebius: Book V, section 10.
7. Mar Ignatius Ephrem, Patriarch of Antioch: "Ad-Dorar an-Nafifissa fi Mokhtasar Tarikh'l Kanissa" p. 212.
8. In his book "The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt" vol. II p. 247.
9. Pierre Jouquet: op. cit., pp. 23-24.
10. Claude Mondesert: "Clement d'Alexandrie"(Lyons 1944), pp. 34,37-38.
11. Abbe Bardy: op. cit., pp. 11-19.
12. A.J. Butler, op. cit., vol. II; p. 92,
13. Claude Mondesert, op. cit., p. 266.

#### ***IV. A. DEMETRIUS, THE VINEDRESSER***

22. How he was selected Pope.
23. His attainment.
24. The Epact devised by Demetrius.
25. Its ratification by two councils.
26. Persecutions by Septimus Severus.
27. Growth of Church after persecutions.
28. Origen's precocious emergence.
29. Faithful unto the End.

22. In the year of Grace 199, the tide of Coptic history was taking a turn: the peace that had been enjoyed by the Church up till then was about to be broken. Abba Demetrius, heretofore a simple vinedresser, was chosen to sit on the Chair of St. Mark. The choice came about when his predecessor, Abba Yulianus, had seen a vision, wherein he was told by an Angel that his departure from this world was imminent, and that he was to choose as his successor the man who came to him on the following day with a bunch of grapes. On the morrow Demetrius, the vinedresser, appeared carrying a bunch of grapes, the first fruit of the season, as a gift to his Pope. Abba Yulianus immediately retained him and related his vision to those around him. On that very same day he died and was gathered unto his forebears. The people, true to the counsel of Yulianus, declared Demetrius as his successor. Thus he became the 12<sup>th</sup> successor of St. Mark the Apostle.

23. Demetrius had been a man of little learning. When he was chosen Pope, the first goal he set for himself was to seek learning assiduously and diligently, and to make himself worthy of serving his people. It is said of him that he used to sit at the feet of his teachers saying, "Let men seek

knowledge with true humility and an ardent desire to learn, forgetful of rank or position”.

As time went on, Demetrius became one of the most learned of prelates—a bright and shining star in the firmament of the Coptic Church which was destined to be ill with shining stars.

24. One of the many significant original achievements of Abba Demetrius was the method he devised for calculating the date of Easter so that it would always follow the Jewish Passover, just like the Rest Easter Sunday, according to the historical biblical events. This method is known as the "Epact," and to this day it is followed by all Eastern Orthodox Churches in determining their Easter date many years in advance. It involved making a correlation between the lunar Jewish year and the solar Egyptian year. This was necessary because the lunar year is shorter than the solar year by eleven days, and a fixed date in it can fall in any season as the years go by, and would deviate Easter from the Passover.

25. When Abba Demetrius made the Epact computation, he convoked the holy Council, and explained it to its members. They approved it and decided to abide by it. Many years later, in 325 A.D., when the first ecumenical Council of Nicea met, this computation was submitted to it, and again approved unanimously. It continued to be followed by all Christian Churches until 1582 A.D., when the calendar was changed by Pope Gregory XIII of Rome. Since then the Western Churches departed from it, and now they observe Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon following the Vernal equinox, regardless of the Jewish Passover. The Eastern Churches, however, still adhere to this old computation. Hence the divergence between the

Eastern and Western Churches on the date of Easter celebration.

26. The first few years after Abba Demetrius had taken the helm of the Church were peaceful years. Then the severe persecutions of Emperor Severus broke out, and many a staunch believer was martyred. Among them was St. Leonidas, father of one of the most famous figures of the early Christian Church, Origen. During the persecutions, a Roman prefect marched with his troops into the Church of St. Mark and robbed it of all its holy vessels. Then he seized Abba Demetrius, and sent him into exile to a town called Wissim,<sup>1</sup> where he remained until the persecutions ceased. On his return to his See, Abba Demetrius learned that Clement, Dean of the School of Alexandria, had gone to his rest. The School was thus in dire need of a new Dean to give it a strong impetus. The Christians of the city who had been enduring the trials and tribulations of those hard times, all witnessed the great heroism, ardent Christian zeal, and brilliance which characterised the young Origen. Upon hearing of this, Abba Demetrius immediately appointed him Dean of the School. He was then exceedingly young, only eighteen years old. Nevertheless, he got the appointment because of what had been said of him.

27. Origen proved that his Christian ardour and his passionate interest in the School more than made up for his youth. Through his efforts it flourished again, and a period of constructive work followed. The Faithful increased in number continually; Abba Demetrius found it necessary to consecrate several new bishops, to shepherd the people and keep the lamp of their newly acquired faith burnished bright.



28. About the year 228 A.D. Abba Demetrius, discerning how brilliant Origen had become, sent him on an evangelistic mission to Achaia, to teach and preach about the Living Word of God. When he terminated his mission and was returning home, he passed through Palestine; there Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem—one of his former fellow-students, and Theostite, Bishop of Caesarea, detained him and ordained him bishop without asking permission of Abba Demetrius. This angered the Pope, and he convoked a council wherein, despite Origen's towering personality, he excommunicated him. He based this on two reasons: the first, he considered the ordination of any Egyptian priest the prerogative of the head of the Church of Egypt; and, in the second place, and more importantly, Origen had committed a sin against his own body, having made himself a eunuch, and thus had lost the right to priestly ordination, for only men without blemish could be ordained.<sup>2</sup>

29. Abba Demetrius lived to be one hundred and five years old. Yet he ceased not to teach and to preach to the very end of his life. Like unto John the beloved Apostle, he used to be seated on a chair and carried to the Church, where he would speak words of comfort to his people.

Then, having governed the Church for thirty-two years and seven months, during which he traded diligently with the talents entrusted to him by his Lord, he was gathered unto his forebears, shortly before the terrible persecutions of Maximin fell heavily on the faithful.

## ***B. ORIGEN***

30. The enigma of ecclesiastical history.
31. A precocious child.
32. His father's martyrdom.
33. His deanship and valour.
34. Expansion of curriculum.
35. Error into which he fell.
36. His type of thinking.
37. Bishops and princes among his disciples.
38. Persecution of Caracalla.
39. Origen in Palestine and Arabia.
40. "The Spirit Vivifieth".
41. Two underlying principles.
42. Origen excommunicated.
43. Dissension.
44. Reconciliation.
45. Persecutions of Decius.
46. Origen resumes his work when the Persecutions end, and dies in Tyre.
47. His influence on subsequent generations.

30. Origen is the enigma of ecclesiastical history. He was a genius in every sense of the word: a prolific writer, a great teacher, an ardent doer. His admirers and devoted followers were innumerable, and yet he did not escape having strong adversaries who tried to malign him. His name stirred the most enthusiastic devotion and the most passionate antagonism. Such a singular destiny could only heighten the attraction of this singularly interesting fixture of Ancient Christianity.

When we consider the life of Origen, we find that he was not only a great man from his childhood, as his most outspoken adversary declares,<sup>3</sup> but he was also a man of

Providence. Of all the early Church fathers, he alone was born of Christian parents, and had the signal grace of being the son of a martyr. This he became steeped in the Christian principles from his tenderest years, and this rendered him capable of penetrating Christianity's most intimate mysteries.

31 From his early childhood he used to follow his father Leonidas, asking him incessant questions about Life, the Universe, and God. His young mind seemed to be possessed of an insatiable desire for knowledge—always seeking, always inquiring, always probing. It is related that his father, with loving and tender pride and apprehension over his son's dynamic intelligence, used to steal into the child's bedroom at night, and, while he slept, kneel beside his bed and pray. Then he would quietly kiss his son's chest over the heart, which he considered to be a very special shrine of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> And so it was, as time proved.

Origen attended not only the Catechetical School, but was also a disciple of Ammonius Saccas, an Alexandrian, and the founder of Neoplatonism, who, about the year 193 A.D., founded a school, of his own philosophy in Alexandria, his birthplace.

32. When the persecutions of Septimus Severus broke out, Origen was still an adolescent, and the eldest of seven brothers. Leonidas, his father, was amongst the first to be seized by the Roman Prefect and thrown into prison. Young Origen would fain have followed, for a live faith and an ardent love burned within him, and he longed to receive the Crown of Martyrdom, but his mother barred his way. Providence guarded him for greater works, greater achievements, and finally greater suffering, which he endured towards the end of his life.

Meanwhile, Origen sent a letter to his father in

prison, full of comfort and cheer, ending with these most touching and admirable words: "Take heed, my beloved father, and change not your resolution because of us".<sup>5</sup>

When Leonidas was martyred, his possessions were confiscated, a customary practice with the Romans. Origen, his mother and his brothers were left penniless. Again Providence intervened. A rich and remarkable woman, whose name is unknown, took them under her wing, and enabled Origen and his six brothers to continue their studies.<sup>6</sup>

33. At the age of eighteen, the martyr's son attained manhood. His precocious mind was already ripe, and his heart overflowed with tenderness. Young as he was, Abba Demetrius appointed him Dean of the School of Alexandria. He transformed it into a veritable School of Martyrs. Those of his disciples who sealed their faith with their blood were countless. The young teacher visited them in their prison, accompanied them to the tribunal of their persecutors, and followed them to the very spot of their martyrdom, then under the very eyes of their executioners, gave them the Kiss of Peace, remaining by their sides until they commended their spirits into the Hands of the Father.<sup>7</sup>

The enemies of the Faith were so stupefied at such courage that they did nothing to him. Yet one day they dared lay hands on him and carried him into the temple of Serapis. There they shaved his head for him after the fashion of the pagan priests, then, putting some palm branches in his arms ordered him to distribute them among those present. The young Christian hero took the palm branches and with a firm loud voice declared: "Come, receive these palms, not as the palms of a temple consecrated to the service of idols, but as the palms of Jesus the Christ".<sup>8</sup> He escaped death by a miracle, God preserving him for other works and other combats.

34. As soon as the persecutions ceased, Origen hastened to reorganise the work at the School. Its students were to study grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. These were to be an introduction to the study of philosophy. All trends of philosophy were to be equally studied: Origen's maxim was clear: "prove all things, hold fast that which is good". His students were to prove all the philosophies and all the sciences, then hold fast that which was good in any and all of them. Having searched and proved, they were then to come to the highest study of all: the Holy Scriptures. For all other studies were but stepping stones leading up to this supreme goal.<sup>9</sup>

And not only were all subjects to be studied, but all those who came to study were accepted: men and women, old and young. Origen could not refuse any seeker after knowledge.

The pagan world, up to the time of Origen, and in spite of the efforts of Clement, was still under the impression that Christianity was for the lowly and the illiterate. It was startled to find this young School becoming the very sanctuary of sciences, divine and human, all in one sweep. It could not fully express all its admiration and its respect for Origen, the young teacher whose words had the charm of magic; whose persuasive eloquence penetrated the hearts, and whose genuine tenderness won the souls. And though he was a young philosopher, yet he was different from all other philosophers. True, they could speak in beautiful words on sublime principles but their teaching ended with their words. As for Origen, he was not satisfied with teaching about temperance, justice and love; he believed that without good works all teaching was sterile, and he offered, in his person; the living example of all the virtues which he preached, thus inspiring his students to follow in his footsteps.<sup>10</sup> His very life was the magnet which attracted

countless people to come and study under his guidance, and to live according to his maxim and his example.

35. But for all his knowledge, Origen committed a grave error. In his zeal, he misinterpreted our Lord's saying concerning those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven – and carried it out literally on himself.<sup>11</sup> For this error, he paid dearly later on in his life.

36. Origen was the first Christian thinker who attempted to push the effort of intelligence to its extremity in his zealous investigation of the mysteries. By his persistent efforts to probe into the secrets of the Cosmos, he succeeded in reaching out beyond the frontiers of the Church, and in winning the intellectual aristocracy of the pagans to his Lord.<sup>12</sup>

37. As he grew older, his reputation widened and his influence became more sweeping and more beneficial. The most outstanding Bishops of all Christian churches sought the advantage of his teaching; Alexander of Jerusalem and Theostite of Caesarea (of Palestine) desired to be his disciples for life; Firmillion, Bishop of Caesarea (in Cappadocia), together with all his province, invited Origen to come to them, endeavouring to detain him in their midst as long as possible. The Councils of Achaia and Arabia appealed to him as the invincible defender of the Faith, and the inveterate winner of the heretics to Orthodoxy. Berylle, Bishop of Bostra, recognised his own error<sup>13</sup> when he spoke with Origen, and having been won, he vowed eternal friendship with him, and wrote to him incessantly, expressing to him his deepest esteem. And not only did the Churchmen revert to him, but the princes of the world desired to have their share also. Mamea, mother of Emperor Alexander

Severu, invited him to Antioch, and overwhelmed him with honours.<sup>14</sup> Emperor Philip, the Arab, and his wife, Severa, reckoned it an honour to write to him and receive his answers; while the pagan philosophers felt honoured to become his disciples, and the servants of the God Whom he preached in word and in deed.<sup>15</sup>

38. In time, Emperor Severus was succeeded by Emperor Caracalla. This latter had such deep admiration for Alexander the Great that he decided to spare the city of Alexandria for his sake. This respite was not too long, however, for when he came to visit their city, the Alexandrians showed him little respect. This aroused his anger, so he changed his mind and decided to take revenge. He did so in an abominable manner. One day, he assembled the youths of the city, under pretence of a solemn festival, and at a given signal, part of his troops fell upon them, while another part started a massacre in the streets and houses. This lasted for many days. The number of the dead was never known. "Nor did it matter" observed Caracalla, in writing to the Roman Senate, "how many had actually suffered, since all deserved it".

39. While Caracalla was yet mercilessly persecuting the Alexandrians, Origen was invited to Caesarea, in Palestine, by Bishop Theostite. The Egyptians, in fear for his life, urged him to accept this invitation, so providentially extended to him. Thereupon, he did accept to go, and when he arrived there the Christians gave him a very warm welcome, and entreated him to stay and teach them. He responded willingly and stayed among them for some time, teaching and interpreting the Scriptures.<sup>16</sup> From Caesarea he went to Arabia to confute the heresy that the soul dies with the body. Having succeeded, he was recalled by Abba

Demetrius to Alexandria, to resume his work of education. Origen hastened to obey. Once back in Alexandria, he not only recommenced his teaching, but set to writing his books. His prolific productivity is still an object of amazement. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamin, in Cyprus, says that Origen wrote six thousand books, while Jerome says that however fond a person may be of reading, he can never read all of Origen's books, because they are so numerous. The most outstanding of his accomplishments is his Octapla, a feat of great scholarliness. It is the Old Testament, written for comparative study, in eight parallel columns, as follows: the Hebrew in Hebrew characters, the Hebrew in Greek characters, the version of Aquila, that of Symmachus, that of the seventy, or Septuagint, that of Theodotian, then two other versions discovered by Origen himself, and called the V<sup>th</sup> and VI<sup>th</sup>, because their authors were unknown. This work, a monument of biblical erudition would alone have marked its author with a seal of greatness.

Yet to Origen, it was only preliminary to other and greater works. To realise his thoughts in tangible form, seven tachygraphers (old-time stenographers) noted down what he dictated, then gave it over to as many copyists to transcribe it. When these finished their work, an equal number of girls, well-trained in calligraphy, wrote it out in its final form.<sup>17</sup>

All these workers were amply provided for by Ambrose, a rich Alexandrian who had been converted by Origen and was one of his great admirers.

40. Like Clement; Origen interpreted the Scriptures in the Spiritual sense; he contended that the proper duty of the exegetic is to extract from the shell of words the pearl of great beauty, and to present it to others in a way by which they may perceive its lustrous loveliness. For this reason, he



opposed both Jews and Gnostics, as the two parties interpreted the Scriptures in a literal sense. And he invited them all to pass from the carnal sense to the sense of the Spirit; from the visible to the invisible; from the Law to the Gospel, declaring that "the lamp is certainly useful until the sun shines".

And like Clement, Origen also opposed the heretic Gnostics by emphasising the Orthodox Gnosticism. In this way he conformed to the mode of defence followed by the Alexandrian Fathers.

41. In all his writings he aimed at clarifying his two main themes: a loving, beneficent Creator, and free creatures. All his teachings revolved around these two main Christian principles. Human beings, being free and mutable, are liable to fall, and actually did fall, then bore the consequences of their fall. History discloses how God, while respecting Man's liberty of choice and never resorting to constraint, endeavoured to restore him through countless eons-to his pristine uprightness, the final example of which was manifested in Christ. The time will come when the total of humanity will be restored, and then it will be submitted to the Son, who will bring its submission to the Father. But no human being will conform to this Divine Plan except of his own free will.

Hence, Origen counselled: "Behave like the sculptor of a statue; he carves, he scrapes, he polishes until he produces something beautiful. Like unto the sculptor, do not cease from shaping your own self until the Divine Radiance lows within you".<sup>18</sup>

42. After twenty-eight years of relentless service, the unfortunate incident which angered Abba Demetrius took place. Origen had been asked to go on to Achaia to teach

and had passed through Palestine on his way back. Both Alexander Bishop of Jerusalem, and Theostite, Bishop of Caesarea, considering it amiss that the teacher of Bishops and the Oracle of the Church should remain in the ranks of the laity, had jointly ordained him bishop. This angered Abba Demetrius greatly, and so he convoked a council and excommunicated Origen. Why did Abba Demetrius take such a drastic step against a man of Origen's calibre is still inexplicable. Was not this the indefatigable torch-bearer, and. giant of the Church whom he had called at the age of eighteen to become Dean of the school, and had since relied so continuously upon? Did the two reasons that the Alexandrian Pope gave for the excommunication-namely, the indiscretion Origen had committed against his own body, and his acceptance to be ordained by bishops other than his own-really justify his action? So far history has given us no clue to affirm this.

When Origen arrived at the precincts of Alexandria and heard of his excommunication, his emotions were so deeply stirred that, he returned immediately to Palestine and settled there, without even attempting to meet his Pope and discuss the matter with him. This voluntary exile seemed to have been one more occasion for the manifestation of the work of Divine Grace. For upon his return, Origen opened a school there, which became the means of spreading the Word of God and converting many more people to Christianity among whom were Gregory, the Wonder-Worker, and his brother Athenodorus.<sup>19</sup>

43. While doing so much good, Origen persisted in criticising Abba Demetrus publicly, and this made' the road for the Pope to pardon him difficult. His conscience, however, was not quite at ease, as the following incident proved. One day when he had got up to preach in the church

at Jerusalem, he had chosen for his subject: "But unto the wicked God saith what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth".<sup>20</sup> Having read the verse, and realising that the people had concluded that he was directing it at Abba Demetrius, he suddenly broke into bitter tears. The whole congregation wept with him. But this manifestation of his inner unrest had come too late. Abba Demetrius died very soon after, and Origen had no chance to ask his forgiveness.<sup>21</sup>

44. The two immediate successors of Abba Demetrius to the Chair of St. Mark were Heraclas and Dionysius, both of whom had been students of the illustrious Origen. Each of them, in turn, pardoned him and sent to him a plea to come back to Alexandria and resume his work as Dean of the School. But Origen refused the pleas of both. He said that he thought it more propitious to carry on his mission in Caesarea, in the School which he had founded there. Apostleship continued to be his unique object in life, and so the twenty three years of his voluntary exile were the most fruitful of his earthly existence. He journeyed through the towns of Palestine, through Phoenicia, then into Greece, from whence he went as far as Arabia, always to teach and preach the Christian Faith and win new converts from among the pagans and the heretics.<sup>22</sup>

45. Origen had barely finished his great and immortal apology for Christianity: "Treatise against Celsum" than the Emperor Philip the Arab died and was succeeded by Decius. The new Emperor unleashed another persecution against the Christians, a persecution marked by the most deliberate cruelty. Hitherto executioners cut short the lives of believers and when the tormented reached the end of their endurance,

and one more stroke would have mercifully put an end to their pains, they were to be left for another day or two. The respite would be long enough to give them fresh powers of endurance, and the tortures would then be resumed. This calculated infliction of brutal torments was intended to weaken the resistance of the faithful and induce them to renounce their faith. To intimidate the faithful more surely, their prominent leaders and Bishops were attacked first. According to this plan, Origen was seized, in spite of his sixty- five years, and thrown into prison. An iron collar was put round his neck, shackles round his feet and chains bound his hands.

Other tortures were inflicted upon him, and he was threatened to be burned – the tormentors always stopping before the limits of death. The Romans hoped that by means of such horrible tortures they would succeed in overcoming him, and that his fall would certainly drag in its wake many others. But he who, when only a lad, had counselled his father to endure all suffering for, the sake of the Christ was not the man to betray the cause he had served for more than forty years.<sup>23</sup> Throughout his life he had eagerly sought martyrdom, and now Providence had afforded him this supreme test, to prove to the world the integrity of his personality, and he did prove it. He withstood all pain without once giving in. This glorious episode, which marked his life towards its end, added greater lustre to his name; he stands sealed with the triple marks of; genius, of sanctity, and of martyrdom.<sup>24</sup>

46. These cruel torments of the Christians lasted throughout the reign of Decius and ceased only with his death. Origen was still alive, though completely worn out. When he regained some strength, he resumed the work so dear to him, the work of teaching and preaching,

strengthening weakened souls and winning new ones to the Faith. But the torments of a prolonged martyrdom and the activities of a life so laborious and so agitated at last sapped his energies. The town of Tyre, in Phoenicia, was his last stage on this earth. There he died and was buried in one of the churches. When the news of his passing away reached Alexandria, Abba Dionysius wrote a most touching eulogy about him, paying homage to the teacher he loved so well. The Church of Tyre realised the value of the treasure it guarded; William of Tyre and other authoritative writers testify that the tomb of the great "Athlete of God" could still be visited up to the 13th century. It faced the altar of the church named after the Holy Sepulchre; over it was a marble slab, decorated with gold and precious stones, bearing the words: "Here lies the Great Origen".<sup>25</sup>

47. Origen was discussed at length even while he yet lived, and has never ceased to be a subject of great interest to many church historians. Friends and adversaries alike have confessed that he has had an immense influence in the building of the Church Universal, not only while he was alive on this earth, but long after he left it. The third and fourth centuries abounded with his disciples. Foremost among them were: Eusebius of Caesarea, the father of ecclesiastical history; Didymus, the blind Seer of Alexandria who continued his work of exegesis and mysticism; Gregory, the Wonder-Worker, the recipient of his intellectual legacy and its faithful transmitter to the Cappadocians; Basil the Great, and his spiritual brother Gregory of Nazianza, who compiled selections from his writings along with those of the most prominent Fathers entitling it "Philocalia," which is still extant; Gregory of Nyssus, who imbibed his theology and his mysticism; Evagrius of Pontus, one of the greatest of speculative spirituals who spread his doctrines.<sup>26</sup> Through

Evagrius those doctrines reached Cassian, who, in turn, passed them on to the monks of the Occident, and in that same Occident, Rufinus of Aquelia made known the works of Origen. Jerome, in his introduction to the translation of Didymus' book "On the Holy Spirit," says that "All the philosophy of Ambrosius of Milan, and of the great St. Augustine was founded on the philosophy of Origen, Alexandria's glorious teacher".

Besides these master-lights of East and West, thousands of lesser lights were guided by Origen across the centuries. But up to the present day, none has succeeded in interpreting to the fullest the thoughts of this wonderful personality. For all who have sought to study him, have fallen into the mistake of wanting to restrict to one particular aspect a person whose versatility cannot be confined within narrow limitations. Origen was a teacher, an interpreter of God to man, a Christian militant, a philosopher, and a great spiritual. In a word, he was a unique genius. In all the domains of thought, Origen marks a decisive point: he is the founder of Biblical Science, by his researches and commentaries on both the Old and the New Testaments; he is the first to constitute a great Theological Synthesis, and the first to attempt an explanation of Christian Mystery, and finally, he is the first who described the Path by which the Soul can ascend to God.<sup>27</sup>

## IV. NOTES

### *The Epact*

Abba Demetrius computed that every nineteen solar years equalled nineteen lunar years plus two hundred and nine days ( $19 \times 11$ ). Hence the Epact is a cycle of nineteen Solar-Lunar years in which a leap year would be composed of thirteen months. In its broad lines, the Epact can be summed up as follows:

In the first solar year there would be 11 extra days.

In the second year there would be 22 extra days.

In the third year there would be 33 extra days.

The third lunar year would, therefore, be a leap year; containing thirteen months plus three days. These would be added to the succeeding year.

In the fourth solar year there would be 3 plus 11, or 14 extra days.

In the fifth year there would be 25 extra days. Therefore the fifth lunar year would be a leap year by borrowing five days from the succeeding year.

The sixth solar year would have 11 minus 5, or 6 extra days.

The seventh year would have 6 plus 11, or 17 extra days.

The eighth year would have 28 extra days.

Therefore, the eighth lunar year would be a leap year by borrowing two days from the succeeding year.

In the ninth solar year there would be 11 minus two, or 9 extra days.

In the tenth year there would be 9 plus 11, or 20 extra days.

In the eleventh year there would be 31 extra days.

Therefore the eleventh lunar year would be a leap year with one day left over to be added to the succeeding year.

In the twelfth solar year there would be 12 extra days.

In the thirteenth year there would be 23 extra days.

In the fourteenth year there would be 34 extra days.

Therefore the fourteenth lunar year would be a leap year with four days left over to be added to the succeeding year.

In the fifteenth solar year there would be 4 plus 11, or 15 extra days.

In the sixteenth year there would be 26 extra days.

Therefore the sixteenth lunar year would be a leap year by borrowing four days from the succeeding year.

In the seventeenth solar year there would be 11 minus 4, or 7 extra days.

In the eighteenth year there would be 18 extra days.

In the nineteenth year there would be 29 extra days.

Therefore the last lunar year is leap year, the 13<sup>th</sup> month comprising 29 days only.

This cycle, repeated continuously, would keep the lunar solar years correlated, and make it possible to fix Easter's date infinitum. It would always follow the Passover but never fall earlier than the first week of April and never be later than the first week of May. Thus it would be confined, as it should, to the range of spring and harvest.



## *NOTES*

1. A town of great importance up to the VIII<sup>th</sup> century, now reduced to the status of a village. It is eleven kilometres south of Cairo.
2. Jerome: "Famous Men" section 62; Selim Soleiman: op. cit.
3. Jerome: ad Pammachium, Ep. 84, n.4.
4. Eusebius B. VI SI.
5. Ibid B VIS2.
6. J. Danielou: "Origene: Le Genie du Christianisme" p. 23.
7. Ibid p. 27; Eusebius B VI ss 3, 4, 45; R. Payne: op. cit., p. 44.
8. Epiphanius: Haeres, 64,1.
9. Danielou, op. cit., pp. 30-33.
10. Discourses of St Gregory Thaumaturgus, Nos. 9 and 11, Eusebius B VI 3.
11. Matt. XIX: 12; Eus. B VIS8.
12. Payne, op. cit. pp 43 and 65.
13. The error being that the soul dies with the body.

14. Eusebius B VI ss. 3, 21, 23, 27, 30, 32-33; Jerome "Famous Men" section VI.
15. Eusebius B VI s 36; Jerome op. cit. section VI.
16. Grande Encyclopedie, under the word "Origene"; Alfonsius Maria Liguori "Contre l'Herésie" p. 42.
17. Payne, op. cit., p. 59; Eusebius B XXIII s 1; J. Danielou, op, cit. p. 36.
18. Danielou, op. cit., pp. 49,149, 190, 204; Payne, op. cit., pp. 51, 55, 62.
19. Eusebius BVI ss 23, 26, 27, 30; Jerome, op, cit., ss. 54, 65.
20. Ps. 50:16-17.
21. Manassa'l Qommos; Tarikul Kanissati'l Qibteya p. 41.
22. Mgr. K. Macaire: "Reconstitution de la Synthese Scientifique d'Origene", vol. I, p.12.
23. E. de Faye: "Esquisse de la Pensee d'Origene" (P 1925) PP.154-7.
24. Cf. "Origene" by Freppel, vol. II, pp. 414-415.
25. Cf. Vincenzu, Tome IV, pp. 421-422; also, op. cit., Mgr. Kyrillos, Macaire vol. I, pp.13-14.

26. Archimandrite V. Guettee: "Histoire de l'Eglise" vol. II, pp. 236-7.
27. Danielou, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

## V. A *SERENE SPIRIT*

48. Heraclas: Philosopher and Orator.
49. Spread of Christianity.
50. Patriarchal letter to Origen.
51. Another flare-up of persecutions.
52. Death of Abba Heraclas.

48. Heraclas was a well-known teacher in the church during the time of Abba Demetrius. Born in Alexandria of pagan parents, he became a Christian later on, when they themselves were converted to the new religion. When he was old enough, they sent him to the Catechetical School, where he studied under Origen. His zeal for study brought him to the notice of Abba Demetrius, who ordained him deacon, then priest, then, in time, Dean to the School, as successor to Origen.

Heraclas had grown to be not only a scholar, well-versed in philosophy and theology, but also an outstanding orator, and a convincing, eloquent preacher. His powerful logic, together with his quiet and engaging manner, were responsible for winning many converts to the Christian faith. Because of these qualities, clergy and people in spiritual accord elected him to be their Pope in 232 A.D. when Abba Demetrius went to his reward.<sup>1</sup>

49. Heraclas spent the first few years after his election in, teaching and consolidating the Church whose affairs were entrusted to his hands. He made a pastoral tour throughout the whole of his See. This direct contact between the Successor of St. Mark and his people, knit their hearts closer together in Christian love. His solicitude for them made them feel he was like a real father unto them and they responded to him like affectionate children.<sup>2</sup>

During his tour, Abba Heraclas ordained twenty bishops over new bishoprics that he created. The reason he did this was that, in spite of the intense persecutions, the number of Christians had been constantly growing, and he saw that these new bishops were needed to look after their welfare.

50. To reinforce his work of edification, Abba Heraclas convoked his council, and discussed with them the subject of annulling the excommunication of Origen. Unanimously they rescinded the verdict against him, and sent him a letter asking him to return and resume his deanship at the School of Alexandria. Origen, however, respectfully declined the offer of the Council, and so the Alexandrian Pope appointed St. Dionysius Dean of the School, and committed to him the work of "judging between the believers".<sup>3</sup>

51. Soon, however, the constructive work of the School was interrupted again as persecutions broke out once more. Emperor Maximin, having discovered a plot against his life, used it as a pretext for persecuting the Christians. His hand was heaviest on the clergy. Abba Heraclas was saved, though the Emperor was keen to get him. His people earnestly pleaded with him to go into hiding and much against his will he accepted, though he was sorely distressed as he contemplated their travail.

52. Shortly after the cessation of the persecutions, Abba Heraclas returned to his city, and the noted Julius Africanus came to Alexandria,<sup>4</sup> attracted by the fame of his learning and spiritual serenity. He attended the teachings of this aged Pope, who, in spite of his years and his sore trials, resumed his work of edification. Tradition asserts that Julius was baptised on his return from this visit.

Upon his return, Abba Heraclas acted like the Shepherd who goes about seeking the lost sheep. Through the efforts he exerted, he succeeded in bringing back to the faith many of those whose human frailty had led them to deny their Lord. Once they declared their repentance, he accepted them again into the Community of the Church without re-baptising them. For, like all the Alexandrian Fathers, before and after him, he declared that Baptism was one unto eternity.<sup>5</sup>

## V. NOTES

1. A common expression used in Ecclesiastical Books to denote death.
2. This whole hearted love caused Euty chius (who lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century) to presume that Abba Heraclas was the first Bishop of Alexandria to be called "Papa". But according to the Coptic records, Anianos was the first to be thus called. Also Margrizi, in his book, on page 22 says: "The Patriarch of Alexandria was called "the Papa" from the time of Anianos". A few lines further he adds: "...they reserved the word "Papa" for designating the Patriarch of Alexandria, and it means `father of fathers.' This title was later on used for designating the bishop of Rome". Cf. also Magani 'L Adab compiled by L. Sheekho S. J pp. 302-3; and note 1 of chap. II.
3. "The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopic Church," a translation of the Ethiopian Synaxarium. by Wallis-Budge, vol. II, pp. 337-8.
4. A Libyan who lived about 178-240 AD He is a noted traveller and historian. He wrote the history of the world from the Creation until 221 AD, and adopted the method of reckoning known as the Alexandrian Era. Cf. Ency. Brft. XIV ed. vol. I p. 335; also "Mokhtassar Tarikh'l Kanissa" by Mar Ignatius I Ephram I Barsoum, pp. 220-2.
5. R. P. Cheneau d'Orleans: Les Saints d'Egypte, vol. II, pp. 197-8.

## ***VI. DIONYSIUS, A MAN OF UNIVERSAL LEARNING***

53. His conversion to Christianity.
54. His elevation to the Papacy.
55. His zeal for study.
56. His letter to Origen.
57. His concern for the School.
58. Persecutions of Decius.
59. Paternal solicitude despite exile.
60. Letter to imprisoned Origen.
61. St. Paul: First Hermit.
62. Renewal, of persecutions.
63. Pastoral tour.
64. A council convened at Arsinoe.
65. Letter to Fabius of Antioch.
66. Persecutions of Valerianus.
67. God's Grace shines in the exile.
68. Death of Valerianus and end of exile.
69. Paschal letter of Abba Dionysius.
70. Refuting Paul of Samosata.
71. Prestige of the Alexandrian Pope.

53. One of the persons who lived in the city of Alexandria during this period was a young Sabean<sup>1</sup> physician called Dionysius, who had gained a high repute for his love of learning. One day he encountered an old woman offering some of St. Paul's Epistles for sale. Being a constant seeker of knowledge, he bought them in order to find out what they were about.

On reading them, something within him was touched and responded to the teachings they contained. He sought out the old woman again and eagerly asked her if she had any more such books to sell. Seeing that "Divine Grace had touched his heart" the old woman told him that if he went to



see a priest, he would be given all the books on the subject freely. Acting on her advice he directed his footsteps to the nearest priest and openly expressed to him his desire to learn more about the “New Way”. The priest gave him more books and spoke to him about Christ, the Saviour.

Soon after, Dionysius became a Christian, and joined the Alexandrian School, where he studied under the guidance of Origen, whose courage and virtues he assimilated.

Abba Heraclas, the would-be Pope, was at the time also a disciple of Origen and thus he got to know Dionysius; both of them proudly wore the philosophers' gown, and both delved deep into the Scriptures. As a result of their common interest, a strong bond of fellowship and understanding developed between the two and cemented their hearts together in mutual love and respect.

54. Meanwhile, Dionysius was ordained first deacon, then priest, then teacher at the Alexandrian School, where he was appointed by Abba Heraclas, who had become Dean of the School. When the latter was chosen to sit on the Chair of St. Mark and Origen refused to return to Alexandria, Dionysius was appointed in his place as Dean. What more natural than that, at the death of Abba Heraclas" Dionysius would be chosen to succeed him as Pope? It was a propitious choice for he had already become known as a man of universal learning... verily a befitting title to one of the great Fathers of the early Christian Church whose words and deeds made the Chair of Alexandria a beacon to all the sister Churches around it.

55. Dionysius was well versed in philosophy and theology and even the heretic writings. Of this subject, he wrote to Philemon, one of his friends: "I was at considerable pains in reading the books and acquainting myself with the

traditions of the heretics. Thus, for the moment, I polluted my soul, with their most vile devices. But this gave me the advantage of confuting them in my own mind, and of abominating them much more than I had previously done. There was a certain brother who wanted to hinder me from this practice, telling me that my mind would be injured and contaminated with the same pollution of wickedness. I thought that he might be right and would have listened to him had I not seen a vision; in which the Lord confirmed me in my way by telling me: "Study everything that shall come into your hands, for you are capable of examining and proving all things, and remember that it is this habit of reading, which from the beginning was the occasion even of your believing." I received this vision as consistent with the Apostolic exhortation to them that have powerful minds, 'Be ye wise bankers'.<sup>2</sup>

56. Like his predecessor, Abba Dionysius had great esteem for his illustrious teacher Origen, and so he also, wrote to him asking him to return to Alexandria and resume his work as Dean of the School. But again this gracious offer was refused. "For", said Origen, "I have started a new School in Caesarea (of Palestine), which needs my whole attention, while the School of my beloved Alexandria is already well established."

57. When Origen declined the offer, the Pope entrusted the Catechetical School to the philosopher-theologian Theognostus, who carried the tradition of scholarly teaching throughout his life. Then, when Theognostus departed from this life, Abba Dionysius appointed Pierius, who was equally noted for his oratory, his learning and his scholarliness.

Fortunately for the Church, Pierius lived to a ripe old age serving the School under five successors of St. Mark.

During all his years he taught diligently and preached brilliantly, upholding the faith during the incessant persecutions through which he survived. He maintained the Origenist traditions so faithfully that he was surnamed "the new Origen" by Abba Petros, the 17th Patriarch, in appreciation of his accomplishments.<sup>3</sup> Owing to his persistent efforts and those of his contemporaries, the erudite teachers of the Church of Alexandria continued to be the most luminous point in the Church Universal, during the third century A.D.<sup>4</sup>

58. Shortly after Abba Dionysius took the reins of the Church, the Alexandrian populace was roused to a frenzy against the Christians by a man who was both poet and soothsayer. This started a local persecution, which, though confined to the city, was nonetheless fierce. No street or lane could be passed in safety. Bands of wild pagans paraded all public places, compelling Christians either to blaspheme, or be tortured and killed, and have their houses burned. As a result of this local persecution, a general persecution followed, instigated by Emperor Decius. It was equally intense in its cruelty. In a vicious desire to exterminate the Christians, Decius poured his venom on their leaders: the more prominent a person, the surer was he to become the target for torment. Abba Dionysius himself was arrested and taken out of Alexandria to the town of Taposiris, in the vicinity of Lake Mareotis. Fortunately for the Church, his secretary, succeeded in escaping, and in so doing was instrumental in saving the Pope. For as he was fleeing, he met one of the faithful, who asked him where he was going, and heard from him of the Pope's arrest and where he had been taken. This person was on his way to a wedding, so he hurriedly went and informed the guests assembled of the news. Thereupon all of them firmly

resolved to go together and try to deliver their Pope from the hands of the relentless Romans. Rising, in one accord, they went to the house where they were told he had been detained and boldly assailed it, shouting and causing an uproar. Amidst the tumult and the confusion that followed, some of them went straight in and carried Abba Dionysius away. Taking him to the house where the wedding was to be held they entreated him to go to safety, telling him that his Church and his people were in need of his valuable life. Accordingly, he chose two companions from among them and together they retired into the desert. There he remained until the fury of the Emperor was spent.

59. While in seclusion, Abba Dionysius remained secretly in touch with his own Church as well as sister Churches. His friends brought him news of the strife, and carried back with them his comforting messages to his sorely afflicted people. He learned through his trustworthy messengers that, to add to the physical tortures, the Emperor had given strict orders to dismiss all Christians from government of ices, regardless of their rank, their intelligence or their efficiency.

Writing about the persecutions to Fabius, Bishop of Antioch, he told him sadly about those who are apostatised through terror, but added: "Many are those also who remained stalwart witnesses to the glory of the Son of God to the very end, and thus became pillars in the House of our God; and the strong foundation on which the Egyptian Church will ever stand".<sup>5</sup> The intent of this letter was to strengthen the hearts of the bishop and his people and to fortify them against what similar torture might befall them.

60. From his desert abode, Abba Dionysius also addressed an exhortation on "Martyrdom" to Origen, who was then imprisoned in Tyre, where he was being tortured, in

spite of his old age. A fragment of this address still exists wherein it is set forth that: "God to Whom Alone all wisdom belongs, appoints the measure and term of our afflictions; that though His ways are above our thoughts, yet, with Job we shall finally acknowledge them to have been just, that by trial only can we obtain an insight into the devices of Satan; that it was from want of such experience that Eve fell; that the endurance of trial is the one way by which we become good soldiers of the Christ; that in His Agony we are to look for our best consolation in our own; and that we are to deal with our enemies in all gentleness and meekness even as He did with Judas".<sup>6</sup> Here, the fragment abruptly ends.

61. While Abba Dionysius was so engaged in encouraging the people to face the fierce tempest of persecution raging about them, a solitary figure detached himself and turned his face toward the desert, trudging on and on toward the fastnesses of its inner depth in search of peace through prayer and fasting in its vast solitude. It was St. Paul, who became the first Egyptian hermit. When he first set out into the desert, no one knew about his intentions, not even the man who sat on the Chair of St. Mark. At the outset of the persecutions of the Emperor Decius, he was a young man of twenty, very wealthy and well-educated in both the Coptic and the Greek literatures. He was of a gentle spirit and a strong lover of God. He had an only sister who was married. Her husband, coveting his wealth, went to the authorities and denounced his wife's beloved brother as a Christian. Hearing of it, Paul's sister went weeping to him, and entreated him to go into hiding. Thereupon, he fled into the desert. His idea at first was to hide temporarily, but the life of solitude both attracted him and appealed to him, and what had been his necessity became his free choice.

He journeyed on, further and further, into that vast

ocean of desert solitude, until he came to a cave beyond which were a fount of clear water and some palm trees. There he made his abode, from the time of his arrival, at the age of twenty, and there did he abide till he died, ninety years later, at the age of a hundred and ten. All these long years he spent in utter solitariness, unknown and unheard of by man, but in complete communion with God. Then, in the fullness of time, it pleased God to disclose the secret of this sacred life of his servant Paul – that it may be a sweet smelling incense and an incentive to others. It was disclosed to Antani (St. Anthony of Egypt) who is known in ecclesiastical history as the "Father of Monks."

The manner whereby Antoni found out about St. Paul was strange indeed. Having himself become a desert dweller for many years, a vain thought assailed and disturbed this holy man. He entertained a sort of pride to think that he was the first desert dweller. But, at night he saw a vision. The Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and told him of yet another desert dweller who had hallowed the desert with his continuous prayers for all humanity, many years before he even set foot therein. Antoni forthwith exclaimed: "As the Lord liveth I must see this man of God". Early the next morning, he started out on his search. For two days he walked from morning till night. At the end of the second day he felt lost and disheartened, so he knelt down and prayed in great earnestness that he might be deemed worthy to find out the whereabouts of him about whom the Angel had spoken. Starting his search again on the morning of the third day, he came to a cave with a big stone closing its entrance.<sup>7</sup> Standing beside it, he heard a voice praying and chanting inside. He stood listening, then knocked on the stone, realising in his heart that he had found him whom he was seeking. Receiving no answer, he cried aloud: "I have asked and I was given; I sought and I have found; I knock, and I

trust that it shall be opened unto me". At these words, the stone was rolled from the cave's entrance, and behold, St. Paul stood there. The two saints looked at one another and were overwhelmed with great joy. They fell on each other's necks, crying and praising God for such a union. They spent the day praying and talking together of God's wondrous ways. Near sunset, as they were getting ready for the evening prayer, a crow came to them with a whole loaf of bread in his beak. St. Paul reverently took the bread in his hands, and turning to St. Antoni said: "You see how our Heavenly Father cares for us. In His Mercy He sends me half a loaf of bread every day, but today that you are with me, He has sent us a whole loaf. Blessed be His Holy Name; He Who never slumbers nor sleeps watches over the least of His children". They gave thanks, broke the bread and ate.

For two days Antani remained with Paul, and they enjoyed each other's companionship. The third day, Paul asked Antoni if he would go back and bring him the cloak that had been given him by St. Athanasius. St. Antoni marvelled in his heart that the hermit, who had been living in such complete solitariness away from the world for nearly a century, could know of this cloak. But out of reverence he dared not question the holy Father. He kissed his hands and his eyes, and immediately set out to do as he was bid.

Now, St. Paul did not really want the cloak. He just wanted gently to send his guest away; so that he may not be present with him at the moment of his death, for it had been revealed to him by the Spirit that his hour was at hand.

St. Antoni lost no time. Exhausted and panting he reached his dwelling. Two of his disciples, who for a long time had ministered unto him ran out to meet him, asking: "Where hast thou tarried so long, master?" "Woe is me," he answered, "that do falsely bear the name of monk. I have

seen Elias, I have seen John in the desert, yes I have seen Paul in paradise". And so, with tight-pressed lips and his hand beating his breast, he carried the cloak from his cell. To his disciples, who were eager to know more, he answered, "There is a time to speak and a time to be silent". And leaving the cell, and not even taking with him some small provision for the journey, he again took to the roads.<sup>8</sup>

He journeyed for a whole day. As the dawn of the second day illumined the sky, he started walking again, when behold, afar off he saw a wondrous sight: St. Paul was climbing the steps of Heaven, apparelled in light, and surrounded by an Angelic host, singing and praising God. Whereupon Antoni exclaimed: "Verily this is the Spirit of my father the blessed Paul, being carried up to Heaven". He accelerated his steps to the cave. Upon arriving there he found that St. Paul had already gone to his rest, and his body was lying, with hands outstretched in the form of the cross. St. Antoni wrapped his body, knelt beside it and chanted the Diptych (or prayer for the dead). Wanting to bury him, he felt at a loss as he had no tools with which to dig the grave. While wondering what to do, he saw two lions coming towards him. They came into the cave and stood beside the body, bowing their heads as though kissing it: Then they looked up at St. Antoni, as though offering their help. Antoni outlined with his finger the plot to be dug for the grave. The two beasts immediately set themselves to the task. When they finished, Antoni, with the help of the lions, interred St. Paul. This done, the lions bowed their heads over the grave, as if in silent prayer for a moment, then they turned back to where they had come. St. Antoni watched them go, then raised his hands in praise to the Almighty, whose command even the wild beasts obey.<sup>9</sup>

Before returning from where he had come, Antoni took with him the tunic, woven of palm-leaf fibber, with



which the blessed Paul clothed himself for many years. This simple tunic he cherished above all others, and would not bring it out to wear except on the solemn feasts of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Some of his disciples wondered why this tunic was so dear to him. So one day, before their eyes, Antoni, without saying anything, silently laid the ancient tunic on a very sick man, and the man was immediately healed.<sup>10</sup>

62. But here we must leave St. Antoni with his followers in the desert, to fight the battle of the Alexandrian Church through their constant prayers, their fasts, their vigils and their very example, and go back to Alexandria itself, to watch the struggle there, set up by the Fathers in the world.

The Decian persecutions having subsided, Abba Dionysius went back to Alexandria. Once in the city, the successor of St. Mark sent an epistle to Gaius, the new Emperor, describing to him, in the most touching of terms, the tortures that had been inflicted on the Copts by his father the late Emperor Decius. The epistle had a soothing effect on Gaius, and so he declared that he would leave the Christians in peace. This was for a very brief period, however, for an epidemic of diphtheria broke out. The pagan priests, together with the soothsayers, convinced the Emperor that the gods were wroth because of the truce he had made with the Christians. Thus provoked, Gaius renewed the persecutions against them, taking a greater toll of them than the epidemic did.

63. Fortunately for the believers the reign of Emperor Gaius was short, lasting for only two years. When his successor Valerian took on the purple, he made a more lasting peace with the Christians. Taking advantage of this, Abba Dionysius country in order to strengthen and confirm

his people after the terrible sufferings which they had endured. He ordained priests and deacons, and consecrated several new churches during this visit. Arriving at Arsinoe<sup>11</sup> he confronted Nepos, its Bishop, who had started the millenarian controversy so-called because it rested on the assumption that after the general resurrection, Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. During this millennium, the saints will enjoy all physical and spiritual delights.

64. Abba Dionysius held a three-day council there with clergy and people in which days, by patient and quiet reasoning based on holy writ, he answered all the questions relating to this subject, and thus succeeded in nipping the controversy in the bud.

On his return from Arsinoe, Abba Dionysius wrote an epistle entitled "The Divine Promises," wherein he said: "It certainly delights me to describe what I have seen in our children" the Arsinoeans: they have proved themselves steadfast, sincere, loving, and intelligent. In our discussions, we interchanged views with patience and forbearance. Each point was fully discussed to the satisfaction of every one before we passed on to the next point. If it happened that one of the debators retracted his views, he frankly declared it without hesitation or shame."

Abba Dionysius, then, explained the divine promises mentioned in the book of Revelation, pointing out that emphasis, in the Scriptures, was always on the spiritual and mystical side of life.<sup>12</sup>

65. Having succeeded in establishing unity and peace among his people, Abba Dionysius directed his energies further afield. He wrote several letters to Fabius, Bishop of Antioch, and other prelates of sister churches, in which he emphasised the importance of accepting repentant apostates

back into the Church community, describing, in terms of eulogy, the heroism of the martyrs. The question of whether to re-baptise them or not was a central one, discussed in his letters. Abba Donysius affirmed the oneness of baptism, but stated that each church had the right to act according to its own traditions. Thus he sought to preserve the unity of the Church Universal and to prevent all dissension's.

66. While striving to do all this constructive work, once more calamity overtook this Pope and his people. Emperor Valerianus, who had shown such great consideration to the Christians, and had left them in peace for a long period of time, suddenly turned against them and began to persecute them. Abba Dionysius was summoned before the Augustal prefect, and when he refused to give adoration to none other than God, he was banished to a place called Kefro in the wilds of the Libyan desert. Hearing of this, a large body of Christians accompanied him from Alexandria and from all over Egypt.

67. Once in exile, Abba Dionysius resumed his intellectual and spiritual activities, writing, teaching, spreading the Word of God: Thus his banishment caused the Faith to flourish even among the desert dwellers. And while he was winning new recruits for Christ, he wrote more and more letters, some of which are still existent today, extolling the faithfulness and steadfastness of the martyrs, and lauding the example they set to all Christians.

68. The exile of Abba Dionysius lasted three and a half years. When he had been summoned before the Augustal Prefect to hear the decree that he was to be banished, he gave a prophetic answer concerning the Emperor. Quoting the words of the Apocalypse given in Revelations chapter

13, verse 5, he said: "There was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months". And what he had predicted came to pass. Three and a half years after Emperor Valerianus had started persecuting the Christians, he was taken prisoner by Sapor, king of Persia, after a battle on the borders of the Persian empire. He was most inhumanly treated, then flayed alive. Thus he met his death in a horrible way.

69. The persecutions ceased with the death of Valerianus, but Alexandria was left a prey to famine and plague. And to make matters worse, two prefects disputed the Augustal honour. Thus civil strife was added to the already stricken people.

Easter was approaching, and, having returned to Alexandria Abba Dionysius sent his Paschal letter to Christians everywhere.<sup>13</sup> In this letter he lauded the Christian charity that had been shown by many priests and laymen toward: the afflicted, both Christian and non-Christian, of Alexandria He described their works as "a light in the darkness of misery and deprivation". Then he went on to exhort his flock to celebrate the Resurrection in a spirit of more love and kindness, and greater compassion, in obedience to the injunctions of the Risen Lord.<sup>14</sup>

70. By this time Abba Dionysius had become quite worn out with all the hardships he had to endure, the continuous and valiant struggle he had to put up to keep the ire of the Christian faith burning. Also, he was getting on in years. Like old Simon, in Luke 2:29, he desired to depart in peace. But there still remained for him another defence to accomplish before his mission on earth would be ended. Paul of Samosata, a native of Alexandria, was raised to the

Chair of Antioch. But soon enough, the clergy of his Church became firmly convinced of his unsound doctrine and worthless character. A Council was convoked at Antioch, to consider the matter. Abba Dionysius was invited to attend but could not go, on account of his failing health. However, he exerted his remaining energy in writing an epistle, described by an English bishop in the following terms: "That divine soul, on the eve of departing to his God, divinely expounded the divinity of the Saviour".<sup>15</sup> And even while the Council at Antioch was still deliberating its problem, Abba Dionysius was called to the joy of his Lord. He had served his Church for almost twenty years, under the rule of five different emperors. One can certainly say of him that he had fought the good fight.

Unfortunately, the original writings of this great and learned Pope do not exist in their original languages any more. Greek translations of them exist, however, which makes their loss less severe.<sup>16</sup>

71. It is worth remarking, in conclusion, that in his letters to the Bishop of Pentapolis, Abba Dionysius addressed him by the title of "son". Since bishops are equal and brethren, such appellation was not used by one bishop to another, not even by the bishop of Rome. But the position of the Alexandrian Pope, and the high regard for the See of Alexandria, warranted such an appellation. At the time Alexandria had come to be described as 'a second Jerusalem', the centre and bulwark of Christian scholarship.<sup>17</sup>

## VI. NOTES

1. Star worshippers, who became followers of John the Baptist. Iticy combined Babylonian civilisation with Greek learning. Cf. *Ency. Brit.* 14 ed. vol. XIX, p. 790.
2. As to the phrase at the end of the paragraph, three opinions have been expressed regarding its origin: a) that the words in question were taken from the Apocryphal Gospel according to the Hebrews, b) that they were adapted from the parable of the talents, c) that they were actually said by our Saviour and were handed down orally. J. Neale, op. cit., vol. I, p. 40.
3. Mgr. Kyrillos Macaire. op. cit., vol. I, p. 43.
4. Archimandrite Guettee, op. cit., vol. I, p. 506 and vol. II, p. 7.
5. Manassa'l Qommos op. cit. p.112.
6. Eusebius B. VI s 39; Freppel: "Origene" vol. II, pp. 114-15.
7. Up to the present a monastery bearing the name of St. Paul still exists within the vicinity of this cave. When, in 1884, A. J. Butler published his book "Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt" he said on p. 346, v. I, "This far convent has scarcely ever been visited by a European traveller, and its beauties and its treasures must be left to their ancient silence". This is no more the case, however, for the monastery. Cars and desert routes have made the monastery accessible now.
8. "Desert Fathers" translated from the Latin and Greek mss. by Helen Waddell, London, 1936, p. 50.

9. Arabic ms. No. 49 Hist. dated I380 AM (1664 AD) pp. 1r-78r. kept at the Papal Library Cairo. It may be noted that one of the wonders connected with the saints is their power over wild beasts, a power similar to that which Adam had before his fall. Having attained saintliness, God bestows on them this power in recompense for their struggle toward spiritual perfection. Cf. R. P, Cheneau d'Orleans, vol. II, p. 518.
10. Waddell, op. cit., pp. 42-53.
11. Modern town of Fayoum, in the oasis by the same name, that lies about an hundred kilometres south east of Cairo.
12. S. Soleiman, op. cit., p. 406; Guettee, op. cit., vol. II, PP-222.
13. This letter is so designated because of the association of Easter with the Passover. Abba Dionysius started the tradition of sending such a letter to all the heads of the various Christian Churches. Later the Council of Nicea made a rule that the head of the Church of Alexandria should do this on a regular basis.
14. From the Epistles of Abba Dionysius, copied out by Eusebius.
15. J. Neale: op. cit., vol. I p. 81.
16. *Ency. Francaise*, under "Denys,".
17. Mgr. Mazloum. "Al-Kanz-ul-thameen fi akhbar il Kiddiseen" vol. 2, p. 55.

**VII. ST. ANTONI,  
STAR OF THE DESERT & FATHER OF MONKS**

72. How he was moved to obey Christ's injunction.
73. An Angel invests him with the "Schema".
74. Going into the inner desert.
75. The crowds throng him.
76. Consecration to prayer and work.
77. At Alexandria during the persecutions.
78. Return to the desert.
79. Effect of his biography.
80. Discipleship.
81. Antonian Rule.
82. Monastic garb.
83. Visit to the desert dwellers.
84. His translation into the World of Light.
85. The Monastery named after him.
86. His continuous magnetic influence.

72. Although St. Paul, the Hermit, was the first man to retreat into the desert, his life was one of utter solitude, and he was not discovered except towards its end. St. Antoni, on the other hand, was the first Christian to blaze the trail of a consecrated life of solitude, and to live in a manner that attracted many followers. When he became surrounded by disciples, he laid for them a simple rule of life and of spiritual self-discipline. Hence he gained the titles of "Father of monks" and "Star of the desert". Furthermore the story of his life was written by one of Christianity's most renowned leaders Athanasius the Apostolic,<sup>1</sup> who was his disciple and had a very close relationship with him.<sup>2</sup>

Antoni was born about the year 250 AD of very wealthy parents, both of whom had died before he reached the age of twenty. One Sunday as he was entering the



church, the Gospel message he heard was: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor and follow me" (Matt. 19:21 ). Antoni felt within his heart that this message was being addressed directly to him. As soon as he returned home, therefore, he obeyed it literally. He distributed all his wealth, took his only sister to a house where devout women lived, then went to a deserted house overshadowed by a sycamore tree, on the outskirts of his home town, where he lived by himself. His one burning desire was to have no other companion but God, to be "alone with The Alone".<sup>3</sup>

The years he spent there were full of temptations and he struggled to overcome them. The Rev. John Neale describes this episode in the life of St. Antoni very aptly in the following words: "Even while he dwelt in his first cell, he was exposed to those temptations of Satan which have rendered his history a mark of scorn for the skeptic, of pity for the liberal, and of astonishment for him who believes in the wiles of an ever-present enemy and the unseen might of an ever-victorious Church. He that doubts the temptations of St. Antoni must doubt every supernatural occurrence; must set at naught the testimony of witnesses ever so numerous, of holiness ever so manifest, of historians ever so judicious, of influence ever so prevailing. We are not about to relate, far less defend, those narrations. But none can doubt that a life as completely contrary to every natural desire of the heart, as was that of the Egyptian hermit; such total abnegation of every tie between the individual and the world, such constant danger, want, and suffering, days and nights so lonely, and all this endured without the hope of human applause, because beyond the sphere of human knowledge; that such a life, we say, which is believed by all to have been practiced is far more wonderful, and far more

contrary to antecedent experience, than the marvellous tale of the conflict of St. Antoni.<sup>4</sup>

73. It was at his early period of his life that the blessed Antoni one day felt both weariness of soul and confusion of thought, and kept praying and saying: "Lord, I would be made perfect, but my thoughts will not suffer me". Then he heard a voice saying: "Co out and look". He walked out, and behold, he saw as in a vision an Angel, wearing a Schema<sup>5</sup> and a cowl on his head, and busily weaving. Antoni stood and watched. The Angel kept weaving for a while, then got up from his work to pray. Antoni heard a voice saying: "O Antoni, do likewise and you shall find rest unto your soul". Investing him with the schema the Angel disappeared. Antoni was obedient to this heavenly message all his life, and found the deliverance he sought.<sup>6</sup> Through this obedience, too, the foundations of the true spirit of monasticism and its principles were laid down.

74. Soon after that Antoni felt that his place of retreat was still too near the world, so he left it and went into what is termed the inner desert. He trudged on and on, marching throughout the day and resting his weary limbs at night. He carried with him nothing but some palm leaves, some dry bread and a staff. For nine days he went on, without respite, till he came upon the ruins of an old castle, an outpost from pharaonic times, standing in majestic solitude. There he made his abode and therein he stayed.

As Abba Antoni surveyed the rugged grandeur surrounding him, a great peace filled his heart. The multicoloured rocks, the steep plateaux, the soft sands, smoothly even or in dunes stretching and merging into the horizon, the purple hills, the vast interplay of light and colour amidst this arid hostility, broken by a spring of water gushing

from nowhere, heralded by a group of palm trees, all these inspired his contemplative soul and stirred his imagination by their sheer beauty and their utter silence. Abba Antoni delighted in the Companionship of his God, of being alone with "The Alone".<sup>7</sup>

75. Abba Antoni did not enjoy his solitude long, however. Somehow he was discovered and many people started following him, not only from Egypt, but from all parts of the then known world. When the first group reached him, he denied them entrance. But, in their zeal to see him, they stormed the gate of the old castle. Some asked to remain with him, others asked to receive his blessing. From that moment onward he never enjoyed complete solitude except at certain intervals.

When the crowds thronged around him, he met them with gentleness and equanimity, even though they were intruding upon his solitude, and he tried to meet all their needs. Those thirsting for guidance he instructed, the sorrowing he consoled, the sick he prayed for, the troubled he put at peace. The Grace of God so filled him, that all who sought him gained something by merely being with him.

76. St. Antoni persevered in prayer, in fasting and in weaving baskets; he also fought the heretics, and strove all his life to help his fellow Christians. And it pleased God to grant him a long life so that he saw the light of day when Abba Dionysius was Pope, then "fought the good fight" throughout the lives of six more successors of St. Mark.

77. When Abba Maximus succeeded Abba Dionysius, becoming the fifteenth Pope of the Church of Alexandria, Emperor Maximinus renewed his persecutions against the Church. When this news reached St. Antoni, he decided to

break his solitude, and return to Alexandria in order to be near the people in their dire distress. He also desired exceedingly to be among those who stood up for Christ, and to be accounted worthy of the "Athlete's Crown".<sup>8</sup>

Once in Alexandria, Antoni sought out the prisons where the Christians had been interned. He went to them, admonishing and encouraging them with the comfort of his counsel and his prayers. When the soldiers came to escort those designated for execution, he would bless them, and sing hymns of praise to fill them with good cheer. His exceeding faith uplifted the believers, so that they were all infused with power and faced death rejoicing. This infuriated the persecutors, and a decree was issued that none of the monks or clergy should accompany those about to be put to death.

When St. Antoni heard of it, he arrayed himself in his white tunic, went to the Hall of Judgment, and stood opposite the wicked judge who had issued this decree. He declared in a thunderous voice before him that he would never forsake his children, but would stand by them to the very end. To the believers who watched him speak, "his appearance was like unto that of the "Angel of Light".

In spite of his excessive boldness, Antoni was not arrested and his life was spared, "through the Infinite Wisdom of God, Who kept him for the strengthening of those who testified, for the benefit of those who were about to do so, for the increase of the monasteries and of the monks, and for the praise of the whole Church".<sup>9</sup>

78. When the persecutions ended, St. Antoni returned to his desert abode. The whole city went out to bid him goodbye because of the light that shone from his countenance, and because of his great love for everyone. "His love for his fellowmen was the vibrant reflection of his

love for God, for he would say to all who came to him: "I do not fear God, but I love Him, and love casteth fear out of the hearts."<sup>10</sup>

79. Intimacy with God made St. Antoni as tenderhearted and as compassionate as the Master he served. Consequently his influence extended beyond the confines of his lifetime, and the Church Universal still reveres him as one of the great saints. Thirty years after his death, a copy of his biography alluded to earlier was found at Treves in Belgium, in a cottage inhabited by a few monks. One day when Emperor Constantine the Younger was hunting; four of his courtiers sauntered round the city and chanced upon that cottage. They walked in without permission. Finding the biography of Antoni, they set themselves to reading it. As a result, two of the four men forsook the palace life to adopt monasticism; this was about 386 A.D.

Then towards the end of the summer of the same year, that same biography changed the life of another man who became a great saint. He was none other than the renowned St. Augustine. It so happened that his friend Pontitianus went to visit him one evening, and talked to him about the Egyptian ascetic, leaving to him a copy of that biography which had been penned so lovingly by Athanasius the Apostolic. Upon reading it Augustine decided to follow the example of St. Antoni, not by going into the desert but by surrendering his human will to the Divine One. He was deeply touched by what the Egyptian ascetic had declared in the following statement: "Let no man fancy that the attainment of perfection is impossible or alien to human nature. Men may have to travel afar to seek learning; but the city of God is within the human heart, and the good that

God asks of us is within, and demands only that we submit our wills wholly unto Him.<sup>11</sup>

80. As already mentioned, numerous people crowded around St. Antoni in order to be cured physically or spiritually. Nevertheless, there were those who sought to live with him and become his disciples. The Saint laid down for them the rule that each live in a separate cell. The cells would be near enough to each other so that they could assemble on Saturday evenings, and spend that night together as well as pray together on Sunday morning. Then each would resume his solitude until the following Saturday. This way of life became known as the Antonian Monasticism.

81. St. Antoni, however, founded no monastery. His rule consisted simply of prayer and handwork; for, he told his disciples that just as Christ was a carpenter, and St. Paul was a tent maker; and, in conformity with the Angel's instructions, they too had to keep their hands busy to escape boredom and temptation.

Work was imperative because a monk should neither be idle nor a parasite; he should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, and be able to give to the needy. St. Antoni taught that if one devil harass a busy man a legion will harass the idle.

Prayer comprised the recitation of certain psalms and selected passages from the New Testament, in addition to spontaneous prayers. Some prayers were lifted up by the group, and others by each individual alone. Prayer had to be fervent and from the heart for it was the link binding the individual to his Creator.

82. Although Abba Antoni did not organise monastic life per se, it was he who assigned a uniform to the monks. This was a garb of white flax reaching below the knees after the fashion of Pharaonic priests. A wide thick belt of leather helped the monk to keep erect. Thus was the pattern set for all monastic organisations, including the hermits, followed suit.<sup>12</sup>

83. One time, in response to the request of the ascetics scattered all over the desert, Abba Antoni made what might be termed a pastoral tour. He visited both monks and nuns. On his tour, he met his sister who had, unknown to him, followed his example. She was living in the company of some consecrated women in a spot of their own choice.

84. After spending eighty-five years in the desert to which he had resorted at the age of twenty, St. Antoni was "translated into the world of Light" (a Coptic expression meaning 'to die'). When he felt by the spirit that his hour had come he called unto him two of his closest disciples and requested them to bury him in the vast desert, and to tell no man of his burial place. Then, kissing them with an holy kiss, he said, "And now, I am going where God's Grace will lead me". With these words, he laid him down, and, commending his spirit into the Hands of the Heavenly Father,<sup>13</sup> peacefully went to his eternal rest.

85. A monastery bearing the name of Abba Antoni stands to this day in the region that had been hallowed by the life of this luminous star of the Egyptian desert and Father of all the monks. Near to the monastery is a natural cave situated over a rocky boulder; it is the cave where the great Saint spent most of his life. Until recently it was almost impossible to visit the Antonian monastery, because of the hardship of

reaching it. Now, however, with better means of communication, and the fact that it has been revived and restored by the Church, it is a living monastery and can be visited by special permission from the Coptic Papacy. Many monks reside in this monastery.

86. The magnetism of the life of St. Antoni continued to have its effect through the centuries. In 1941, the Belgian ambassador to Egypt-Le Chevalier Guy de Schouteete de Tervarent-gave a lecture at the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo, entitled "La Gloire Posthume de St. Antoine". He said that a French nobleman who had visited the Holy Land in the eleventh century, and then passed by Constantinople on his way back, was given permission by the Emperor to carry what was thought to be the relics of St. Antoni: It happened that in the year 1090, the plague raged in Western Europe. During its fiercest, word went around that the relics of Egypt's ascetic had the power to cure the stricken. Many rushed to visit it and some were actually cured. Shortly after that a church was built in the Saint's name and the relics were placed in it. Then, a hospital was annexed to it. Furthermore, a monastic order-called the Antonian-was instituted in Vienne-en-Dauphine (France) and, as a result, the influence of the Saint spread in ever-widening circles: Over the years the centre of the Antonian order in St: Antoine de Viennois-en-Dauphine won great repute, and became a place of pilgrimage.<sup>14</sup>

An American minister, in-a recently broadcast sermon, made a remark that may be appropriately quoted here. He said, "Who can count the apples in a seed? or who can measure the effects of one good deed?"<sup>15</sup> In the same vein of thought, one might also ask "Who can determine how many lives were transformed through the example and teachings of the great saints or how far and wide their influence has gone?"



## VII. NOTES

1. 19<sup>th</sup> successor of St. Mark who played a major role at the Council of Nicea, and about whom more will be said as this story unfolds.
2. English translation in "Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers," 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., v. 4, pp. 188-221.
3. Arabic Ms., of "The Paradise of the Fathers," kept at the Baramus Monastery in the western desert at Wadin-natron.
4. In his book "A History of the Holy Eastern Church," v. 1, PP.108-109.
5. A closed double circle of braided leather intersected with crosses. Since it was first given by the angel of the Lord, it became an insignia of saintliness. Therefore the monk whose companions witness to his uprightness is invested with it after chanting the prayers set especially for the occasion.
6. As-Sadik ul Amin, v. 1, PP. 309-313.
7. Helen Waddell, *op. cit*, p.123.
8. "The Paradise of the Holy Fathers" translated by Wallis Budge v-I, P. 39. The term "athletes of God" has been used to describe the ascetics who reached a high degree of sanctity and saintliness. Cf. Helen Waddell, *ibid*: introduction, p.14.
9. Budge, *op. cit.*, v. I, p. 40.

10. Waddell, *op. cit.*, p.175.
11. *Ibid*: introduction, p. 7, Cf. also Sealey and Co: "Augustine of Hippo (London, 1908) pp. 18-20.
12. Amelineau: "St. Antoine et le Commencement du Monachisme Chretien en Egypte"; Abbe P. Barbier: "Vie de Saint Anthanase " p. 407.
13. Budge, *op. cit.*, v. I, p.114.
14. This lecture was published in its entirety in "Le Bulletin de la Societe d Archeologie Copte" Tome VII (1941) pp. 74-76.
15. Dr. Robert Schuller of Garden Grove, California.

### ***VIII. BUILDING THE FIRST CHURCH***

87. Maximos: His Upbringing and election.
88. Establishment of Peace and its results.
89. Incandescence of Alexandria's Church.
90. Two Egyptian priests elected in succession Bishops for Syria.
91. Election of Abba Theonas.
92. Diocletian becomes Emperor.
93. Patriarchal Epistle to Lucian.
94. Stand of Alexandrian philosophers toward Christianity.
95. Death of Abba Theonas.

87. At the vacancy of St. Mark's Chair, Maximos, a priest of Alexandria, highly extolled by Abba Dionysius, was elected by clergy and people in 270 A.D., to fill that vacancy, thus becoming the fifteenth Pope of Alexandria.

Born of Christian parents, Maximos was accorded the privilege of a Christian education from his tenderest years. Growing up in such an atmosphere, he became saturated with love for the Church. He attended the School of Alexandria when Origen was its Dean: He combined an interest in philosophy with that of theology, and in time became well-versed in both. Ordained deacon, then priest he served and taught the people with zeal and diligence. Thus his education and his service both prepared him for the attainment of the supreme honour of becoming St. Mark's successor.

88. Fortunately, peace had already been re-established before he was elected the persecutions which had been raging so mercilessly against the Church had subsided. Abba Maximos found peace a most propitious ally for reaffirming

the doctrines of the Church; he comforted his people, instructed them, and guided them into the paths of righteousness.

Soon after his election, Abba Maximos received a synodal letter from the Council of Antioch, informing him of the deposition of Paul of Samosata, head of the Antiochan Church, 'and the reason for it. The Alexandrian Pope seized this opportunity and immediately sent a circular epistle to all the bishops within his jurisdiction in which he made known to them the verdict of the Council of Antioch, and warned them against the false doctrines of the deposed Samosation.

At the same time, Abba Maximos found it appropriate to expose the errors of yet another heretic by the name of Mani. This heretic had pretended that there were two gods: the God of Good, living in the World of Light, and the God of Evil, living in the world of Darkness. In this letter, the Successor of St. Mark emphasised the Christian Doctrine of the One God: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

These two letters of Abba Maximos comforted the hearts of the people and consolidated their faith.

89. During this epoch, the Church of Alexandria had become the most luminous among Churches.<sup>1</sup> Several outstanding teachers assisted the successor of St. Mark in his work of edification. Foremost among them was Phileas, a Bishop and writer of high repute who eulogised the martyrs, and won the Martyr's Crown for himself.

90. Side by side with Phileas stood the erudite priests Eusebius and Anatolius, whom Abba Dionysius, the preceding Patriarch, had selected to bear his letter against the heresy of Paul of Samosata to the Council of Antioch. Both of them had been entreated by the people of Syria to stay on

and settle in their country, and they both responded and spent the rest of their lives there. Eusebius was soon elected Bishop there because he was "a treasure of religion".<sup>2</sup> At his death his friend and compatriot Anatolius was regarded as the foremost scholar of his time in literature, in science, and in philosophy. Mathematics also were as familiar to him as the natural sciences. He followed in the footsteps of his predecessors and published works of great educational value to the people of his time concerning the Christian points of view.<sup>3</sup>

These teachers of the Church, with Abba Maximos at their head, carried on their work with joy and delight, as the Church enjoyed the prosperity of peace for the space of twelve successive years.

Unfortunately, very little remains of the writings either of those teachers or of Abba Maximos. Although we do not even have a biography of this Pope, tradition accords him a high reputation of sanctity and industriousness. He guided the affairs of the Church during the twelve years of peace, then he rested in His Lord.

91. After Maximos, the Chair of Alexandria was entrusted into the hands of Abba Theonas, a man full of grace and fear of God. To him was granted the honour of building the first Church since St. Mark's Cathedral. For though great Saints preceded him as successors of the Apostle, yet, like King David of old, they were not privileged to build God's house; while he, like King Solomon,<sup>4</sup> received this Grace of erecting this house of Christian worship on the ancient shores of the Nile.

For many years, because of the successive persecutions the Christians could not hold their prayers except in private houses, in hiding places, and in cemeteries, even during the times of peace. The new Church was built in

the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and was called "The Church of the Mother-of God".<sup>5</sup>

92. Then, in the year 292 AD, Diocletian was declared Emperor in Nicomedis, while Achilleus assumed the purple in Alexandria. Diocletian marched against him and besieged the city-a siege that lasted for six months. When he finally triumphed, the city walls had been levelled to the ground. Achilleus and all who were suspected of helping him were put to death. Severe punishment was meted out on many an innocent.

93. When Diocletian settled in Alexandria, peace was restored for some months. A Greek copy of an epistle written by Abba Theonas during this period, and addressed to Lucian, a Christian and the chief of the gentlemen of the bedchamber of the palace, is still existent. The prudence and piety which characterise it, make us deplore the loss of his other writings all the more. It says thus:

"The peace which the Church enjoys is granted to this end; that the good works of the Christians may shine out before the unbelievers, and that through them, our Father which is in Heaven may be glorified. This should be our chief end and aim, if we would be Christians in deed and not in words only. For if we seek our own glory, we desire a vain, perishable thing. But the Glory of the Father and of the Son – Who for us was nailed to the cross, saves us with an everlasting redemption, that great expectation of all Christians. I neither think, therefore, nor wish, my dear Lucian, that you should boast, because many in the court have come by your means to the knowledge of the Truth. You should rather give thanks to God, Who hath chosen you as a good instrument to a good result, and hath given you favour in the sight of the prince, to the end that you spread

abroad the savour of the Christian name, to His Glory and to the salvation of many.” After emphasising the necessity of avoiding everything that might cast a stumbling block in the way of Diocletian, he proceeds: "God forbid that you should sell to any the entry of the palace, or receive a bribe to suggest what is unseemly to the Emperor's ear. Put away from you avarice, which worketh for idolatry rather than for the Christian religion. Unworthy gain and duplicity are very unbefitting to him who embraces the Christ, our Example and Teacher. Let there be no evil speaking nor immodest language among you. Let all things be done in kindness, courtesy and justice; that in all things the Name of our God and Lord, Jesus the Christ be magnified. Fulfil the duties to which you are severally appointed, with love towards God and respect towards the Emperor, and exactness and diligence. Account that all commands of the ruler, which offend not against those of God, proceed from God Himself. Put on patience as a robe. Be girded with virtue. Be filled with Faith, Hope, and Charity". Abba Theonas goes on to particularise, then concludes with general exhortations for behaviour, advising all to set apart a time for prayer and for the reading of the Scriptures "which will enable you to accomplish your duties in the love of the Christ, and to despise all things transitory for the sake of His Eternal Promises, and conduct you to the attainment of everlasting felicity".<sup>6</sup>

94. It is worth noting here that by this time many of the pagan philosophers were not antagonistic to Christianity, though they did not adopt it. The School of Neoplatonism, founded by Ammonius Saccas at Alexandria showed great reserve in its attacks. The most outstanding disciple of Ammonius was Plotinus, who never adopted Christianity,

yet never attacked it; but he did not remain unmoved by its teachings.

95. Then, all of a sudden, Emperor Diocletian, like so many of his predecessors and successors, broke the peace which he had promised to the Christians, and began the seventh persecution against them. The last year of the papacy of Theonas was the beginning of a reign of terror, which continued without respite for ten whole years. Such were the atrocities committed, that many of the pagans themselves were horrified and sought to hide the Christians.

After guiding the Church for nine years and nine months, Abba Theonas went unto the joy of his Lord in the year 295 A.D. For many centuries after, he remained the spiritual guide of his people. In many of the existing old manuscripts his successors always asserted with exaltation that: "they never deviated from the teachings of Abba Theonas".<sup>7</sup>



### VIII. NOTES

1. Guettee, op. cit., vol. II, p. 234 where he says: "L'Eglise la plus tumineuse a cette epogue fut, sans contredit, celle d'Wexandrie. Celles d'Antioch, de Jerusalem et de Rome jeterent beaucoup moins d'eclat."
2. *Ibid*, p. 235.
3. *Ibid*, p. 235-6.
4. 2 Samuel VII: 4-11.
5. A. J. Butler: "Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt," vol. I, p. 5.
6. Manassa'l Qommos: op. cit., pp. 85-6.
7. S. Soleiman: op. cit., p. 422.

**IX. A. PETROS, 17th POPE AND  
"SEAL OF THE MARTYRS"**

96. The School of Alexandria carries on in spite of ....
97. Petros, its Dean, the son of fervent prayers.
98. His election to the Papacy.
99. Eruption of Diocletian's fierce persecutions – and the designated beginning of the Coptic ‘Era of the martyrs’.
100. Canons for repentance.
101. Excommunication of Arius because of his heresy.
102. Arrest and martyrdom of bishops, then of Abba Petros.
103. Persecuted and persecutors alike in the Hands of God.
104. ‘Love your enemies’.(Matt 5:44).

96. One of the remarkable things about this period of exceptional stress for Christians of Egypt is that the Fathers of Alexandria were able to carry on their work at the School. It continued to be a source of enlightenment, strength, and spiritual and intellectual food for many. Hence it remained a bulwark of faith. In charge of it as Dean at this critical time was a sagacious person by the name of Petros who was to become the 17<sup>th</sup> Pope of the Church, and later to seal with his blood that era of the martyrs by becoming the last to lose his life for the faith in this fiercest persecution.

97. Petros was an only son, who had been born in answer to his parents' fervent prayers. His father, called Theodosius was assistant priest in Alexandria. His mother was called Sophia. Both were God-fearing people who, being childless kept praying fervently that they may be granted a son.

One day, when the Church was celebrating the

martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul, Sophia stood in the House of God and watched a company of Christians entering the Church with their sons, dressed in goodly raiment, walking before them. With her heart deeply stirred, she kept weeping and praying, like the mother of the prophet Samuel of old, asking the Lord before His holy altar to bestow on her a son.

That night she saw in a vision tow venerable old men dressed in white, comforting her and telling her that God had heard her prayers, and that she would be given a son whom she must call Petros who will be the father of the whole nation. They commanded her to go in the morning to the Pope and ask him to pray over her.

In the morning Sophia, with a glad heart, told her husband of her vision and he rejoiced with her. Then she went and related it to the Pope and he gave her his blessings.

In due time Petros was born. When he was seven years old, his parents offered him to the Pope, just as Samuel the prophet had been offered. He became as the Pope's son, and was consecrated by him, first reader, then deacon, then priest. He grew up to be learned, chaste and upright, and in time his knowledge, wisdom and understanding earned for him the surname of "Excellent Doctor of Christian religion".<sup>1</sup>

98. When Abba Theonas was dying he counselled the church leaders to choose Petros as his successor. His counsel was attended to, and thus Petros, the child of promise, became the father of the nation and the 17<sup>th</sup> successor to St Mark in the year 285 A.D.

99. The years in which Abba Petros guided the church were years of excessive stress. Storm raged from without, in the form of the most terrible persecutions the Christians were subjected to; and storms from within such as Arian heresy

that was more than equally dangerous to the Christian faith. Like the able captain of a ship, Petros did his utmost to cope with both storms, and the fact that the church still stands today as a living church is evidence of how he fared.

The persecutions that were unleashed against the Christians when Abba Petros became pope were those ordered by Emperor Diocletian. They were the fiercest and longest of all the known persecutions, lasting for over ten years, and not ending until the Pope himself was martyred. Since he was the last to lose his life for the Faith under Diocletian, he is called to this day in church history 'Ieromartyros' or 'The Seal of the Martyrs.'

It is impossible to determine the number of Egyptian Christians who lost their lives during Diocletian's persecutions. The tortures and executions were carried on day in, day out, and year in, year out, without respite. Tertullian, a priest from Carthage and a contemporary of the times says, "If the martyrs throughout the world were to be put in one side of the scales and the Coptic martyrs alone were to be put in the other, the latter would outweigh the former". While the article entitled "Martyrs" in "La Dictionnaire des dictionnaires" states that the Copts who lost their lives in this seventh persecution suffered under Diocletian were eight hundred thousand. The writer of the article is a Catholic prelate by the name of Monseigneur Guerin.

To keep alive the memory of their valiant and heroic forefathers who laid down their lives for their faith, and to remain ever aware of how much they owe to them for the preservation of this priceless faith, the Coptic Church decided to have a Coptic calendar with the year 284 A.D. as its starting point. They called it the Era of the Martyrs. The current year is the year 1697 AM (after the martyrs), 284 years less than the Christian era. The Copts still follow the

calendar system of the ancient Egyptians. It begins on the 11<sup>th</sup> September of the Christian era, and has twelve thirty-day months and a short month of five days at the end of the year, (and six on leap year).

100. During the fourth year of the persecutions, Abba Petros felt it necessary to pass special regulations concerning accepting repentant apostates back into the Communion of the Church. So he drew up fourteen canons which came to be considered as a veritable monument of Church discipline, and which were respected by the Church Body both in the East and the West – even after the schism which alienated the Churches one from the other.<sup>2</sup> One of the principles set in the canons was that a Christian could be baptised only once, even if he renounced his faith, and then returned to it. Baptism was a sacrament which is to be performed once only for each believer. The truth of this principle was confirmed by an incident which took place at the time. A Christian woman who lived in Antioch had two sons whom she had been unable to baptise because their father had obeyed the Emperor and given up his faith. Quietly and imperceptibly she boarded a ship to Alexandria and took them with her. While yet at sea the ship ran into a storm, and she was afraid lest her sons might die – if the ship sank without having been baptised. So she wounded her breast, and with her blood made the sign of the cross upon the foreheads of her two sons, and baptised them in the name of the Holy Trinity. However, the ship arrived safely at Alexandria, and she took them to Church to have them baptised with other children. When their turn came and Abba Petros attempted to immerse them in the holy water, the water turned to stone. Thrice he tried, and thrice the same thing happened. In surprise he asked the mother about the matter and she told him what she had done on the way. He was astonished and glorified God,

saying, 'Thus saith the Church, that there is only one baptism'.<sup>3</sup>

101. Among the persons Abba Petros had to deal with was Arius, the man who began spreading the heresy denying the divinity of Christ, and who was stubborn and disobedient in his stand. Abba Petros excommunicated him, and decreed that anyone following his teaching would be treated likewise. Abba Petros had two close disciples called Achillas and Alexandros, and he knew by the Holy Spirit that each of them, in turn, was going to succeed him, as head of the Church. So he took them aside one day and warned them against Arius and against ever re-accepting him into the Church. He told them that he had a dream the night before in which he had seen the Saviour with His robe torn asunder; when he asked Him, 'Lord, who is it that has thus torn Thy garment?' the answer was, 'It is Arius who has done that to me'. Therefore, continued Abba Petros, "when I go my way, you two shall succeed me one after the other, on the Chair of St. Mark Take heed, then. Be valiant and vigilant. Defend the Faith even as did Abba Dionysius, of blessed memory".<sup>4</sup>

102. When it became evident to Diocletian that after so many years of persecutions, the Christians of Egypt had not been exterminated, but rather that the converts to Christianity were increasing because of the example and the heroism of the martyrs, he became very angry. He ordered that their religious Heads be arrested and tortured, thinking that by so doing, he would break the spirit of the people. Six of the most active Bishops were arrested, but-as no amount of torture would induce them to relinquish their faith-they were martyred. When Abba Petros heard of their martyrdom, he fell on, his knees and offered thanks to God

with all the ardour of his spirit for having kept them steadfast unto the end.<sup>5</sup>

Finally it was decided that the turn of Abba Petros had come. In spite of the prestige of his office and his reputation for sanctity – or perhaps because of them, the Emperor's soldiers laid hands on him and led him to prison.

When news of his arrest went around, a large crowd of his devoted people gathered together and went to the prison in one big mass and there clamoured for his freedom. Hearing their loud shouting and fearing that their behaviour might bring calamity on them, Abba Petros decided to do what Our Lord said the good shepherd does, to lay down his life for his sheep (John 10:2). So he told the officers guarding him that if they granted him the opportunity to speak to them and pacify them he would immediately give himself up to them so that there would be no more trouble on his account. The officers complied and led him to where he could address them. In words of compassion and reassurance, he spoke to the multitudes and pleaded with them to depart in peace. They could not help but obey him. After they dispersed, Abba Petros signalled to the officers that they could now take him, as he was ready. On the way to be executed, he was asked if he had any special request to make. He replied that he would like to be allowed to visit the Church of St. Mark. His request was granted, and he was permitted a few minutes there. He went in, knelt in prayer and fervently asked God to accept his life as a ransom for his people. No sooner had he ended his petition than a voice was heard saying: Amen.

The soldiers then led him out to be executed. For a while no one dared raise a hand against him, for they beheld his face like unto the face of an angel. Then one of the officers took out twenty-five pieces of gold and said: "These will I give to him who dares behead this sage". The sight of

gold made one of the soldiers take courage and strike the saint's head off.

Having beheaded him, the soldiers went away, leaving him where he fell. Soon after that, the Faithful heard the news and came rushing, in tears, and carried away the remains of their blessed Patriarch back to St. Mark's Church. There they donned him in his complete ritual vestment and seated him on the Evangelist's Chair – that Chair on which he had refused to sit all during his lifetime, because of his great humility and his admiration for that Apostle.<sup>6</sup>

103. They then celebrated the Rite for the burial and laid him to rest with his predecessors. The martyrdom of Abba Petros inaugurated a period of peace-hence he is called "Ieromartyros", or "the seal of the martyrs". This appellation was given to him because he was the last person to have been martyred by Diocletian. Other persecutions overtook the Copts in later years and times. But this seventh persecution, because of its fierceness, its length of duration, and the number of those martyred, is recognised as has already been explained as the starting point of the Coptic calendar – the Era of the Martyrs. The name of Era of Martyrs and the History of the Saints read regularly in church are the only reminder the people have of all their martyrs across the ages. There is not a single picture or painting in any Church – or anywhere else – depicting the scenes of agony and terror the martyrs went through. No monuments were ever erected in memory of them. Although epics could have been written about those giants of the Faith, who held the Torch of Christianity high and kept its light shining ever so bright, the Copts were content to commend both persecutor and persecuted alike, into the Hands of God.<sup>7</sup>



104. As for Diocletian; all his efforts to stamp out Christianity were in vain. And when the persecutions ceased, it emerged radiant like unto the sun after the tempest.

Unable to pulverise the Christians, he could not maintain his throne; he lost his power even while he was yet alive for he died in A.D. 313, while he remained Emperor until the year 305. In the wake of his atrocities, he became blind and mentally deranged; and when his own people deserted him, a saintly, old Christian woman nursed him and took care of him. By so doing she practiced our Lord's injunction to do good to those who "spitefully use us and persecute us".

***B. "... SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES"***  
***Heb. 12:1***

- 105. The Apostle Paul's description of the fruits of faith.
- 106. How this description applies to the martyrs of Egypt.
- 107. The Theban Legion.
- 108. St. Verena.
- 109. St. Mena, called the "wonder-worker".
- 110. Saint Dimiana and the forty virgins.
- 111. The Five and their mother.
- 112. 'Mari Girgis', known the world over as St. George.
- 113. Abba Paphnuti.
- 114. Concluding remarks.

105. In chapter eleven of the Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul the Apostle, describes the mighty deeds that men, some of whom he named, and many he did not name-were able to do through faith. In a rising crescendo of deeply effective terms, this giant among the apostles, speaks of how, through faith, they "... wrought righteousness, obtained promises stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mocking and scourings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth ... and obtained a good report through faith ...".

106. The persecutions through which the Christians of Egypt passed in the era of the Martyrs, as well as in the times that preceded and followed this era through the centuries, filled the annals of their church history with pages of accounts of valiant men, women and children, who, by faith were able to do deeds just like those described above. The spiritual heritage they left to the Copts is truly a rich heritage that has given them strong sustenance in times of stress, and pride in their church as ‘the Mother of Martyrs’.

Although the life stories of many of the Coptic saints and martyrs are worth relating, it is not possible to do so in a book encompassing the history of the whole people. It is appropriate, however, to give the stories of a few, as shining samples of the many.

107. The first story to be given here is that of the men of the Theban legion and of a nurse whose name is associated with them.

Since Egypt was being ruled by the Romans, the latter exercised their right to mobilise Egyptian youth to serve in their army. One of the Egyptian legions that had won high repute in the armed service was known as the Theban legion – so-called because its members were natives of Thebes, capital of Pharaonic Egypt (and site of the present day town of Luxor). Unknown to the Romans, the soldiers of the Theban legion had all been converted to Christianity.

When, in the course of the history of the Roman Empire, the province of Gaul [present-day France) rumbled with signs of, rebelliousness, Emperor Diocletian commissioned Maximian – an old comrade and loyal friend of his whom he had appointed as his second in command and given the title of Caesars<sup>8</sup> to quell their rebellion. Maximian having heard of the valour of the Theban legion requested Diocletian to send it over to him that it might participate in

the action. When they arrived., Maximian divided them into two groups: one was to encamp on the border of Gaul, and the other, in present day Switzerland, in preparation for the attack.

On the eve of the battle, Maximian, as was his habit, decided to go to the pagan temple to pay homage to his gods, and he ordered the men of the Theban legion to go with him. But he was both surprised and infuriated when they unanimously refused to obey his order and declared they were Christians. He therefore, ordered them to stand in file and had them decimated (ie., every tenth man killed), hoping thereby to intimidate them. But the rest assembled together and wrote him a letter which they all signed. In it they said: "Great Caesar-we are your soldiers, and at the same time we are God's slaves. We owe you our military service, but our prime allegiance we owe to God. From you we receive our daily wages; from Him our eternal reward. Great Caesar, we cannot obey any order if it runs counter to God's commands. If your orders coincide with God's commands we will certainly obey them; if not, "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), for our loyalty to Him surpasses all other loyalties. We are not rebels; if we were, we would defend ourselves for we have our weapons. But we prefer to die upright than to live stained. As Christians we will serve you. But we will not relinquish our Faith in our Lord, and this we openly declare".<sup>9</sup>

When Maximian read this letter the very steadfastness it portrayed angered him all the more. Again he ordered a second decimation, and once more asked the remnant to accompany him to the temple. Fearlessly they said: "We are Christians". Thereupon Maximian ordered his Roman soldiers to wipe out the whole Legion. Pere Cheneau describes this saga in the following terms: "Thus were they martyred: some in Agaune, others in Soleure, in

Ventimiglia, in Bergamo, and in Treves. It was a mighty holocaust; an unparalleled massacre, the plains were drunk with blood and the bodies strewn to the winds. But by being willing to make the supreme sacrifice, the men of the Theban Legion proved that their faithfulness to their Heavenly Lord and King surpassed their valour as soldiers in the army of the temporal ruler.<sup>10</sup>

108. In the midst of this terror, there stands an inexplicable element: Maximian whom even Diocletian described as "a barbarian" spared the nurses accompanying the Theban Legion. Among them was a young lady whose name is Verena, a native of Garagoz, a town not far from Thebes. As she meditated on the strange circumstances that brought her so far away from her native land, she concluded that the Almighty God must have assigned as a mission for her the teaching of the people among whom she stayed. Consequently she spent the rest of her life in present-day Switzerland, educating the people to become Christians and at the same time teaching them the principles of hygiene. To this day her icon depicts her holding a water jug in one hand and a comb in the other.

When Verena had run her race and died in peace, the people of Zurzach where she lived built a church in her name, and buried her in it; but this church was later destroyed by the Germanic tribes. In the ninth century, the Benedictines built a monastery in its place, and it still bore St. Verena's name. The monastery was transformed into a Bishopric but was burnt in 1279 A.D., then rebuilt as a church once more when the Unionists won the victory in which they adjoined Zurzach to the Duchy of Baden. Following that, all the thermal baths were put under her auspices, and her church became a centre of pilgrimage. Another church in her name was built in the city of Baden

itself, together with a chapel. On being victorious in 1712 A.D. the Protestants destroyed the church, but spared the chapel which remained until the nineteenth century. Then the chapel was also destroyed and the bath bearing St. Verena's name was closed. And thus it was many centuries after she departed this earthly life that the last chapter in her story ended. However she has not been forgotten, and in the town of Soleure, a church named after her, still stands. It was built after she had visited the city to meditate over the tombs of St. Urs and St. Victor, two of the officers of the Theban Legion martyred and buried there.

A contemporary eminent Swiss journalist, writing about her not so long ago, related her amazing story; and concluded by saying that through her utter consecration and her devoted Christian service, Verena the native of Garagoz in Upper Egypt, and the one-time nurse in the Theban Legion, became the 'matron' Saint of housewives, and the Healer of lepers in Switzerland.<sup>11</sup>

### *109. The story of St. Mena.*

St. Mena is one of the most popular saints of the Coptic church, and, to this day the site of the great cathedral built in his name in Mareotis, in the desert near the city of Alexandria, is a historical spot visited by many devotees and tourists.<sup>12</sup> One of the epithets attached to his name is that of "wonder-worker," even though the many miracles wrought in his name occurred after he died as a martyr. His fame did not remain confined to his homeland, however, but spread far and wide-northward to Europe and eastward to towns in Asia Minor. Ampulae (or earthenware flasks) have been discovered in which pilgrims visiting his shrine had brought back holy oil or water, in places as far removed from each other as Cologne (Germany), and Dongola (Sudan); or

Marseilles (France), and Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup>

St. Mena was born of Christian parents, and his father was governor of the once thriving province that had Mareotis as its capital. Although he was orphaned at the age of eleven, his mother took great care to bring him up in the fear of the Lord, and as a young man, he became noted for the honesty and integrity of his Christian character. No sooner had he come of age than the people – by common consensus – chose him to be governor in his father's place.

When Emperor Diocletian started his persecutions, Mena renounced his governorate and retired to the desert where he spent his days in prayer and fasting. One day while he prayed, he saw a vision in which the heavens opened and the martyrs were being crowned. Immediately he left his solitude, went to Alexandria and declared everywhere that he was a Christian. Hearing this, the Roman ruler – who knew of his lineage and had a liking for him – called him and tried first to persuade him to deny his faith, then threatened to kill him if he did not do so. Neither means availed in making Mena change his public declaration, so orders were given to have him beheaded. And thus he won the crown of martyrdom which his vision had inspired.

Hearing of his death, some of his faithful friends came and removed his body, and took it to be interred in the desert of Mareotis, near his former abode.

For some time, very few people knew where the saint had been buried. Then, one day, a shepherd, who had been feeding his flock in the area, returned to Alexandria with an amazing story: one of his sheep, sick with scabies, had scratched itself against the ground and had risen whole. Everywhere he went, the shepherd related the story until some people, hearing it, remembered that this was the spot where St. Mena had been buried. The word spread, and people from all over the country started visiting this holy

spot, many seeking to be healed. Numerous miracles started to happen by evoking the saint's name, and drinking water from a spring near his tomb.

Gradually, the need to have a church built in the area honouring the saint's memory was felt by many. It was erected by Abba Theophilus – 23<sup>rd</sup> Pope of the Coptic Church, and enlarged and embellished by several of his successors. Emperor Zeno, whose daughter had been miraculously healed by visiting St. Mena's shrine, contributed further to the Church and succeeded in transforming it into a magnificent cathedral with roseate coloured marble pillar's and a mosaic pavement of matchless designs.<sup>14</sup>

The cathedral built by the Emperor continued to be an outstanding edifice in Mareotis up to the ninth century when the Abbasid Caliphs<sup>15</sup> ordered-that some of its pillars be carried to Baghdad to beautify their palaces, and others to Jerusalem to be placed in the Aqsa Mosque. The cathedral fell into ruins and was not reconstructed except in our own times by Pope Kyrillos VI as has already been mentioned.<sup>16</sup>

However St. Mena continued to be venerated all through the centuries, since his martyrdom in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. To this day many churches bear his name all over Egypt. One of them, built recently in a town called Manhari in the province of Minia in Upper Egypt, has an interesting story. An old man, returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, dreamt that Saint Mena appeared to him and showed him a site wherein he desired to have a church built in his name. The next morning the man and his friends went to inspect the site and found to their surprise the ruins of an old church that had born the saint's name. They glorified God and built a new church in its place.<sup>17</sup>

Also in 1948 – following the consecration of another cathedral in this saint's name in a residential area of Alexandria called 'Ramleh', a group of Coptic scholars held



a meeting and decided to found an Association to be called "The Association of St. Mena in Alexandria". Their educational cultural and archaeological activities comprised giving lectures, organising guided tours to Coptic historic sites, arousing interest in historic excavations, and publishing an annual bulletin to record their activities.

The Association is still active and its accomplishments have been noteworthy.

#### 110. *St. Dimiana and the forty virgins*

Since persecutions and martyrdom were not confined to men, the next 'witness' to be considered here is a woman saint and martyr. Her name is Saint Dimiana, and she is, perhaps, the most widely known and most popular heroine in Coptic sacred history. Her icon in many a Coptic church depicts her in the centre with forty virgins around her. The reason will be known as her story unfolds.

Dimiana was the only child of Marcus, Governor of Burullus<sup>18</sup> during the rule of Emperor Diocletian. Marcus and his wife were Christians and had brought up their daughter in the fear of the Lord. She had been taught the Scriptures from her early childhood and had become so captivated by them that their study occupied most of her time and interest.

As she grew up, Dimiana became a beautiful young lady, and her parents – like all others – aspired to have her well married. When she was approached on the subject, however, Dimiana refused to consider it and revealed to her parents that her sole wish was to dedicate her life to the service of the Christ. Disappointed; but complying with her wish, her parents built for that a special mansion in Za'afaran<sup>19</sup> where she and forty virgins decided to live and plan their Christian activities. In this abode Dimiana and her

companions lived harmoniously together, worshipping God and serving the surrounding community. The happiness and peace they enjoyed was not destined to last, however. One day Diocletian, who had already begun his persecution of the Christians, asked the Egyptian princes and noblemen, of whom Marcus was one, to accompany him to the pagan temple to offer incense to the Roman gods. Fearing the loss of prestige and perhaps of life itself, Marcus joined the ranks of the worshippers, and did not publicly declare that he was a Christian.

A few days later, the news of her father's frailty reached Dimiana in her seclusion. Immediately she left her abode and went to meet him in his capital. As she entered his mansion, her father sensed her sorrow and hurried forward to greet her. But as she responded to his paternal solicitude, her whole frame shook and her tears gathered and fell. Finally when she collected herself, she told her father how disappointed she had felt when she heard that he had not had the courage of his faith, and that she could have borne with greater fortitude the burden of his loss than the shame and treachery of his survival. Her words and her sobs moved her father so deeply that he regretted what he had done, and told her he was going to redress it. In a mood of resurgent courage and resolution, he went back to see the Emperor. Firmly, proudly but quietly he declared before him and his retinue his fealty to the Christ. Diocletian, infuriated by the change of heart Marcus had, and the calm defiance he showed, ordered him to be beheaded at once. Then, when he learned that it was his daughter, Dimiana, who was the instigator of her father's repentance, Diocletian sent one of his officers at the head of his regiment, with the orders to do his utmost to dissuade her from her faith. If neither promises nor threats availed, she was to be tortured; and this failing, be put to death.

The officer obeyed his orders. He tried persuasion at first, but Dimiana and her forty companions refused to denounce their faith. Forthwith they were tortured outrageously and inhumanely, but despite that, never wavered. Amid their pains and suffering, they kept praying and praising God. Finally they were all put to death and received the crown of martyrdom. Before Dimiana's head was cut off, she prayed, then proclaimed: "The Lord Christ I confess, on Him I rely, in His Name I die, and through Him I live forever".

A large crowd of people stood by and watched, and when they beheld her courage and steadfastness, and the patience with which she accepted torture, in a surge of miraculous exaltation many of them confessed the Christ, and were massacred on the spot.<sup>20</sup>

Less than half a century later, when these terrible persecutions had ended and become only a nightmarish memory and Emperor Constantine the Great declared Christianity to be one of the official State religions, his mother Queen Helena, hearing the story of St. Dimiana, paid a visit on her return from the Holy Land to the saint's mansion, which was still standing at the time. There she built a dainty little church with one spire, and in the vault beneath the altar, she laid the bodies of St. Dimiana and her companions.<sup>21</sup> This original church was eventually destroyed but another has been rebuilt and still stands on the very same site. Every year myriads of people visit St. Dimiana's shrine between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> of May, to fulfil their vows, make offerings, pay homage and ask for the intercession of this highly popular and beloved saint. In the whole area round about her Church she is venerated by both Christians and Muslims, and she is referred to with just one word, which is 'El-Sitt' or the Lady. When it is mentioned, everybody without exception knows who is meant by it.<sup>22</sup>

111. *The story of 'The Five and their Mother'*<sup>23</sup>

In a small village in the province of Giza, just south of the city of Cairo, there stands a small but old church called the Church of 'The Five and their Mother'. Copts from all over the country visit this church in remembrance of the saintly martyrs after whom it is named. This prompts the question-who are these martyrs and why is the church so-called?

These martyrs were five brothers whose father had died when they were very young, and whose mother was a pious, Christian woman. When her husband died, she consecrated her life to bringing up her sons to be virtuous and God-fearing. The two older ones named Kuzman and Dimian studied medicine and became doctors. The three younger ones retired to the desert and became monks.

When the Diocletian persecutions started, Kuzman and Dimian spent a lot of their time among the distressed and the suffering, dispensing physical as well as spiritual healing. Their activities brought them to the attention of the Roman authorities, who were told, also, of their mother and brothers and how they were all Christians. Kuzman and Dimian were immediately summoned, ordered to bring the rest of their family and appear together before the governor on a certain day. When they did, they were told to relinquish their faith and bow their knees to the Roman gods. This they categorically refused, proclaiming they were Christians. When neither coercion nor threats succeeded in making them change their firm stand, orders were given that they be tortured with progressive severity until they either give in or die. At first their mother was left standing by to behold what was happening to them, but when instead of breaking down, she kept encouraging them to withstand the suffering by

constant prayers and hymn singing, she was beheaded in front of their eyes and left lying on the ground.

Seeing her lying there, her oldest son Kuzman appealed to the standers-by, saying, 'Will he who has a compassionate heart among you remove the body of this old woman and give her a decent burial'. No sooner had he said this than someone's heart was stirred and the mother was carried away for burial. As for the five sons they continued steadfast in their faith bearing all suffering for their Master's sake until they, too, were beheaded and received the crown of martyrdom. Because they were persecuted together and as one family group, they came to be remembered and celebrated as the 'Five and their mother'.

When the era of persecutions came to an end, several churches were built in their names, and many of those who prayed fervently to the Lord there evoking their blessed names received miracles in accordance with their Faith.

*112. The story of St. George, the Coptic version of whose name is 'Mari Girgis',<sup>24</sup>*

In the annals of Coptic saints one of the most popular and most beloved of all is without doubt 'Mari Girgis' known and revered by many peoples and churches all over the world as St. George.

Portrayed as a young, handsome, daring cavalier, riding his white horse and valiantly stabbing and killing the evil dragon, he arouses our admiration and captivates our imagination. And, in real life, St. George was true to the representation that his pictures impart.

St. George was born in the second half of the third century A.D. He belonged to one of the wealthy and noble families of Cappadocia in Asia Minor, and received a good education. Early in his life he joined the army, and in time

became one of its outstanding officers.

St. George is called the first martyr under Diocletian. One day as he was riding his home in the streets of the city of Alexandria, he saw a posted proclamation denouncing the Christian religion and its adherents. With great anger and no fear, he tore it down. Henceforth he scorned office and all worldly things, and prepared to defend the faith. So he distributed his wealth, freed his slaves and went to the court. There he spoke to the king and chiefs saying, 'How, O king and chiefs, do you dare make such a proclamation against the religion of the Christ, the true religion?' When asked how he dared to speak thus, he answered boldly, 'I am a Christian and come to witness to the truth'. Refusing to retract this statement and to worship the king's idols, he was subjected to the severest tortures, for the space of seven years. Given strength to endure them all, he was finally beheaded, and thus received the crown of martyrdom. He was buried in Lydda, his mother's homeland, but tradition says that his relics were brought to Egypt during the days of Abba Ghabrial, the 57<sup>th</sup> Pope of the Coptic Church (about A.D. 900).

The churches that have been built in the name of St. George in all parts of Egypt are innumerable. One of the oldest of them is in a small town called "Meetdamsis" in the province of Daqahliya in the Nile Delta. Once a year thousands of Copts and many Muslims as well visit this town to participate in the religious services and festivities held in honour of the saint; and to pay their debts of gratitude and fulfil their vows for the blessings of healing, deliverance or succour bestowed upon them through the intercession of the saint. To this day countless are the miracles that are wrought by God Almighty and in the lives of those who have appealed to Him through the name of St. George – so much so that one of the descriptions by which he is popularly

described is that he is 'the-quick-to-respond' to whoever calls upon him in faith.<sup>25</sup>

### 113. *Abba Paphnuti*

Side by side with the martyrs stand the confessors, who withstood severe trials but did not lose their lives. Consequently they are described as 'martyrs without shedding of blood'. One of those confessors, who patiently endured to the end, is Abba Paphnuti, Bishop of the Thebaid. As a youth he contended with himself thus: "If heaven is our real goal, and we are merely travellers and sojourners on this earth, then I should set my heart, from now, on heavenly goals". This contention led him to leave his home town and go to St. Antoni in the desert, there to become his disciple, soon he became known for his eagerness and diligence, and his piety, patience and understanding: "a living temple to the Divine Wisdom".

One day, some of the ascetics in the vicinity, came accusing a brother of theirs of a sin which he emphatically denied. Hearing them arguing vehemently with one another, Abba Paphnuti spoke, saying: "A man was once walking on the bank of a river, and his leg got stuck in the mire. Some men saw him and came to help, with the purpose of pulling him out, but instead, they pushed him in deeper". The accusers realised that this short simile was meant for them and that their argument would only lead them and their brother to graver errors. In humility they sought forgiveness and pardoned their erring brother. Going back to St. Antoni, the brothers related what had happened. Antoni smiled and commented: "This is indeed a man who judges in equity and who understands the depths of the human spirit".

Shortly after that Abba Paphnuti was chosen and chosen crated Bishop of the Thebaid. When the persecutions

of Maximinus flared up, Paphnuti and his people were among the foremost to suffer. He was arrested and subjected to torture. Among other inflictions, his right eye was plucked out and his left leg broken. Not satisfied with this, his persecutors sent him with a hundred and thirty of his people, to the quarries of Sinai, where they were forced to labour under constant use of the whip. Through his sufferings, Paphnuti was a rock of endurance and spiritual strength to his fellow-sufferers. He was constantly encouraging, sustaining, praying with them and for them.

When finally the persecutions subsided, St. Paphnuti was miraculously still alive and he returned to his See where he again resumed his work of edification. God in His Mercy granted him the power to work miracles; he healed the sick opened the eyes of the blind; and cast out evil spirits. Emperor Constantine the Great esteemed him highly and often invited him to the palace, devoutly kissing the orbit of that eye lost for the love of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Some years later, Paphnuti was one of those chosen to accompany the Pope of Alexandria to the great Ecumenical Council of Nicea, where he was most active in upholding the Faith. During the years which followed, he was one of the staunches and most steadfast supporters of Athanasius in his lifelong struggle against the Arians.

114. The foregoing are the stories of but a few of the mighty host of witnesses, many of whom will remain forever nameless, whose love for Him Who, ransomed us was greater than their love for life itself. Not that they did not love life. They certainly did. But when the test came they fearlessly and unequivocally made their choice. They counted it a gain to win the 'crown of Eternal Life' at the price of whatever years they might live in this earthly life. What power they had! What victory was theirs!



A pagan philosopher, watching some of them beating the 'unbeatable foe' commented: "Do you not see them, exposed to such suffering, even flung to the wild beasts, to make them deny their Lord – yet unconquered"?<sup>27</sup> While Origen declared, "Those victors who go as far as death for the sake of their unshakeable religious faith destroy the very authority of the demons".<sup>28</sup>

### C. ABBA ACHILLAS

115. *Like unto a summer cloud.*

115. When Abba Petros, Seal of the Martyrs, went unto his reward, the man who was elected to succeed him as Pope was Abba Achillas who had been the Dean of the School of Alexandria. This was in the year 303 AD Abba Achillas was a man of outstanding qualities, but the duration of his papacy was very short-about six months. That is why it is likened unto a summer cloud that floats across the sky and quickly disappears.

In the few months in which he occupied the Chair of St. Mark, the main task to which he devoted himself was to strengthen the faithful and heal their wounds after the persecutions had come to an end.

The wily Arius reappeared in Alexandria and sought the new Pope's forgiveness, persuading him of his repentance. Abba Achillas, motivated by a spirit of Christian tolerance granted it to him. Unfortunately, however, Arius had evil intentions – as subsequent events proved. Abba Petros, who had become familiar with his devious ways and had discerned that he was a person neither to be believed nor trusted, had warned against ever accepting him into the church again. But Abba Achillas had forgotten that warning.

When Abba Achittas was gathered unto his forefathers, he was succeeded by Abba Aloxandros as Successor to St. Mark.

## IX. NOTES

1. Archimandrite Guettee. *Op. cit.* vol. 2, p. 228.
2. For details of these canons cf. Archmandrite Guettee: *ibid* vol. 2, pp. 284-6.
3. Coptic Synaxarium, giving the daily remembrances of the acts of the Saints, v. 1, p. 161, under the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the Coptic month of Hathor; the Baptism accepted by the Coptic Church is that administered by the Priest and "the Baptism by blood" only.
4. Guettee. *ibid.* vol. 2, p. 295.
5. Pere d'Orleans: *Les Saints d'Egypte*, v. 2, pp. 513-14.
6. Cf. '*Les Actes des Martyrs de l'Egypte*' by Hyvernats, trans. from a Coptic MS. at the Vatican Library, pub. in Paris, 1886. pp. 263-286.
7. This willingness to put everything in the Hands of the Almighty God is demonstrated in many aspects of the lives of the Copts throughout their history. Artists, architects, and craftsmen who built Churches, and beautified and decorated them with magnificent carved wood, stone or ivory never signed them with their names. The only words found on artistic productions are the same words found also on many a manuscript, viz. "Those who have laboured for Thy Glory, compensate, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom of Heaven."

8. *Cambridge Ancient History*. Vol. 12, p. 327.
9. Pere Cheneau d'Orleans. *Op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 239-240.
10. *Ibid.* vol.-2, pp. 241-8; 357-8.
11. *'Journal Suisse d'Egypte et du Proche Orient*, No. 37 of the 23<sup>rd</sup> year, issued in Alexandria on Sept. 14,1949; and no. 15 of the 24<sup>th</sup> year, issued on April 13,1950, published by Mme Marie Fiechter; also *'Lexique historique de la Suisse,'* under the names *'Soleure'* and *'Zurzach.'*
12. Until recently, this site consisted of some historical archaeological remains. When Abba Kyrillos VI became Pope in 1959-as the 116<sup>th</sup> successor to St. Mark – he began a great re-building movement in the area.
13. *'Apa Mena'*-a selection of Coptic texts, edited with translation and commentary by James Drescher, p. xi.
14. *As-Sadeq-al-Amin*, vol. 1, pp.155-157; Also recently found documents containing anecdotes about St. Mena, translated, edited and published by J. Drescher in *'Le Bulletin de la Societe Copte*, T. vii (194I) pp. 19-32. After making some speculations, the author says: "... the material itself cannot fail to be of interest for the new light which it throws on the cult – so popular in early Christian times – of the elusive figure of St. Mena.

15. One of the dynasties that ruled over Egypt and the surrounding Arab countries in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
16. See note no. 12 above.
17. S. Soleiman, *op. cit.*, p. 427.
18. The sea-coast province, lying between the Rosetta and Damietta Nile branches, right on the Mediterranean.
19. A town twenty kilometers south of the coast and about forty kilometres southwest of the city of Damietta which is at the mouth of the Eastern branch of the Nile.
20. Coptic Synaxarium. 1969 ed: vol. 2, pp. 139-142 (under the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the Coptic month Bashans).
21. Arabic Ms. by Yoannis, Bishop of Burullus, written in 1482 AM (or 1776 AD). This ms. is kept in the Church of St. Stephen adjoining the old Coptic Cathedral of St. Mark in the centre of the city of Cairo.
22. It has been my privilege to visit the shrine of St. Dimiana on the occasion of the celebration of her feast, in May of 1955. It was an exhilarating, unforgettable experience to stand on the spot sanctified by such heroic self-immolation. The sanctuary where the Saint and her companions are interred is a rotunda consisting of four pillars each of which comprises four assembled columns, bearing a

copula that overshadows the tomb. A circular nave surrounds it. The whole gives an imposing impression of grandeur and majesty.

23. Coptic Synaxarium. 1969 ed., vol. 1, p.149 (under the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the Coptic month Hathor).
24. A. J. Butler, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 263.
25. The author and members of her immediate family have had some unusual experiences in which St. George came to their rescue when they were in imminent danger.
26. Mgr. Whiffle. Hipster des Conceals. vol.1, p. 277.
27. J. Foster. After the Apostles, p. 96.
28. J. Foster. Why the Church? p. 43.

## *X. INVINCIBLE FAITH*

- 116. Prominence of Abba Alexandros.
- 117. Arian disturbance.
- 118. Council of an hundred Bishops.
- 119. Orthodoxy versus heresy.
- 120. Christianity declared a State Religion.
- 121. Emperor's Letter.
- 122. Hosius of Cordova Envoy of Constantine.

116. Alexandros was a priest already well advanced in years when he was chosen to sit on the Chair of St. Mark in 303 A.D. But both people and clergy revered and loved him, and unanimously elected him to be their Pope. He had already been known as "the saint who was a father of needy ones". At the same time, he was considered by the churches, as a "perfectly irreproachable person".<sup>1</sup>

117. Soon after his election Arius, knowing his gentleness, sought to be absolved by him also. But the gentleness of doves was coupled with the wisdom of serpents in the old Pope. Therefore, he answered those who entreated him on behalf of Arius by saying: "Go and tell him that my father Abba Petros counselled me not to have any communion with him. If he repents of his sins against our Saviour and is forgiven, I will receive a sign by which I will know that; then will I gladly take him back into the church fold". This answer, instead of pacifying Arius and leading him to repent, infuriated him and set him against his Prelate.

Relying on his great eloquence, he became very active in preaching his heresy. Thus he succeeded in winning many adherents, among whom were two bishops from Libya: Secundus and Theonas.

118. When Abba Alexandros heard of the ravaging activities of Arius, he decided to renew his efforts to win him by persuasion, patience, and gentleness. He, therefore, convoked a council in Alexandria wherein he gave full liberty to Arius and his partisans to discuss their views and defend them before the assembled bishops, and, in turn, listen to the Church Doctrine expounded in all its integrity. The patient Pope listened serenely while the whole problem was thrashed out – assenting here, correcting there, and modulating the whole tenor of the sessions. The desired result was not achieved because Arius stubbornly refused to be convinced.

And so once again the gentleness on the part of the Alexandrian Pope missed the mark. Arius grew even more arrogant and delusive. This led Abba Alexandros to convoke the Church Council for the second time. Urging all Egyptian Bishops to attend, one hundred of them responded and assembled at the meeting. After debating the matter at length, the Council passed the verdict "to degrade Arius from his priestly office, and to excommunicate him". This verdict was signed by ninety-eight of the bishops present. The only two who refrained from signing were the Libyan bishops whom Arius had already influenced. This took place in the year 321 A.D.

119. But even this verdict was insufficient to stop the evil of Arius. For Alexandros and Arius were not merely the heads of two contending factions, rather they are to be considered the embodiment of two Principles, which had from the beginning conflicted in the Church, but never encountered each other on this same scale. On the one hand there was the belief in the Divinity of Christ, the Saviour, Who is the Only Begotten of the Father, so triumphantly proven by the Church across the ages; and on the other hand, the denial of this Divinity. The Fathers of Alexandria



maintained that the Christian Doctrine is the Unique Way; those who wavered indecisively were seduced by some of the old rich philosophies with their occultism and their secretive initiations. Consequently, a fierce battle was waged: a spiritual intellectual battle. And since Alexandria was the battlefield,<sup>2</sup> it became littered with the wreckage of the conflagration. Arius was merely a flotsam of this wreckage. His arrogance was such that he presumed he could collect the routed, reorganise them, and instigate the fight. The Church met this renewed struggle with the same invincibility.

While the Arian heresy was thus gaining force, Abba Alexandros was most active in refuting it: several councils were convoked in different cities of Egypt. Letters were sent by him to all the Churches. Seventy of these letters, a century later, were still current, but only two of them are now existent. He, also, wrote an Encyclic Epistle containing a brief history of the Arian heresy, and an exposition of the True Faith.

120. It was at this time that Emperor Constantine declared Christianity one of the State religions. Hence the efforts of Arius and his followers to incite the civil authorities against the 'Orthodox Faith' in an attempt to stir up a persecution failed.

121. However, the Arians expended all sorts of other efforts to influence Emperor Constantine both directly and indirectly. They incited riots among the people, exploited the ignorance and weakness of those who could easily be swayed, and resorted to whatever tricky or base means to poison the air. Meantime Constantine was unaware of the magnitude of the Principle at stake. Thinking that he could resolve the matter and put an end to the raging dissensions, he sent a letter, rather crude in tenor, addressed simply "To

Alexandros and Arius"<sup>3</sup> requesting both to agree and make peace.

The division between the two, however, was too profound to be soldered by a letter. On his part, Abba Alexandros, the aged and venerable Pope of Alexandria, was not the man to forego his Orthodoxy, not even to please an emperor. He fully realised that the doctrine of Arius was contrary to the teachings of Christ Himself, who had declared that He was the Cornerstone on which the Church reposes. As for Arius, he, too, had shown time and time again, that he was unwilling to change his stand.

122. The bearer of Emperor Constantan's letter to Alexandria was Bishop Hosius of Cordova whom he had appointed as his religious Counsellor.<sup>4</sup> This Bishop had suffered greatly in the persecutions of Maximinus, and enjoyed a well-earned reputation for sanctity. He was destined to play a foremost role in the troubled times that followed.

By the time he reached Alexandria, Arius had already left and gone to Palestine. Bishop Hosius concerted with Abba Alexandros in an attempt to effect a reconciliation. The Alexandrian Council was convoked for the third time. After attending it, Hosius realised that Arius was not merely a dissenter but also a trouble-maker and a heretic. He agreed with Abba Alexandros that the only solution to this problem lay in convoking an ecumenical council.

Hosius reported this to Emperor Constantine, who accepted the idea. Thus it was decided to convoke the first council of its kind – a council of representatives of all the Christian churches in existence. The date for its meeting was fixed for June 14, 325 A.D., and the place, the city of Nicea a port on the Black Sea.

## X. NOTES

1. Manassa'l Qommos: *op. cit.*, p.141; J. Neale: *op. cit.*, vol. I,115.
2. Mgr. Hefele: *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 233 where he states: "Alexandrie etait, depuis plus d'un siecle, L'Eglise philosophante parmi Les eglises Chretiennes."
3. Guettee: *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 378.
4. "Histoire de L'Eglise," T III: "De la Paix Constantinienne a la Mort de Theodose" by J. R. Palanque, P. de Iabriolle and G. Bardy, p.33.

## *XI. THE GREAT ECUMENICAL COUNCIL*

123. The Bishops assembled.
124. Abba Alexandros and his delegation.
125. Emperor Constantine's invitation.
126. Council's inaugural session.
127. Election of Hosius of Cordova to preside over Council.
128. Patient thrashing of the Arian Heresy.
129. The careful wording of the Creed and the Committee that formulated it.
130. A statement of anathema appended to the Creed.
131. The Creed receives unanimous approval.
132. Emperor banishes Arius and orders his writings burned.
133. Other matters discussed by the Council:
  - a) Date of Easter;
  - b) Question of baptism;
  - c) Question of celibacy of clergy;
  - d) 20 canons laid to regulate church matters.
134. Council's letter to the Church of Alexandria.
135. Termination of the Council and the Emperor's farewell banquet.
136. Abba Alexandros returns to Alexandria; and goes 'unto his reward' a few months later.

123. Before describing what took place in the ever memorable Council of Nicea, let us pause for a moment in the presence of the principal prelates who assembled there and ponder some of the deeds of this great host of the King of Kings. Among the three hundred and eighteen trained servants of the Most High, were men who carried within their bodies the sears of their fearless Confessions during the persecutions; men in whom all the Apostolic gifts still dwelt

in their pristine vigour; men who not only had the power of binding and loosening in Heaven, but of healing the diseased, and raising the dead on earth. They gathered from every province to bear witness to the Truth of the same Holy Spirit Who spoke by all, that they may invest traditional Faith with infallible words, and raise an everlasting bulwark between the Church and heresy. They assembled for the Verity of the Creed, and the Glory of the Consubstantial. Among others were St. Marcarius of Jerusalem, illustrious for many miracles; St. Eustathius of Antioch, who had raised a dead man to life; St. Leontius of Caesarea, in Cappadocia, ‘the equal of the angels’; St. Hypatius of Gangra, who years later attained the crown of martyrdom himself, and breathed out his spirit in a petition for his murderers; St. Paul of Neocaesarea, who had been mutilated in the persecutions of Licinius; St. Archilleus of Larissa, the Athanasius of Thessaly and St. Alexander of Byzantium, at whose supplication Divine Vengeance overwhelmed Arius in later years.

The Council of Nicea was outstandingly Universal. It counted among its members bishops from as far as Spain to the West; from Persia, Cythia and all Churches of the East.<sup>1</sup>

124. To this reverent company came Abba Alexandros Pope of Alexandria with twenty of his bishops, among them were St. Potamon of Heracla, who was martyred some years later by the Arians, and St. Paphnuti from the Thebaid, renowned for his confession and his sanctity.

The most outstanding and most formidable personality to come from the ancient land of the Nile was Athanasius.<sup>2</sup> He was only twenty-five years old and a deacon, two reasons which instigated his antagonists to protest against his presence. Soon however Athanasius displayed such deep learning, such acquaintance with the

Scriptures and power of argument, and such eloquence of speech, that his friends rejoiced and his opponents were aghast. His talents and assets immediately made him the target of the Arians implacable hatred which pursued him to the end of his days. But he withstood and overcame all, and at the end his spiritual and moral victory was total.

125. Eusebius of Caesarea says that "The Emperor requested the bishops of all countries to assemble promptly at Nicea, by very respectful letters"<sup>3</sup>; while Rufinus says that the Emperor invited Arius also.

Constantine the Great expended every effort to facilitate the voyage of the Council members to Nicea and to make their stay memorable for them.

126. The Council was solemnly inaugurated on June 20th when Constantine arrived after celebrating the anniversary of his victories in Nicomedia. While the Bishops were awaiting the Emperor's arrival, they met and debated together, clergy and laymen participating in their debates. All the ancient writers witness to this fact affirming that Arius was given a chance to expose his doctrine freely (in spite of all the ill-will he had already shown). A number of his friends were with him, and they, too, were listened to patiently while they stoutly defended him.<sup>4</sup>

127. When the Emperor arrived, all members gathered in the building designated for the meetings, and each sat in the place assigned to him. The Council was formally declared opened, and its first order of business was to elect the presiding Bishop. The choice fell on Hosius of

Cordova who was elected both for his age and his sanctity.

128. After an exchange of courteous speeches<sup>5</sup> the Council proceeded with its order of business, the first of which was to deliberate on the Arian heresy. According to Rufinus the Council held daily sessions, for the members wanted to give such a grave and weighty matter full study and consideration before passing their final judgment. Arius was often called in and his doctrine seriously questioned-and counter-questioned. Finally the overwhelming majority, including all the Confessors,<sup>6</sup> after thrashing the subject thoroughly, decided that the Arian doctrine was a heresy, and that-to preserve the Christian faith as it had been handed down to them by the Apostolic Church Founders, they had to sum up its elements and give them a crystal clear definition. Thus was born the idea of the Creed, and it was this Council of venerable Christian Fathers that formulated the Nicene Creed, the first in the history of Christianity. To this day this is the Creed still used either in its entirety or, its main bases in many churches both of the East and the West. Only six of the three hundred and eighteen members of the Council were from the West, the Creed is therefore the Legacy of the Orient given to the Church Universal.

129. When the Council members discussed the need for the creed, its wording and its contents, they all agreed that it had to be worded with extreme care and precision, and to be free from any ambiguous terms. For they knew that the Greek language-which they all used and in which it was to be written-lent itself easily to subtle nuances. For example, Arius had declared that Christ, the Son, was of like substance to the Father's – “Oomoisios” – but the

Orthodox clergymen affirmed that He was of the Father's Very Substance – “Oomoosios”.

The Council, then, selected three members to word the Creed, and they were Alexandros, Pope of the See of Alexandria, his deacon Athanasius who had so distinguished himself and Leontius, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia: namely two Egyptians and the third a Syrian.

The three agreed that the Creed must affirm the divinity of the Son, so as to be the basis of the true Christian faith of the Church Universal for all time. To increase its forcefulness, they appended to it a statement of anathema that would constitute a warning to those who digressed from the established principles of the Faith, as Arius had done.

The text worded by the three is as follows:

**"WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD: THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH: THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE.**

**WE BELIEVE IN ONE LORD, JESUS THE CHRIST, THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, 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; THIS IS HE WHO FOR US HUMANS, AND FOR OUR SALVATION, CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, AND WAS MADE MAN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE VIRGIN MARY; HE WAS INCARNATE; CRUCIFIED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, HE SUFFERED, WAS BURIED, AND ROSE FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES. HE**



ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN AND SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF HIS FATHER, FROM WHENCE HE SHALL COME IN GLORY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD; FOR WHOSE KINGDOM THERE IS NO END.

WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT."

130. The statement of anathema was worded as follows:-

"And as for them that say concerning the Son of God, there was a time when He was not, and He was not before He was produced, and He was produced from things that are not and He is of another substance or essence, or created, or subject to conversion or mutation, the Universal-Apostolic Church Saith: let them be anathema".

131. When the Creed, and its appended statement were presented to the Council, all members with the exception of three approved and signed it. The three were Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognius of Nicea, and Maris of Chalcedon. The zeal of the Emperor was so kindled, however, that he declared that whoever refuses to sign will be deposed and exiled.<sup>7</sup> This firm resolve of the Emperor led the three to change their attitudes. The former two signed the Creed but not the 'anathema'; the third signed both, in spite of his reluctance to do so. Thus the Creed was signed unanimously.

132. Emperor Constantine considered the Creed as a revelation of the Holy Spirit speaking through the saints. To put it into immediate effect, he issued a decree banishing Arius to Illyria. He also ordered that all his

writings be consigned to the flames, menacing those who hid any of them with death.

133. Having established the basic Church Doctrine of the divinity of the Son, the Nicean Council Fathers turned to other matters of concern to all churches. Among them were the date of the celebration of Easter, the question of re-baptism, the question of celibacy or non-celibacy of the clergy and a number of other questions.

a) On the subject of the Easter date, the representatives of all the churches agreed that this solemn day was the most significant in the Christian religion because it was only through Christ's Resurrection that His Crucifixion became meaningful and humanity's Redemption was fulfilled. They also agreed that historically and according to the Scriptures Easter Sunday came after the Jewish Passover and at the beginning of the spring season, and they expressed the wish that all of them should celebrate it in unison on the same date. Having heard of the Epact cycle that had been calculated by the 12th Alexandrian Pope, the Council agreed to request that the Head of the Church of Alexandria should undertake the responsibility of writing an annual Paschal letter to all his brethren Bishops-including the Bishop of Rome-advising them of the date of Easter.<sup>8</sup> They, in their turn, were to relay the date to all churches within their domains.

b) Concerning re-baptism, it was the decision that had been made by the Church of Alexandria during the time of Abba Dionysius that was unanimously accepted which was that baptism was to be administered once only in a lifetime. Christians who had renounced

their faith and then wished to be accepted again, were to be examined, and if proven sincere, were forgiven and admitted back into the communion of the believers.

c) After deliberating the above questions, the Council proceeded to discuss matters raised by individual members having relevance to all of them. The outcome was the formulation of twenty canons<sup>9</sup> regulating Church matters. The third of these canons concerned the celibacy of the clergy. Some members tended to support the idea that celibacy should be imposed on all the ranks of the clergy. This idea, however, was emphatically rejected by Abba Paphnuti, Bishop of the Thebaid, who bore in his body the marks of the Maximian persecutions. Abba Paphnuti was held in great esteem by all members as well as by Emperor Constantine himself.

In defending his point of view, Abba Paphnuti declared: "We should not impose too hard a yoke on the clergy; for marriage is honourable and blameless, as the Apostle Paul says. We should not harm the church by an over-exaggerated severity, for not all men can endure absolute continence, and the relation between a man and his wife can certainly be chaste. It is therefore right to abide strictly by the orders of the early Church: that none can marry except before his reception of holy orders but not after. Let that suffice, and let the liberty received from our fathers be safeguarded for posterity".<sup>10</sup> Abba Paphnuti's words carried great weight and all present accepted them, thus giving each clergyman the liberty to decide for himself the mode of life he preferred.

The Coptic Church abides by this canon (as it abides by all the Nicean canons) up to the present day. A priest can get married while still a layman. Once he gets

ordained, however – if he is still single, he must remain so; and should his wife die, he cannot get re-married.

This principle of marriage before ordination was taken from Apostolic practice. For when the Apostles were called by Christ and made "fishers of men", those who were already married before the Call, remained with their families; those who were unmarried, kept their chaste celibacy.

134. It seems befitting to quote here the letter that was written by the Nicean Council and given to Abba Alexandros and his delegation to carry back to their Church. It is a historic document of great interest and value, and this is how it reads:-

"Unto the Church of Alexandria, saintly and great by the Grace of God; and unto our beloved brothers who inhabit Egypt, Libya and the Pentapolis: - the Bishops assembled at Nicea and composing a great and saintly Council, salute you in the Lord.

"By the Grace of God, and at the convocation of Constantine, the prince cherished by God: assembled from diverse provinces and cities, and forming at Nicea a great and saintly Council; we deemed it necessary to send you this letter from the Council that you may know what was proposed, examined, decreed, and established by the Council.

"To begin with, and under the eyes of our Emperor, Constantine, cherished by God, we discussed the impious and perverse doctrine of Arius, and unanimously decided to ban them with anathema ..."

"We also announce to you with joy that we are agreed on the celebration of Easter and that thanks to your prayers, Unity is achieved.

"Rejoice, therefore, of what has been so happily accomplished, and for the reign of peace and harmony, and equally for the extirpation of heresies. Receive with all the honour and all the love of which he is worthy, our colleague: your bishop Alexandros, who in spite of his old age has worked incessantly that you may enjoy peace".

"Pray for us, all, that the things which it seemed good to us to establish may be accepted and ratified by our Lord Jesus Christ, judging that they are seemly and done by the Will of God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, unto Whom be Glory unto the ages of all ages. Amen".<sup>11</sup>

135. When all Church matters were regulated to the satisfaction of the assembled bishops, Emperor Constantine celebrated his 'vicennalia' i.e. the twentieth anniversary of his coming to the throne. To manifest to the Nicean Fathers the respect and deference he had for them, he invited them to a banquet at the imperial palace.

A few days later, he convoked the bishops for a final session in which he exhorted them to do their utmost to maintain peace in the Church. He then accorded them permission to return to their Sees, requesting them to remember him in their prayers.

Most of them hastened to their homelands. And, being filled with joy at their work of pacification and unity, which the Council effected and the Emperor ratified, each proclaimed to his people the resolutions passed by the Council.

Thus ended the Council of Nicea, which was, doubtless, a landmark in the history of the Christian Church Universal, and the monument of the victory that Faith achieved over heresy.<sup>12</sup>

136. Five months after Abba Alexandros returned to Alexandria from Nicea, he felt the approach of death. Like a candle that had burnt to the very end, the flame of life was flickering in him. He had spent long years in faithful service to his Lord and his Church, and now was ready to rest.

While hovering between life and death, he kept calling the name of Athanasius again and again. But he received no answer, for no sooner had Athanasius returned and fulfilled the missions entrusted to him by the Emperor, than he retreated to the desert to stay with his old teacher, the blessed St. Antoni.

But illumined by the light of another world, Abba Alexandros cried out: "In vain do you hide yourself, O Athanasius. For you cannot evade the mission designated to you from on High". And with these prophetic words, he commended his spirit into the Hands of the Father, consoled by the vision of the Church guided by Athanasius.

## XI. NOTES

1. See St. Athanasius: "Epist and Afros" No.1.
2. Mgr. Hefele. *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 265.
3. Archimandrite Guettee, *op. cit.*, vol. III, pg. 2 where the author cites all the early historians who unanimously affirmed that it was Emperor Constantine who requested the convocation of the Council of Nicea and fixed its place and date.
4. Hefele: *op. cit.*, vol.1, p. 270.
5. *Ibid*: vol.1, pp. 273-4.
6. As explained earlier, these were the individuals who had suffered during the persecutions but were spared before they reached the point of death.
7. Hefele: *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 285.
8. Cuettee. vol. III, p. 20.
9. For a detailed study of these canons, Cf. *Histoire des Conciles* by Mgr. Hefele, vol. I, pp. 346- 421; also *Tarikh al Kanissa'l Qiptiva* by Manassa'l Qommos, pp.183-260.
10. *Ibid* vol. I, pp. 422-3.
11. Guettee: *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp: 21-3.
12. For a detailed study of the Great Council of Nicea, Cf. Hefele: *Ibid*. vol. I, pp. 255-440.

## *XII. ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC*

137. Athanasius a thorough Egyptian.
138. His precocity manifested at the age of twelve.
139. His mother's solicitude and inspired decision.
140. His education and preparation.
141. His ordination as deacon.
142. Athanasius like unto the Pyramids.
143. Elected Pope; ordains first Bishop of Ethiopia.
144. First Pastoral tour.
145. Arius finds a way to the Emperor's ear.
146. The Council of Tyre.
147. Athanasius confronts Constantine once again.
148. Banishment to Treves.
149. Imperial ultimatum and Divine intervention.
150. Athanasius encounters Constantine the Younger.
151. Death of Constantine the Great.
152. Return of Athanasius to Alexandria.
153. Second Pastoral tour.
154. Plots against Athanasius.
155. Emotional eruptions and ardent prayers.
156. Arrival of intruder at Alexandria.
157. Gregory, the intruder, tries in vain to crush the spirit of the Copts.
158. Antoni visits Alexandria to sustain the Faithful.
159. Athanasius in Rome.
160. Council of Rome.
161. Letter of Bishop of Rome to his Oriental brethren.
162. Athanasius stays in Rome and has great spiritual influence.
163. He is invited by Emperor Constance.
164. Correspondence between two Emperors.
165. Emperor Constantius writes three letters to Athanasius.



166. Athanasius returns to Alexandria.
167. Alexandrians receive him with great acclamation.
168. Emperor Constance assassinated and a storm gathers anew.
169. Constantinus turns against Athanasius.
170. Council of Milan and its consequences.
171. Another period of hardships and suffering for Copts.
172. Assault on Faithful inside Church and disappearance of Athanasius.
173. Athanasius hides for six years in the home of a deaconess.
174. Leaves house of deaconess and moves around unperceived.
175. Writes his defence against Arianism.
176. Refutes a new heresy.
177. Constantius dies suddenly and is succeeded by Julian.
178. Athanasius resumes his activities in Alexandria.
179. Reconciles Greeks and Latins.
180. Julian hounds Athanasius.
181. Returns after Julian's death and accession of Jovian.
182. Jovian's untimely death and his succession by Valens in the East.
183. Third pastoral tour.
184. Valens as fickle towards Christians as many of his predecessors.
185. Athanasius refutes heresy of Apollinarius.
186. His last-five years spent in peace.
187. The Church Universal confers on him title of `the Apostolic.

137. Because of the magnetism and genius of his unique character, Athanasius has been the subject of many books.

Although-like many men of his era – his education was Greek, he himself was a thorough Egyptian, born and bred in Egypt, and a true son of his native land. He combined in himself all the outstanding characteristics of the Egyptians-unflinching tenacity; impetuous ardour, and the capacity to be inflamed by every movement of the soul. These traits, together with his nature of steel, he harnessed to a cause which has sanctified him.

The life of Athanasius was one of continuous combat, and there is not a power against which he did not contend with courage and boldness; he contended against the gods, the emperors and the heretics. He faced everything and everyone-without a halt; with a perpetual tension of the spirit; with a constant indefatigableness of effort-like an overflowing torrent. To look casually at the ardour of this prodigious athlete, one cannot help but wonder how he could not cease from combat throughout his entire life. But to ponder over the depths of his passionate agitations, is to discover the sublime motive which inspired this rugged fighter. A true disciple of the Almighty God, Lover-of man, he himself grew up to be a lover of his fellowmen. His every thought and word, his action and his suffering, his writing and his fighting, all his powers were channelled for the welfare of men.<sup>1</sup>

138. As Jeremiah the prophet was sanctified by God while yet in the womb,<sup>2</sup> so was Athanasius. His whole being was saturated with abounding Grace, that even in play he would say to his companions: "If God chooses me to serve Him I will be a Christian". At these words they would all laugh in glee. Rufinus relates to us a story of Athanasius at play. He says that one day, Abba

Alexandros, awaiting some of his clergy to dine with him, was looking out of his window. A few paces away from him, some children were playing on the seashore. Their attentiveness and their sobermindedness astonished the Pope and he watched them intently. His whole being vibrated with emotion as he realised that they were performing the Rite of Baptism. He had them called in and began questioning them. With bowed heads and cheeks red with confusion, they confessed the truth; and turning towards one of them declared: 'It is Athanasius who was our chief. He acted the role of a bishop and baptised those among us who have not yet been baptised'. Abba Alexandros looked at the lad who had been singled out, and immediately loved him. The lad looked back at the venerable Pope with candour and frank audacity; his face lit up with the triple reflection of all beautiful souls: intelligence, serenity and purity. On examination, it was found out that each minute detail of the Baptism Rite had been carefully observed by this 'bishop' of twelve.

On that very day of his first meeting with Athanasius, Abba Alexandros felt within his heart that he was before a person who was destined to become a chosen vessel for the service of the Church. Thus, even through play, Athanasius was initiated into the sanctuary of the Most High; he was stirred to the depth of his spirit, and filled with joy. So he set himself to study the Scriptures and all Church books. At the end of the day, when school was over, he would hasten home to delve into them. With singleness of purpose, this became his sole interest.<sup>3</sup>

139. When his mother beheld how engrossed he had become in his books she was alarmed. At fifteen, she thought that the best cure for him was marriage. When

she could not arouse his interest at all in this subject, she sought a soothsayer and asked him to help her in what she considered a dilemma. The soothsayer suggested that she let her son lunch with him, and with some effort she succeeded in persuading him to do so. However, young Athanasius lost no time in going back to his books, and the soothsayer said to the mother, "Do not lose your time and energy, for your son will follow the Galilean and his life will be a sweet-smelling incense among many nations".

The mother pondered in her heart over these words and, in a moment of illumination, came to a wise decision. Not only, would she allow her son to follow his inclinations so as to keep his affection, but she would offer him to the Church as Hannah of old had offered her son Samuel to the temple.<sup>4</sup> Immediately she accompanied him to Abba Alexandros and entrusted him into his hands<sup>5</sup> and from that day onwards Athanasius lived with the aged Patriarch, increasing daily "in wisdom, stature and favour with God and with man".<sup>6</sup>

140. During those years, Providence was arming Athanasius for the task that would be set before him. Diligently did he study, and daily did he sit at the feet of the Alexandrian teachers, seeking to imbibe all their wisdom. He studied grammar, logic, oratory; Homer and other Greek classics; Greek philosophy and Roman law. He eagerly sought to learn the teachings of the old Heliopolitan masters (the sages of Egypt) and unravel their mysteries; he pondered over the Old Testament; he ardently assimilated the teachings of both Clement and Origen. But above all, the source of his spiritual maturity were the few years he spent in the desert with Abba Antoni whose spiritual wisdom and insight he fully assimilated. The aged man of God was delighted to see

the ardour of this youth, who was barely twenty. He received him with open arms, as a father receives a son. Side by side they spent long hours in conversation and in silence. And while Antoni meditated, Athanasius sat beside him and wrote. Both breathed the same hallowed air, both prayed together and both enjoyed the occupational relaxation of plaiting baskets. By sunset of each day Athanasius would go out and fill a jar of water from the nearby waters spring, that he may wash the hands of the old sage, then wash his own before partaking of the frugal meal, so imperative for the upkeep of the body that it may perform the demands of the spirit.

During those years Athanasius wrote two books—two veritable masterpieces. One entitled "On the Vanity of Idols", and the other "On the Existence of the One God". Both books are clear, profound, virile and vibrant with emotion. He utilised all the powers with which he was endowed: reason argued, faith expounded its dogmas, love changed and glowed up by turn—all fed the soaring inspiration.

Athanasius wrote throughout the day, towards its close and when the last rays of the setting sun receded from the earth, he would sit at the feet of St. Antoni and read to him what he had written. The venerable saint would listen, enraptured: counselling and suggesting—inspiring the young writer by his own serenity and his penetrating intelligence. Thus did Athanasius spend his time in the desert in fruitful labour.<sup>7</sup>

It was during this period also that Athanasius annotated the information on St. Antoni which he capitalised in later years by writing the biography of the saint. In this manner he armed himself for the combat which awaited him. It could most assuredly be said of

him that he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and in deeds.<sup>8</sup>

141. Athanasius was about twenty-three years old when he returned to Alexandria. No sooner had he settled in his native town than he bent his forehead under the hands of the venerable Abba Alexandros, to rise to deacon. His soul, already robust, received in the effusion of Divine Grace an overflow of power.

In the IV<sup>th</sup> century, the deacon still exercised the active functions set down by the early Church. He constituted 'the eyes and the ears, the mouth and the hand, the heart and the soul of the Bishop'. These words describe most fittingly what Athanasius became to Abba Alexandros from that time onwards. He was not only the power which sustained the soul of the aged Pope, but was the light which illuminated his path. And Abba Alexandros leaned on him as a father leans on a beloved son. Both worked together in harmonious concord: both were aspiring spirits, with the same keen understanding and the same lofty Ideals – which served the Church to the very end. Athanasius went about his work, performing its, lowest to its highest demands. Part of the day he spent in the poorest slums giving succour to the disinherited of the earth: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoners and the strangers. If during his errands of charity, he met a brother whose faith was shaken, he reaffirmed him with words of confidence and comfort.<sup>9</sup>

Arius well knew this formidable foe, of whom he was secretly jealous. He, therefore, shot his venom and his biting sarcasm at both the Pope and Athanasius: both shared the pangs and the honour of being hated for righteousness' sake.<sup>10</sup>

142. Athanasius was a rare genius indeed: his outstanding intelligence harnessed the logical flow of words and made of him a most gifted dialectician. His aptitude for the potamic was of special value in the struggle against such agile sophists as the Arians.<sup>11</sup> He stood up amidst the turmoil of contending doctrines as the gigantic pyramids stand against the skyline. A traveller promenading on the ancient land of Egypt may feel crushed by their grandeur. Likewise a Christian, contemplating Athanasius, this giant son of the same ancient land, may feel the same impression, with this difference: that while he may feel crushed by his stature, he would be charmed and attracted towards the heights of spiritual attainment which Athanasius set before him.<sup>12</sup>

When finally the struggle reached its most crucial point, and three hundred and eighteen Bishops and other Church leaders assembled at Nicea to try and re-establish peace, Athanasius stood up in their midst and crushed the Arian heresy by the force of his reasoning power as well as by the strength of his faith. To the vaporous and mercurial phraseology of Arius, he replied in firm lucid language, which set forth the Truth as a clear-cut diamond.<sup>13</sup>

143. With all these assets and accomplishments, it is little wonder that Athanasius was the man singled out as the most worthy to succeed Abba Alexandros as Pope of the Coptic Church. When grief for the departing prelate subsided and gave place to the thought of a successor, the people unanimously reiterated the name that the departed Pope kept murmuring on his death-bed, and it reverberated from lip to lip like a magnificent obsession: Athanasius ... Athanasius!

The Bishops shared the people's sentiments, so together they sought him in his desert abode with St. Antoni and brought him to Alexandria amidst shouts of joy and exultation. Leading him to the Cathedral, they all remained until the consecration was completed.<sup>14</sup> Fifty bishops officiated at his ordination, while the multitudes cheered.<sup>15</sup>

Abba Athanasius and his people enjoyed peace during the first three years of his papacy. During this short period, Fromentius, an Egyptian monk, was consecrated first Bishop of Ethiopia. Both the king and the people of that country welcomed him with great joy, and they entitled him "Abba Salama" i.e. Father of peace. In the Ethiopian annals he is described as the "revealer of the Light."<sup>16</sup> (Up to the present day, Ethiopia's Primate is ordained by St. Mark's successors, the Coptic Popes).

144. After ordaining Fromentius, Abba Athanasius made his first Pastoral tour throughout the Egyptian region of his See. He sailed by boat up the Nile as far as Aswan, stopping to visit his people along the way. The people regarded this as a sign of paternal solicitude. They responded to this act by spontaneously giving him their love and veneration. Thus a strong link of devotion and loyalty was created between the Copts and Abba Athanasius early in his career as Pope, and it continued to the end of his life.

While on this journey consolidating his Church and edifying his people, Abba Athanasius heard that the Arians were beginning to raise their heads again. He immediately dispatched a message to his spiritual father St. Antoni, in his desert abode, and asked him to go to Alexandria to refute them. The venerable old sage responded without hesitation and once more entered the



metropolis. There he went about speaking everywhere-in public places and in private homes warning the believers against the pernicious influence of the Arians, and exposing and clarifying the difference between their divergent teachings and the orthodox faith. "Now his speech was so exceedingly savoury and so well seasoned with heavenly salt, that none of his hearers could be angry at his words ... for he was ready and prepared to hear and answer every kind of opinion."<sup>17</sup>

145. "There is a time for war and a time for peace".<sup>18</sup> And for Abba Athanasius, the time for peace was drawing to an end – Arius being again the cause of agitation within the Church. Stealthily going to see Emperor Constantine, he feigned repentance and with his sycophant manner, convinced him of his pretence. The Emperor, who wished unity within the Church at any cost, issued a decree that he was to be accepted unconditionally back into the Church communion. This he did without consulting church leaders. The Emperor's decree had the opposite effect from its intent, for the bishops throughout Christendom took sides, exchanging numerous epistles among them.<sup>19</sup> Abba Athanasius immediately reacted. He remonstrated openly by stating that whoever is excommunicated by an ecumenical Council must be reinstated in the same way-for the Church decrees that he who has the authority to bind is the only one who may unbind. This remonstrance infuriated Constantine and he threatened to banish whoever refused to submit to his decree. Athanasius, however, was not the person to recoil before threats, and not only did he remain firm in his stand, but went to Nicomedia to speak to the Emperor in person. Meeting him face to face, he defended his point of view with such ardour and eloquence that the

Emperor was greatly moved, and permitted him to return to his people.<sup>20</sup>

But, unfortunately, this did not put the matter to rest. Like a snake in the grass, Arius and his supporters who both envied and hated Athanasius, raised up their heads again, once Athanasius returned to his See. Incessantly they calumniated him in the eyes of the Emperor, and tried to convince him that he was the cause of the continuing dissensions within the Church, since he refused to accept the Emperor's decree. Again Constantine was affected by the talk, and again he wavered between the two sides. While in this wavering attitude, he decided to convoke a Council at Tyre.

146. This Council at Tyre was totally different from the ecumenical Council of Nicea. It was the Arian bishops who had manoeuvred until they made the Emperor call for it. The Emperor himself was not intending to be present at it, for he was planning to go to Jerusalem to attend the consecration of the newly-constructed Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

When Abba Athanasius received the invitation, he realised that its intent was to mollify Arius, and that the majority of the bishops who would attend would be Arians. At first, he ignored the invitation and remained in his metropolis. But his adversaries grouped together against him, and convinced the Emperor that if he refused to come, he must be brought by force. And so the Emperor sent a messenger to Athanasius informing him of that.

When he received this message, Athanasius decided forthwith that he would go of his own free will—rather than be dragged by imperial troops. Furthermore he felt within his heart that this was another call on him to

defend the Faith. Taking along with him fifty of his bishops, he quietly sailed for Constantinople.<sup>21</sup>

147. Abba Athanasius arrived at Constantinople without warning. One day, as the Emperor was riding through the city, a man in sacerdotal clothes intercepted his path. Not recognising him at first, and piqued by his audacity, the Emperor was about to turn away from him when Athanasius declared to him in a clear emphatic voice and with complete equanimity, "God is the Judge between you and me". The voice and the manner struck a vibrant note in the Emperor's conscience, who immediately recognised the speaker to be Athanasius. He invited him to his palace, and right away sent a letter to the bishops at the Council of Tyre to come and meet him in Constantinople.<sup>22</sup>

Receiving the letter, the bishops realised that if they faced Athanasius before Constantine, they would be discountenanced. To counteract that eventuality, they forged an accusation against Athanasius to the effect that he had aroused the Egyptians to disobedience and thus prevented the corn destined for Constantinople from being sent to it.

148. Although the accusation had nothing to do with the purpose of the Council, yet it was a serious one since the imperial capital relied on the Egyptian corn for its subsistence. When Athanasius replied to it by saying that this was a matter administered by the civil authorities and he had nothing to do with it, he was answered by being told that his influence had become so great that he could easily sway the authorities whichever way he chose.

Although the Emperor was not really convinced of the accusation brought against the Alexandrian Pope, he

imagined that the only way for establishing peace lay in getting Athanasius out of the way. He, therefore decreed to banish him to Traves, a town on the Franco-Belgian border. This was the first exile Athanasius suffered and it lasted for a little over two years—from Feb. 336 to May 338 A.D.

The journey of Abba Athanasius from Constantinople to Treves was like unto the triumphant march of a hero: wherever he passed, he was welcomed with joy and honour. His sojourn in the Occident roused the attention and the sympathy of the people towards Church matters: it became the starting point of a more active Church policy on the part of the West.<sup>23</sup>

149. Having obtained the banishment of the foremost protagonist of the Nicean Creed, the pro-Arian faction aimed at reinstating Arius. They succeeded in convincing Emperor Constantine of the heretic's repentance. Thereupon, an imperial order was sent to Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople, to accept Arius into the communion of the Church. Alexander was a peace-loving man throughout his life, and now at ninety year of age, he was ready to fight. For his loyalty to the Orthodox Faith was still stronger than any other motive within him. He, therefore, answered the imperial message by giving the same argument as Athanasius that "Arius was deposed by an ecumenical council, and only another such council can reinstate him". The Emperor in another fit of anger sent an ultimatum to the aged Bishop, telling him that he must allow Arius to officiate with him the following Sunday, or he, too, would be banished. The effect of this ultimatum was to charge the whole city with suspense. The aged bishop was not ready to obey, yet the imperial order was categorical. At that time, James, Bishop of Nisibis, was

visiting Bishop Alexander at Constantinople. Both Bishops found solace in each other's companionship, and both resorted to prayer and fasting that God may show them a way out of this dilemma. It was Thursday when the ultimatum had been received. Throughout Friday, they both supplicated God in great earnestness; Saturday wore on while the two Bishops still prayed and fasted unwaveringly.

Now Arius, in anticipation of his triumph, strutted haughtily among his friends, while his followers paraded the streets in smug arrogance. At three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, while Arius stood in the main square of Constantinople, he was suddenly seized with severe colic. He asked for a place of rest, and was directed to a nearby one behind the Forum. While inside, a sudden sickness gripped him, and he bled profusely. Some time later, his friends missing him, and worrying about his delay, went in to see him, and to their horror found him dead.

The death of Arius relieved the strain in the city and was considered an act of divine intervention. All the Churches were opened in an instant, and people thronged them to offer their thanks. The people's emotions were deeply stirred-not only in Constantinople, but throughout the Christian world. The Arian faction became stupefied and Constantine regarded the incident as another sign which seemed to lead him to greater attachment to the Creed of Nicea.<sup>24</sup>

150. In the meantime, Abba Athanasius met Constantine the Younger at Traves. After the meeting, the prince wrote to his father, Constantine the Great, inspiring him with the thought of ordering the Pope's return to Alexandria. The Emperor had actually exiled Abba

Athanasius only on the presumption that this was the best means for establishing peace within the Church, but finding that the absence of St. Mark's Successor only aggravated the situation, and receiving his son's letter in his favour, he thought it wiser to recall him from his exile. These thoughts crowded into his mind as he lay sick and near death. He died, however, before accomplishing this act of redress.

151. Upon the death of Emperor Constantine, his Empire, was divided among his three sons: Constantine, the Younger, who took over the rule of the West; Constance, who took Italy, North Africa and Illyrian, and Constantius, to whose lot fell Egypt and the Orient. The rule of Constantine the Younger was very short-lived, for his two brothers plotted against him, and killed him, then divided the Empire among themselves.

152. During his very short reign, Constantine the Younger ordered the release of Athanasius from his exile, and sent a letter to the Church of Alexandria to inform them of that release.

Abba Athanasius returned to his See among demonstrations of great joy from his people, who received him with acclamations and prayers of thanksgiving.

153. No sooner had Athanasius returned to his native land than he embarked on a second pastoral tour, up the Nile. At the town of Esnah, north of Aswan, he was met by Pakhoum (father of Cenobitism). He and his monks went out to meet their Patriarch chanting psalms and hymns of joy. Wherever he went, Athanasius did what the Apostles of Christ did three centuries earlier-teaching,

strengthening, comforting, healing-according to the people's needs.

154. It was fortunate that Athanasius undertook this tour so soon after his return to Alexandria, for he was not going to be left in peace long. Bishop Eusebius of Nicodemia, who had been one of his strong opponents and a supporter of Arius from the very beginning, started activities aimed first at winning the favour of Emperor Constantius, and then at plotting against Athanasius. When he succeeded in the first, he tried to convince the Emperor that the return of Athanasius had been hastily decreed by his dead brother and had not been approved by any Council as it should have been. Furthermore he convinced the Emperor that this being the case, they had the right to appoint one of their bishops to sit on the chair of St. Mark instead of Athanasius. The Emperor approved, and Gregory of Cappadocia was chosen to do so.<sup>25</sup> It was a blatant act of impropriety, contrary to all Church law, for Athanasius was exiled by order of Constantine and not by a council, but the Emperor was not the man to take this into consideration, and Eusebius of Nicodemia had only one motive – to overthrow Athanasius.

155. When the news of an intruder-bishop were proclaimed in Alexandria, they fell on the Copts like a thunderbolt. They were all stunned, especially that the sky of dissension was thought to be clear, and there was no presage of the oncoming storm.

Having recovered from the daze of it, the people all rose as one man in a fury. They kept continuous guard round the Pope's mansion, and whenever Abba Athanasius went to pray, the Church would be thronged with crowds.

They prayed in all earnestness; they wept; they were under severe tension. Every soul was a-tremor. Each one felt that it was the beginning of a sanguine revolution.

In the midst of these growing apprehensions, Athanasius kept an impassable serenity. He continued to explain the Holy Writ to his people, endeavouring to moderate their vehemence and strengthen their faith.

The Arian faction, in turn, sensed the imminence of a collision, and decided to save their forces for the inevitable hour. They worked and schemed in secret. They enlisted among their ranks all the discontented pagans and all the disillusioned rabble.

156. Passion Week began. The faithful assembled in the churches to attend the Services and chant the hymns appropriate to the occasion. Suddenly a menacing blare of trumpets resounded throughout the city, together with the gradually mounting cries and shrieks of the crowds. The intruder, Gregory, had arrived at Alexandria, accompanied by priests, soldiers, and a motley multitude, headed by Philagrius, the city Prefect. It was a signal for unutterable horrors. They marched into the churches on horseback, killing the Faithful and trampling over them with horses' hoofs. It was a massacre. Christian blood filled churches and streets.

During these tense and dark days, persecutors and persecuted alike focused all their attention on one man: Athanasius. The Faithful eagerly sought to save him, while the Arians desired to destroy him. Notwithstanding the impending danger, Athanasius remained in his own Capital: every house in Alexandria became a refuge for the Great Pope, and every person a shield. He, therefore, moved throughout the city feeling secure in spite of danger. And he stayed among his people until Easter



Day, that he may celebrate it with them and share their misery and their suffering. Easter, being God's guarantee for the final triumph of Good over Evil, gave comfort to the sorely afflicted people. After the celebration of this glorious festival, Abba Athanasius quietly disappeared, in compliance with the insistent wishes of his people.

The Arians, disappointed at their failure to kill Abba Athanasius, vented their rage on his people; they doubled their oppression, committing against them all the horrors which but a few decades earlier were committed by Diocletian and his soldiery. To these atrocities they added the most odious calumniation against the person of St. Mark's successor, who had chosen the city of Rome as the place for his self exile, for it was beyond the power and jurisdiction of Constantius.

157. Gregory, backed by the Emperor and his civil authority, gave strict orders that no Orthodox priest was to be permitted to officiate at any Church, still less to visit the people. The Copts now had two bitter alternatives: either to accept the services of an Arian priest, or to die without any spiritual succour; to bow the head under the hand of a heretic, or to go unbaptised. Most of them elected what to them was the lesser of the two evils – they boycotted Arianism and the intruding ‘self-styled’ patriarch, and worshipped God behind the closed doors of their homes. All the efforts Gregory made to win or influence them went unrewarded. They disdained him, refused to go near him, and deprived him of the honours he longed and hoped for. All their sentiments and their fervent prayers were with their legitimate leader, who, they hoped was only temporarily absent from their midst; and it was his spirit together with the Grace of God that sustained them during this most difficult period and

enabled them to suffer injuries and even death without giving in or giving up.

158. Antoni, the chief of solitaries and aged saint, was still alive in the desert. His serene spirit revolted against these turbulent events. So he descended from his mountain and once more appeared in the streets of Alexandria. Standing in its central square, he addressed the people in simple, sublime language, and the multitudes thronged to hear him. None dared raise a hand against this giant man of God, whose age and years of consecrated saintly service had won him universal veneration. The Arians trembled while he 'spoke, but perforce remained silent. When he ended his defence, he returned to his desert abode, leaving within the city a host of consoled, re-affirmed souls.<sup>26</sup>

159. In the meantime, what was Athanasius doing in the land he chose for self-exile? He was active as ever, and Christians from many lands had their attentions riveted on him, while their hearts throbbed with emotions. To them "this illustrious fighter bore on his shoulders the whole edifice of Christ's Church."<sup>27</sup>

Julius, Bishop of Rome, welcomed him to the city, and sent out an invitation to all bishops in Christendom to come and confer with him, and hold a council in which any differences could be resolved. A good number of the Occidental bishops immediately responded to his invitation, but of the Orientalise, only those who were friendly to Athanasius came. As for his foes-headed by Eusebius, former bishop of Nicomedia who had become bishop of Constantinople-they bided their time and delayed the messengers sent by Julius.

160. When time passed and there was neither a sign of them nor a message from them, Julius decided to open the Council sessions anyway.

The case of Athanasius did not drag: the abstention of the Eusebians; the presence of Athanasius with his modest but firm assurance, and the radiance of his glorious deeds; the testimony – written and verbal – of the Egyptian clergy; the examination of the reports sent to serve as a basis for the accusations against him—all these facts called for the justification of the Alexandrian Pope, and proclaimed his innocence. The council of Rome unanimously confirmed him in his rights and maintained him in the communion of the Church.

During this procedure, the envoys of Julius arrived from the East. Their crestfallen mien declared only too plainly that they carried bad news. The Arians, with their Eusebian allies refused to attend. Instead of giving a direct refusal, their reply was subtle. Its purport was that the Christian Church never acknowledged the rule of the individual, hence an invitation to a council, signed by one person, is to be discredited even if that person was the bishop of Rome. For, though Rome was the Imperial Capital, yet it was out of the Orient that the Gospel had been proclaimed. Why, then, did Julius write to them in his own name? Why did he not accept as valid the verdict of the council of Tyre whereby Athanasius was deposed? Are not the decrees of a council immutable until another council rescinds them? Besides, the Emperor of the East was waging war on Persia and it was not appropriate that they should leave their Sees during such a crisis.<sup>28</sup>

Thereupon the Fathers of the council of Rome decided to answer. They sent the acts of their assembly in a letter which Julius was charged to transmit to the Eusebians. The letter is exceedingly interesting both as a

valuable document and because it proves that the Bishop of Rome at that time exercised no universal jurisdiction and did not have those prerogatives that his successors in later ages claimed that he had.<sup>29</sup>

161. The letter opened thus: "Julius to Danius, Flaceillus, Narcissus, Eusebius, Maris, Macedonius, Theodorus, and their friends who wrote to us from Antioch, our dearly beloved brethren, salutations ... "

Julius then continues: "I read your letter brought to me by my priests Elpidius and Philoxenus, and I was astonished to find that in answer to my letter, written with affection and love for the Truth, you sent me an answer full of bitterness and disrespect. The pride and arrogance of those who have written it are reflected in every line; such sentiments are far from Christian. In fact the spirit of dispute bursts from it instead of the spirit of love. If the writer of this letter desired to give proof of his eloquence, he might have reserved it for other occasions. In ecclesiastical affairs, the apostolic canons are to be sought rather than eloquence ... If it pleased some of you to listen to the voice of anger and write a letter under its sway, the sun should not have set on such anger, still less should it have been consigned to paper. What did you find in my letter to legitimise such rage? Is it because I have invited you to the council? This invitation should have delighted you: those who have no doubt whatsoever on the justice of their acts cannot be discontented when their acts are subjected to examination-they ought rather to be persuaded that what has been passed with justice will not be found unjust. That is why the great Council of Nicea permitted the discussion of the acts of previous councils ... A tradition established by the Church and

confirmed by the councils cannot be abrogated by some individuals ... "

After going into the details of the coalition between the Arians and the Eusebians, and dwelling at length on the testimonies witnessing to the integrity of Athanasius, Julius ended his letter with these words: "Those who have not made known unto us what they have done, and have behaved according to their own desires, want us to give them our consent without knowing the causes. This is contrary to the regulations established by St. Paul and taught by the Fathers; it is a new regulation. I pray you take heed of what I have written unto you, because my sole aim is the common welfare. I notify you of what we have received of the blessed St. Peter which I deemed well-known but for the emotion-provoking incidents actually taking place. Bishops are uprooted from their Sees, other imposed in their stead, while the faithful are forced to acknowledge those whom they do not want. Put an end, I pray you, to such matters, and write against those who behave in this manner, that the Churches will not be troubled and the faithful need not act against their conscience. Give not the pagans occasion to laugh at us, and bring not the anger of God upon you. Each one of us, on the day of judgement will have to give an account of what he has done in this life ... I desire, dearly beloved brethren, that you will be well in the Lord".<sup>30</sup>

162. In spite of the sincerity and goodwill that this letter portrayed, it produced no effect on its recipients. They considered it personal and not conciliatory.

Athanasius, aware of that, decided to remain in exile in spite of the fact that the Council of Rome had reinstated him. He continued carrying on his spiritual and

intellectual activities – studying, writing, praying and discreetly sowing the Seed of Christ's teachings. These activities, together with the dignified and simple manner with which Athanasius bore himself, captivated the hearts of many a Roman patrician. It exemplified an emancipation of soul which they did not possess but which they craved. In their desire to attain this emancipation, they requested Abba Athanasius to write the biography of his teacher. He responded to their plea and gave them (and all Christians) his famous book, "The Life of St. Antoni".<sup>31</sup> Consequently some of the large villas of Roman Senators and consuls were transformed into retreats for monastic life.

163. Hearing about the erudition and sanctity of the Alexandrian Pope, Emperor Constance also was moved, and he expressed the wish to receive instruction in the Scriptures from him. Thus, Athanasius wrote a summary of all the books of Holy Writ and sent it with a letter to the Emperor. Upon receiving it, Constance was so pleased that he invited the learned Father to his court.

Though appreciative of the invitation, Athanasius debated within himself whether it would be wise of him to visit the Emperor or not. His own country being subject to Constantius, he did not want to do anything that might antagonise him and aggravate the situation of the Orthodox living under his rule ... After meditating and praying about this matter, Abba Athanasius reached the decision to visit Emperor Constance in Milan.

At Milan, Athanasius was received with due honour. His visit with the Emperor of the West was quite congenial, but faithful to his principles of prudence-he did not make it an occasion to complain to Constance of the deeds of his brother Constantius. Knowing that in every

court there were eyes to spy, ears to eavesdrop and tongues to betray, he practiced absolute reserve. Furthermore, every time he conferred with Constance, he deliberately took with him witnesses from among the bishops whose sincerity he trusted – these were Hosius of Cordova, Crispin of Padua, Protais of Milan and others. Later on, circumstances proved how sagaciously he had acted in this; for whenever there were any calumnies about his conferences with the Emperor, he called to witness those sincere and venerable men to discredit the false talk.

One thing Athanasius could not master was his aroused emotions whenever he uttered the name of Alexandria, and his beloved Church there, betrayed into the hands of a cruel intruder. He would burst into an involuntary indignation whenever he pictured the trials and tribulations of its people and the peril under which they lived. It was the righteous indignation of a soul passionately attached to a cause.

164. Impressed by Athanasius and convinced of the righteousness of his cause, Emperor Constance promised to do his utmost for re-establishing the peace of the Church. To keep his promise he immediately wrote a letter to his brother Constantius making a strong plea for this. Constantius had already become very tired of the atmosphere of blood and strife in his Eastern Empire and deeply desired to liberate himself of it, hence his brother's letter found in him an attentive ear. The two Emperors agreed to convoke another Council for the purpose, and chose as its site the town of Sardika in Illyria, on the borders of the two empires and the two Churches.<sup>32</sup>

The idea of this Council at Sardika was welcomed by all who really cared for the return of peace and

harmony within the Church. The Arians and Eusebians, however, were quite alarmed. They could not refuse to go-as they had refused to go to Rome – since the Council was being held at the request of the two Emperors. So, they went in spite of themselves. They did so with unchanged attitudes, and with the same uncharitable spirits.

About two hundred bishops converged on the Sardikan Council, and -as at Nicea – Hosius of Cordova was elected presiding Bishop.

Sizing the situation, the anti-Athanasians found that the procedure was going to be purely ecclesiastic: that all the churches with complaints had sent witnesses against them, bringing well-authenticated documents; that Athanasius whom they hoped would be absent, was there in person and very composed and confident. They realised that he was surely going to confront them in his usual powerful manner; and that if they accepted to sit at the Council, the probability would be that they, rather than their adversaries, would be indicted. Bearing these facts in mind, they pretended that they needed time to deliberate and plan their defence, and so withdrew to hold secret meetings. What they really wanted to plan was how best to retreat from Sardika and avoid a confrontation with the venerable Council. While they deliberated, Hosius entreated them to come to the council without delay, and to this entreaty, the Sardikan fathers added: "We must conform to the desire of the Emperors and examine the very cause of this deplorable dissension".

Athanasius, himself, in spite of what his Church had suffered because of their actions, went to see them; and-forgetting pride and prestige and, in a spirit of true Christian charity – implored them to acquiesce with the unanimous desire, and come to deliberate with their



colleagues that peace may be restored to the Church Universal.

But they still persisted in not showing up, and so Athanasius flung the gauntlet at them, saying, "I declare that I shall wash myself clean of all your calumnies, and shall convict you of oppressing the Churches"; but, unable to refute him they remained resolutely silent and unmoved. While all this was going on, a letter arrived from Emperor Constantius proclaiming his victory over the Persians. This letter provided the dissident bishops with the excuse they were waiting for: they must hurry back to share with the Emperor the celebration of his victory.<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless the Council of Sardika went ahead and held its sessions. They passed two major decisions: to declare their adherence to the Nicene Creed, and to excommunicate all intruding bishops. They also passed more church canons which they communicated to all churches in both East and West. These canons were accepted, although the Council of Sardika was not considered ecumenical because of the withdrawal of the Oriental bishops.

165. When the Council wound up its sessions, a full report of it was sent to both Emperors. A plea was also made to Constance, Emperor of the West, imploring him to write to Constantius, Emperor of the East, that he may validate their decisions. Responding to their plea, Constance wrote a letter and commissioned two prelates and a Christian general to carry it to his brother. Constantius met them well, and to the relief of all who took to heart the welfare of the Church, approved his brother's request. Not only that, but-to the chagrin of the Arians-wrote to Athanasius the following letter:-

"Constantius, Victorious, Augustus, to Athanasius:

Our clemency and our goodness do not permit us to leave you much longer to the raging sea and the tempest. Our piety has continuously followed you in your exile, your poverty and your voyages across savage lands. If we have deferred the disclosing of our intentions up to the present, it is because we hoped that you will take the initiative and ask for the remedy to your ailments. Probably fear withheld you from carrying into action the desire of your heart, therefore we address this tetter to your courage, declaring to you all our munificence. And be it known unto you that in future you can present yourself to us without fear, and prove for yourself the effects of our goodwill. We give you freedom to return to your homeland which you certainly desire. We have written to this effect to our brother Constance Victorious, Augustus, that he may permit you to come to us and to receive of our mutual goodness the permission to enter into your country".<sup>34</sup>

This long-sought freedom to go home certainly filled the heart of Athanasius with joy, but prudence commanded him to remain a little longer just to be sure that the letter was not dictated by an imperial whim. At this reserve, Emperor Constantius sent him a second letter in the same vein; but Athanasius still did not move. Shortly after, Emperor Constantius met some priests from Alexandria at Edessa and entrusted them with a third letter to Athanasius: a letter full of assurance, sincerity and goodwill. In this letter Constantius made known unto him the death of Gregory. This intruder who had only succeeded in keeping his usurped Chair by blood and sword, had finally met his death in a street brawl. And the Emperor of the Orient assured Athanasius that he would

safeguard his peaceful return, and would see to it that life return to normal within the Church of Alexandria.

166. With all these affirmations ringing in his ears, Athanasius listened to the call of his heart and left for Alexandria. Out of propriety and friendliness he passed by Rome, where he was met by the Bishop and the people with great joy and hailed as the great defender of Orthodoxy.

From Rome Athanasius went to Antioch to meet Emperor Constantius. After the interview, the Emperor wrote to all the bishops and priests of the Church Universal declaring to them that Athanasius had been completely reinstated, and that all his adherents – like him – should fear no anxiety for the future. He then wrote a particular letter to the people of the Church Universal living in Alexandria. Lastly he wrote to the prefects of Egypt, the Thebaid, and Lybia, informing them that all the papers written against Athanasius should be removed from the public annals, destroyed, and considered as non-existent.

On leaving Antioch, Athanasius went to Jerusalem. All the bishops of Palestine, with the exception of three, received him with joy, and assembled in a council to give him a collective testimony of their sentiments. They also gave him a letter to the priests, the deacons and the people of Alexandria, which they all signed.<sup>35</sup>

167. Jerusalem was his last stop on the way home. After nine years of exile: nine years of uninterrupted pain, and growing virtue, Athanasius was finally recompensed with an unexpected triumph. He returned home with enhanced rather than diminished prestige, vindicated by the declarations of four councils, the favour of two

Emperors, the support of innumerable bishops and the unanimous applause of Orient and Occident. His heart was overjoyed to see that the peace so long hoped for, was at long last re-established within the Church and the empire.

His entry into his metropolis was indescribable. The bishops of Egypt and Libya hastened to receive him and form a procession for him. The magistrates hurried to the frontiers so they might welcome him first. The people shouted with joy. For many days, public banquets were given wherein the rich regaled the poor. Processions and parades lasted far into the night. Everywhere the full hands sought out the empty ones to fill them; and so whole-hearted was charity that for a moment poverty seemed to have vanished. An atmosphere of probity and fervour pervaded the whole country, and each home seemed transformed into a sanctuary. Athanasius wept for joy as he beheld the heights of love and faith which his people had attained; and he glorified God, Who kept the sacred fire burning within their souls.<sup>36</sup>

168. For a while peace reigned, and the Church of Egypt grew and flourished. Unfortunately, the good times were not yet destined to stay. Emperor Constance, of the Occident, was betrayed and assassinated by Manganites, one of his generals. Agitations shook the Empire, and Constantius waged war on his brother's assassin. He overthrew him, and thus became the sole ruler of both Eastern and Western Empires.

These shaking events inevitably had their repercussions on Egypt and its Church. An atmosphere of strife and change was just the right one for the Arians to start their intrigues anew. Across their path stood one man and one alone, against whom persecutions and

calumnies beat as the waves beat against a rock. Their bitter experience throughout twenty five years had taught them that as long as Athanasius was alive and free, their ambitions were but empty baubles. They, therefore, began to whisper into the ears of Constantius, and – unfortunately – the Emperor, in an hour of weakness and a vainglorious mood – forgot his letters and his promises to Athanasius, and again lent an ear to his calumniators.

169. To the denunciations and intrigues of the Arians was united the soft and gentle voice of a beautiful woman; Princess Aurelia Eusebia, second wife of the Emperor. Her sweet words quietly saturated his mind against the Egyptian Pope.

As for Athanasius, he continued to teach his people and to govern them with sublime calmness even though he felt the clouds were ominously darkening.

Lent came. Never were Christian assemblies so vast and so fervent. A presentiment of alarm filled the hearts of the people, urging them to pray all the more intensely. They celebrated Easter with great splendour. In the midst of these pastoral occupations, Athanasius received a letter from Constantius in which the Emperor feigned that the Pope had asked his permission to visit him in Rome and regulate with him some Church matters, and in response to his request Constantius gave orders to facilitate his journey. When Athanasius carefully perused the letter, he found no explicit order in it, but simply a permission to go to the Imperial court. He, therefore, gave a verbal reply only to the imperial messenger, thanking the Emperor and declaring to him that he was as yet very busy organising his Church and that he would accept the invitation later on. In this manner, he postponed the cruel hour of parting again from his people.

Nonetheless, he realised that he must be on guard. Clouds were gathering thick and fast on the horizon and he must prepare for the tempest. This prudent behaviour enraged the Arians. They circulated new accusations: that Athanasius had been in league with Magnentius, and that consequently all his friends had deserted him, even St. Antoni himself. Such rumours surprised and scandalised the Faithful. Athanasius gave a signal to St. Antoni, and the aged man descended once more from his mountain. When he arrived, the whole of Alexandria went out to meet him: rich and poor, men and women, Christians and non-Christians, all hastened towards him. They all looked at the man of the desert, bearing lightly the weight of a whole century of living: his face bright, his vision still good, and his feet firm. They brought to him all the sick and the maimed and like unto his Saviour, he healed them all. The multitudes waited on his every word and on his radiant smile; his authority over them was decisive for his mere presence made all who were in it feel especially blessed. He confuted the calumniators and comforted the Faithful.<sup>(37)</sup>

Albeit, Emperor Constantius did not give a frank order to arrest Abba Athanasius, though his rage against him was continuously mounting, fed by the insidiousness of the Arians and the insinuations of his wife. He feared that the impassioned volatile Orient would rise in revolt against a new persecution of this Successor, of St. Mark who had become the object of so much affection and reverence. He therefore awaited that inevitable hour in which Athanasius would fall under the anathemas of the coalesced Eusebian – Arians. With these thoughts, he readily responded to the letter of Liberius, the new Bishop of Rome, to convoke a Council at Milan.<sup>38</sup>

170. Very few Oriental bishops attended the Milan council; while there were over three hundred Occidentals. As soon as they assembled, the Arians declared they must come to an agreement on the subject of condemning Athanasius before deliberating on any other subject. Most of the bishops present ratified the condemnation that had already been prepared, through fear of the Emperor whose feelings they knew. Some of them however were fearless, and courageously stood up and defended the Orthodox Faith and Athanasius its great champion. They refused to be cowed by the clamours of the Arians and the menaces of the Emperor.

One of these was Hilarius, Bishop of Poitiers who sent a letter of protest to Emperor Constantius, telling him of the anger and disappointment felt by all true Christians at his behaviour. He wrote: "We are discovering, O ravening wolf, the skin under which you hide. You present yourself to the bishops to give them that same kiss by which the Lord was betrayed. You bow the head to receive their benediction, and you trample the Faith under your feet. You invite them to dine at your table, and when they rise from your banquets, it is to sell God as did Judas ... you renounce your rights in their favour but it is to make them forget their own duties and lose the eternal reward".<sup>39</sup>

171. Athanasius was condemned in absentia, for he did not go to Milan to attend the Council. No order was given to arrest or banish him, yet the Church of Egypt was pressured and persecuted in diverse ways. When Easter came, the people did not dare to go to Church to celebrate it for they knew they would not be left in peace. So they celebrated it in the cemeteries.<sup>40</sup> Athanasius bore

his yoke with majestic calmness, and continued to teach his people and strengthen their hearts.

Sometime later, an imperial secretary came to Egypt bearing an oral message to the Alexandrian Pope that he was to leave his homeland. In answer to this message, Abba Athanasius produced the letters of the Emperor by which he had been authorised to stay in Alexandria, affirming that he would not leave his people without receiving a written order.

A few weeks elapsed, then the whole of Alexandria was shaken by the sudden arrival of the imperial legions from Libya. The chief of the army went to see Athanasius, and again told him by word of mouth that he was to leave his See. The Successor of St. Mark gave him the same answer which he had given to the first messenger, but he realised that these messages were the dark omens presaging the storm. He, therefore, asked his people to resort to prayer and fasting. At this request the Churches overflowed with crowds who earnestly prayed-not only during the day-but far into the night.

172. One evening the multitudes thronged the Church of Abba Theonas, more numerous than ever, to celebrate a solemn feast. 'It was a great and beautiful spectacle indeed: a vast crowd of Faithful bowing their heads in silent adoration, lifting their voices in praise and glorification. Suddenly a harsh clang was heard, and the doors of the Sanctuary were violently pushed open. The soldiers, headed by their general, marched into it, trampling the worshippers under their feet or shooting them with their arrows. At this sacrilegious invasion, Abba Athanasius kept his seat, and asked the deacon to read Psalm 136, during which the people responded with the refrain: "For His mercy endureth forever" after each



couplet. The Faithful obeyed; they stood firm, making of their own bodies a bulwark between their Pope and his enemies. While they chanted, some monks surrounded Athanasius and carried him away imperceptibly. The soldiers trampled, shot, and hacked their way through the people, only to find in the end that they had failed to lay hands on the one person whom they had been ordered to take dead or alive.<sup>41</sup>

Athanasius was thus saved by God for more combats and more attainments. That same night, when his monks had carried him away, he went out in the dark with that tranquil audacity which had served him most marvellously in his hours of great peril. He did not leave his beloved Alexandria, for he knew that should he knock on the door of any Christian, he would find a place of refuge. For six years he was lost to sight while all the efforts of the Arians at finding him went unrewarded. They were completely baffled, for Athanasius kept sending his Paschal letters in their due seasons, wrote to his bishops whenever he found it necessary, and was ever present in the midst of his people, though his enemies could not find him. Greater persecutions were meted out, more violence was committed – but all the rigours could not extract the confession from one single person of the followers of Athanasius on his whereabouts. Emperor Constantius presumed that he must have fled to Ethiopia to stay with Fromentius, his friend and disciple; messengers were dispatched there in haste-but Athanasius was not to be found.

One day, an encyclical epistle from the invisible Pope circulated with the rapidity of lightning throughout Egypt. He had heard that the Arians proposed a creed to his bishops demanding their signatures. So he immediately dispatched his message to them to uphold

them against the heretics-and thus his vigilance never slumbered.<sup>42</sup>

173. But where had Athanasius gone and how did he manage to hide for six whole years?

Now there was in Alexandria at the time a pious, God fearing deaconess who had consecrated herself to the service of her people. She served quietly and charitably and her reputation was above reproach.

When Athanasius was hurriedly carried away from his Church on that evening of horror, he walked in the streets of Alexandria pondering and praying. A very strong impulse that seemed like a divine order urged him to go to the home of that deaconess. And so he went there. When he knocked on her door, she opened it and to her great astonishment found it was the blessed and beloved Athanasius. She quickly ushered him in, and he told her that he had been inspired by the Holy Spirit to take refuge in her house and hide there.

Unreservedly-and with a sense of being honoured and blessed- she gladly accepted what she felt was "a necessity laid upon her." She continued to carry on her daily tasks in her regular manner so that nobody seeing her could suspect for a moment that she was providing a haven for the great Athanasius. But, quietly, she prepared for him all his needs, brought to him the books he asked for, and carried his messages to the persons designated by him.<sup>(43)</sup>

Meanwhile the Alexandrian Church continued to be subjected to persecutions and terror of the cruelest kind. Again an intruder-bishop was imposed upon it through the wiles of the Arians backed by the might of a volatile and changeable Emperor. The imposed, illegal head of the church was, again, a Cappadocian by the name

of George-and he was servile, ignorant and brutal, the type of man willing to execute any orders to commit atrocities as long as the imperial troops supported him. And this is exactly what he did. Neither young nor old, neither clergy nor laity were spared from the iron, fist of his persecutions-which, he hoped, would break the spirit of the Copts and make them renounce their fealty to the Orthodox faith and their loyalty to Athanasius.<sup>44</sup> But the hopes of George and his Arian backers were in vain. Like many of the persecutors before them, their brutalities had an effect opposite to that of its intent. It consolidated the bond of compassion and kindness among the faithful, who – having proved all things-held fast to "that which was good" – their Church and its true Christian teachings.

174. Six years after he had taken refuge in the home of the deaconess, Athanasius seized the opportunity-when the wave of Arian brutality and vigilance had waned – and quietly slipped out and made a trip to the Holy Land. From there he wrote "An Apology to Constantius, the Emperor" in which he reminded him of his Christian background and the good deeds he had done and, in his usual eloquence, made a strong appeal to him to restore peace and justice to the Church of Alexandria,<sup>45</sup> and to its faithful people. This "Apology" was circulated through the Empire and had a deep impact on Christians everywhere.

Protected and shrouded by the innumerable friends and disciples, Athanasius re-entered Egypt, with his enemies still unable to trace him or lay hands on him. He retreated to the desert and made its many monasteries his dwelling place, moving from one to the other as the spirit moved him.

At the first monastery, he learned of the departure of St. Antoni from this life. The bond of love which had cemented his heart so strongly to the great saint during his earthly life, gave Athanasius a sense of assurance that the Spirit of this Athlete of God would be with him and help him more than ever. With this assurance he carried on his life of Christ-centred activities, and as he moved from one monastery to the other, his prayers, his praise and his adoration mingled with prayers, praise, and adoration of the desert conquerors. He was consoled to think that Christ was loved and glorified in the desert; he was sad to think that Christ was persecuted in Alexandria and other cities of Egypt by his blinded foes.<sup>46</sup>

It was through the fidelity and vigilance of the monks that Athanasius, though absent from his flock, was ever present in his church. At the least movement of the enemy, they immediately warned him. Whenever he wrote, they immediately transcribed his writings and circulated them throughout Christendom. He continued his course of action giving his counsels and his orders, teaching, guiding, writing.

175. These years of seclusion in the depths of the desert were probably the most prolific years in the life of Abba Athanasius. Alone with his thoughts, away from all the distraction of city life, he wielded his indefatigable pen. Out of the dark desert caverns shone the Light which illumined the path for all religiously-minded people throughout the ages. While this masterful teacher was forced to find shelter in the solitude of the desert, he wrote his defence against Arianism in four volumes. Forgetting all personal questions, and ignoring all treachery and backhandedness, he concerned himself solely with the theological questions. He rose above all

the ephemeral troubles and party prejudices to concentrate on divine ideas: his one aim being to clarify the dogma that had been darkened by ptolemics.<sup>47</sup>

Hardly had he laid down his pen, than a letter came to him from Serapion bishop of Thmuis, informing him of the rise of a new heresy. The heretic, this time, was Macedonius Bishop of Constantinople, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

176. A great sadness pervaded the soul of Abba Athanasius when he heard of this new aggression on the Holy Trinity. Immediately, he picked up his pen and set himself to refute it. "To Serapion, bishop of Thmuis, - against the blasphemers who say that the Holy Spirit is a creature... It is in the depth of the desert that the letters of your holy friendship reached me; they have been the means by which the Father of all mercies and the Lord of all consolation comforted my soul in the midst of distress and persecution. As I read them, your sincere friendship and the love of all my other friends surrounded me and filled me with joy. But alas! hardly had I come to the end of reading them, than my soul was filled with sadness at the perversity of these men bent on ruining the Truth ..." Athanasius, however, did not linger over his sadness; the fighter within him was roused. He attacked the new system and demolished it; then clearing away all the debris, he laid the firm foundations on which he built the Orthodox Dogma in its integrity. Relying totally on the Holy Scriptures, he proved that the Holy Spirit is God Eternal; He is sanctifying, vivifying, Creator; Immutable and Immense, He fills the universe. Baptism is to be administered in His name as well as in the name of the Father and the Son; Divine Grace is given us by the

Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit; He is the Speaker by the prophets.

After giving a vivid and clear picture of the Church's belief in the Holy Spirit, the valiant Pope added: "Though far in the desert, I was moved to the very depth of my being at the impudence of the innovators ... I am sending my refutation of their heresy to your piety entreating you to correct whatever error you may find therein and to pardon me for it".

This last phrase expresses the humility of the great hero, for his letter was a masterpiece worthy of the Holy Spirit Who had certainly inspired His defender.<sup>48</sup>

The letter of Abba Athanasius had the immediate effect of quieting this new heresy. It also dumbfounded the Arians who seemed at the time to be in power because of their great influence at the court. With all the imperial support they received, however, the Arians were, nonetheless, baffled by Abba Athanasius and his people who obstinately refused to bend the knee unto Caesar.

Athanasius foresaw the fall of the anti-Niceans even in their hour of triumph. Having forced him away from his Capital, and dispersed all the redoubtable Orthodox, they dissented among themselves. Proof of this was afforded by the number of creeds they promulgated: whenever they assembled, they wrote a different one.<sup>49</sup>

177. Amidst all these clashing events, the world was suddenly shaken by grave news: Emperor Constantius – on the eve of going to war against Persia-was seized with a fever which proved fatal-and brought about his death. At the hour of his hope in a triumphant issue, the incorrigible persecutor of Athanasius and of the Church fell.<sup>50</sup>

The direct and sole successor of the Constantinian Dynasty was Julian. He came to the throne with all the assets that could charm the people: hereditary right, youth, eloquence, and the prestige of a powerful military genius. And all the people had high hopes at his advent: the highest being those of the Alexandrians. Did not the new Emperor study at their School? On his part the new ruler of the Empire fanned the people's expectations by his easy flow of eloquence, and the shower of favours: He decreed a general amnesty to all those in exile! This all-sweeping graciousness hid behind it an abominable hostility which he was yet apprehensive to avow. He reckoned that the recall of the exiled Bishops would light the fire anew between the devotees of the Galilean.

The Bishops hastened back to their people – all except Athanasius. He waited for a sign from Heaven. When he heard of the death of George of Cappadocia, the intruder-Bishop, he considered this the sign to return to Alexandria. In the great city, the people, wearied by their ordeal, were in dire need of the presence and leadership of their beloved Athanasius. So were the true Copts all over the country. When the news spread that he was returning to his See at last, all of Egypt was stirred by it. An irresistible enthusiasm dominated every soul: and huge masses went out to greet him as he sailed by ship up the Nile northward towards Alexandria. They all wanted to see the man who had become a legend while yet he lived; they crowded on both banks to greet him as he passed and to receive his paternal blessing. As he came within sight of the great metropolis, everyone went out to meet him. They formed themselves into groups according to their age and their calling; they marched towards him in long undulating lines: a multitude that was so large, it was hard to count.

178. At long last he entered Alexandria. He had grown older and thinner but maintained the same fiery Spirit. Wearing the same old garb of monks, he seemed more majestic and magnetic to his people. Cries of love and admiration echoed and re-echoed from one end of the city to the other. And as he advanced amidst his people, smiling serenely and joyously, his whole being radiated with paternal love.

Abba Athanasius set himself immediately to the task of re-organising his church. His first act was to convoke a council in which he laid the rules for accepting repentant Arians. Some of his bishops were not exactly pleased at the clemency of his regulations; but he quieted their fears by explaining that "The Kingdom of God should not belong to us alone; we must, therefore endeavour to the best of our ability to accompany with us to this glorious realm as many of our brethren as possible. We must bend to reach the fallen. Violence is no remedy; it will render the wounds of the Church more incurable. Both Christian charity and reason demand that we maintain in their dignity all those who give us proof of their sincere repentance. "When this plea did not satisfy all those present, Athanasius added: "Shall we be more demanding than God? When the Prodigal son repented, after dissipating his heritage on riotous living, he had the joy of being welcomed home; he was accounted worthy of his father's embrace; he received a gold ring and was dressed in the sumptuous robes which he had worn before his fall. And the father disapproved of his elder son's indigence. Henceforth those who abjure the heresy in order to adopt the Faith of our fathers, are to be admitted within our ranks. Far from closing the door in their faces,



let us welcome them with open arms and rejoice at their return. Let us be true followers, indeed, of our Lord".<sup>51</sup>

179. With these touching and revealing terms, the illustrious teacher of Alexandria convinced all his hearers, and thus succeeded in winning vast numbers of heretics. This marvellous achievement would have sufficed many a man, but not Athanasius. As he scanned the state of the faithful, he found that for several years, an insidious quarrel troubled the two sister churches: the Greek and the Latin. This quarrel had arisen, not over principle, but over words. In fact, three words were at the bottom of it all: person, substance and hypostasis. The Greeks used the word "hypostasis" to express the idea for which the Latins use the word "person". And to make matters worse, the Greek word "hypostasis" resembled in its linguistic composition, the Latin word "substance". This linguistic divergence threatened to rupture the believers of one Creed: each accusing the other of accepting a contrary belief: Athanasius decided that it was time to end this quibbling; he invited both groups to convene together, asking each in turn, to define clearly and concisely the exact meaning of the words over which they dissented. Out of the definitions sprang the light; the seeming adversaries were astounded to discover that they shared the same belief. Each was then free to use his own linguistic expression without causing offence to the other. The only recommendation Athanasius made was that they keep intact the Creed of Nicea: a recommendation dictated by a deep insight which seems to have penetrated far into the unknown future.<sup>52</sup>

This Athanasian policy scored a success out of all proportions: the depth of Athanasius' soul called unto the depth of other souls, and they speedily responded. The

half-Arians adopted the .Orthodox Doctrines almost immediately. The pagans felt attracted by his magnetic personality and his tranquil logic won them. To the pagan priests who were augurs and soothsayers he seemed a veritable sorcerer who enchanted men and women from all ranks.<sup>53</sup>

180. Emperor Julian had not calculated that his edict of amnesty would have such auspicious results. He had condescendingly liberated Athanasius and other Orthodox Bishops hoping to poison the atmosphere between them by placing the chief opponents face to face. When his hope was not realised he was enraged. Consequently, he took off the mask of magnanimity he had so ostentatiously paraded with, and exposed his real self by apostatising. Then he sent a letter to the people of Alexandria in which he ordered Athanasius to leave their city. This was coupled with a letter to the Prefect of that city warning him that should Athanasius remain in his metropolis later than the first of December, he and his officers would have to pay a hundred pounds weight of gold as a punishment.

These two letters infuriated the people. They delegated some of the most trustworthy among them to go to Antioch and meet the Emperor to see if they could convince him to change his orders. When the delegates arrived, they were met with disdainful arrogance.

December was drawing near. Athanasius realised that if he did not leave the city, his people would be exposed to grave danger. To comfort them before leaving, he assembled them and spoke to them: "Let not your hearts be troubled my dearly beloved children", he said. "This is merely a passing cloud which one whiff of the wind will dispel". And once again he embarked on the Eternal River towards his familiar haven: the Thebaid.

Meanwhile, the Prefect received orders to follow Athanasius. So, no sooner had he heard of his departure than he boarded a boat and sailed upstream after him. Unaware that he was being pursued, Athanasius wished to stop on the way, so he asked his men to lay anchor. As they were all relaxing happily under some palm trees, Abba Athanasius suddenly got up saying: "We are not sailing upstream; we are going back to Alexandria to prove that He Who protects us is greater than him who persecutes us". They all got up at once; and started going back downstream. Hardly had they sailed a few miles than a boat crossed their path, and it was that of the Prefect. Its sailors asked: "Have you seen Athanasius and his men?" Athanasius who was sitting in the midst of his own, his face half hidden by its hood, answered calmly without moving from his place: "He is not far from you". Not realising who the speaker was, the Prefect's men speeded up their oars. As for the pursued Pope, the re-entered Alexandria, and resorted to the tomb of his own father, where he lived for six months. Only then did the authorities discover that St. Mark's Successor had not left his metropolis. But the Emperor was preparing an expedition against Persia, and envisaging himself as a triumphant conqueror, he thought it hardly worth his while to pre-occupy himself with a follower of the Galilean. So he just gave his men orders to be on the lookout for him. The friends of Athanasius who were in the very court of the apostate sent him a secret message of the Emperor's orders. So the heroic Pope took the road to the desert once more. He advanced with prudence: spending a day here, two days there; sleeping at times in a far away village, at others in some deserted ancient temple; and often spending the nights amid the

palmgroves by the banks of the Nile under the starry skies. Thus, all endeavours to find him were fruitless.

One day when for a moment the shadow of weariness clouded the soul of Athanasius, Piamon, Abbot of the Arsinoe monasteries, and Tlteodorus, Abbot of Tabennisi came to see him. By the way they spoke, he sensed that they were in an unusually good mood. Asking for an explanation, Theodorus made haste to answer: "If we seem happy, beloved father, it is because we are bringing you some good news. Julian has just been killed by the Persians, and his successor is a Christian prince who has heart set on the peace of the world. You need not remain away from your See now. Rather go to Antioch where the new monarch will receive you with great honour".<sup>54</sup> Abba Athanasius, thanking God for the quick deliverance He had provided, immediately left the desert and its Cherished inhabitants, and descended the Nile. He resolved to go first to Alexandria and wait there for an invitation from the new Emperor to go to Antioch. The wind sped his boat by, and to their great relief and joy, his people suddenly saw him in their midst.<sup>54</sup>

181. Julian the Apostate was succeeded by Emperor Jovian, a man endowed with piety and gentleness of character. His advent filled the hearts of the Egyptians with high expectations.

Jovian entered Antioch after coming to terms with the Persian conquerors, and as soon as he did so all the bishops hastened to present their congratulations with the exception of Abba Athanasius. This did not anger Jovian, because in his youth he had learned to hold the Alexandrian Pope in great esteem. Inquiring about him and hearing that he had settled quietly in his great metropolis, he sent him the following letter: "To the very

religious Friend of God, Athanasius – from Jovian – We greatly admire, beyond all words, the sanctity of your life and the indefatigableness of your efforts. Therefore, we extend to you our esteem and our protection. You merit both for the valour you have displayed amidst all your trials, and for your heroic disdain of armed forces and implacable persecutors.

"Knowing of your loyalty to the Faith and your constancy in teaching your people, we cannot suffer you to remain under the burden of banishment. We request you to return and to resume your work of edification. Return, then, to the Holy Church and shepherd God's people. As you stand at the head of your people, remember us in your prayers. We are persuaded that God will shower His favours on us and on all who are Christian like unto us, if you will kindly accord us the succour of your prayers".

This imperial letter was followed by another, in which Jovian asked the Alexandrian Teacher to instruct him in the True Faith. In response to this second letter, Abba Athanasius assembled his own bishops, and after conferring with them sent the Emperor the following answer: "Your thirst after things divine is most becoming to a prince; it is a sign that your heart is really in the Hands of God. And since Your Piety desires to know from us the True Faith of the Church we find nothing more edifying on this important issue than the Faith professed by your Fathers at Nicea ... The True Faith shines in spite of all heresies and Chiasms through the clarity of the Scriptures. The saints baptised unto this Faith have sealed It with their blood, and are now enjoying the well-earned repose in Paradise ... The men who contradict It can never prevail against It". Abba

Athanasius, then, wrote the Nicene Creed in its integrity, and added: "This is the Faith, O Prince, in which you should live, for it comes from God and from his Apostles".<sup>55</sup>

The response of Athanasius intensified the Emperor's interest; and forthwith he invited him to Antioch. The Alexandrian Pope accepted gladly, and was received at the court with great honour. In consequence, several Arian bishops returned to Orthodoxy, and all further Arian efforts to calumniate Athanasius were gone with the wind.

182. Unfortunately, this heaven-sent peace was quite short. Sudden death overtook Emperor Jovian as he was travelling from Antioch to Constantinople. He had reigned for seven ephemeral months. His passing away deprived the world of a good Christian, and Athanasius of a loyal friend.<sup>56</sup>

Two brothers succeeded Jovian: Valentinianus in the West, and Valens in the East. The profound peace enjoyed by Egypt after the long laborious combats was like a dream-truce.

183. When Valens first took the reins in his hands, he left the situation as it was. Abba Athanasius resolved to go on a third pastoral tour, so that his people who had often seen him hounded and harassed would be able to see him in the joy of an unforeseen triumph and thus be assured of the inexhaustible vitality of the cause he championed. Several bishops and priests gathered in Alexandria to form a retinue for him. They embarked and took a leisurely voyage this time. As they sailed slowly, people collected on the banks of the Nile in countless numbers. The Pope and his companions stopped at every

town and every village. At night, the whole countryside would be lit with torches held by long lines of people waiting to greet their Pope and singing joyful hymns.

At times, Athanasius would disembark, and go far inland to visit some out-of-the-way village. The waiting crowds, urged by an irresistible enthusiasm would follow his procession. It was a wondrous experience for the people of the Egyptian countryside who considered Athanasius the light of their Church and the glory of their nation. They could not take their eyes off him. The contrast between his elevated position and the simplicity of his garb, between the vigour of his character and the pleasant cordiality of his visage; and between his spiritual insight and erudition and his ability to mix with the lowliest-all that magnetised the people: they venerated and loved him simultaneously.

This voyage was both a triumph and a conquest. It strengthened the Faithful and caused many heretics to repent and return to the Orthodox doctrine. The Church that had been so mercilessly abused was gloriously rehabilitated.

As the procession advanced southward, Theodorus, Abbot of Tabennisi assembled his Coenobites, and they went out together to meet their Pope. When the two processions met, a chorus of virile warm voices chanted a psalm. Together, they marched towards the monasteries. A profound joy invaded the soul of Athanasius when he beheld the monks in their own abodes. He praised God for causing the desert to flourish. He blessed them and spoke words of comfort and cheer to them. They, in turn, looked with admiration on this living miracle: a man so great humbling himself as the least of them; kind and affable more than any they had seen.<sup>57</sup>

The visit to the monasteries was the termination of the pastoral tour, after which Athanasius set sail northward, going downstream back to Alexandria. As he parted with Theodorus and his monks, the illustrious Pope chanted the words of the 137 psalm: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth: if I remember not Jerusalem above my chief joy".<sup>58</sup>

184. It was a good thing that Athanasius had a chance to make this heart-warming tour, for Valens – like other Emperors before him – succumbed to the influence of the Arian Bishop of Constantinople and unexpectedly issued an edict that all Orthodox bishops be banished from their Sees. He also threatened that the magistrates and prefects who did not enforce his commands would be held answerable for it.

At the first rumours of the imperial menace, the Alexandrians flew into a passion, expressing their readiness to withstand any consequences rather than expose their aging Father to another banishment. They assembled in masses and dispatched notes of strong protest to their governor.

At first the governor seemed unmoved by these protests and unwilling to risk the consequences of going against the Emperor's order. When, however, he sensed that the people's anger was rising to a boiling point, and that any action against Athanasius might lead to riots and bloodshed, he decided it would be wiser to forestall such an eventuality. Hence he ceded to their wishes and permitted the illustrious Pope to remain in his capital. Having done that, he immediately dispatched information of his decision to the Emperor, justifying it on the



grounds that he had made it because he wanted to avoid unnecessary disturbances and bloodshed, and to maintain peace along those people of' the city who so ardently supported their beloved Pope.

When Valens received the governor's dispatch, he was in a receptive mood. Hence not only did he give his approval to the decision to leave Athanasius in peace, but he even sent a letter to the venerable Pope entreating him to remain at the head of his Church.

In consequence, a profound calmness enveloped Alexandria. The people relaxed and went about their daily business. The churches kept their doors always open and were always full. Services were held in them daily, and they continuously reverberated with the echoes of the sacred chants.

Athanasius also relaxed and was pleased that the Emperor's conciliatory message had restored peace and harmony within his Church. He had learned from long experience, however, that Emperors could be fickle. The promises of Valens were good but there was no guarantee that he would not suddenly change them. So in order to avoid the consequences of such a possible change, one day not long after, he quietly left Alexandria and retreated again to his desert abode. Also he had been saddened to hear that Apollinarius, Bishop of Laodicea and one of his dear friends, had committed a new heresy, and he wanted the time and freedom required for the task of refuting it.

185. The heresy of Apollinarius was the opposite of that of the Arians. He denied the humanity rather than the divinity of the Christ, affirming that He had been a man in appearance only but not in reality.

This heresy was just as unacceptable to Athanasius as the Arian heresy for it was contrary to the teachings of

the Apostles, and to the true Christian faith. It meant a denial of the Incarnation, the redemption by blood and the glorious Resurrection-making the incarnate Word a sort of divine phantom.

The combatant spirit of the heroic 'Defender of the Faith' was again stirred to its depths, and he mustered all his energy, his logic and his accumulated knowledge to refute the new heresy. He had become an old man now, but the fire of his youthful soul was still aflame, and he could not bear to see the physiognomy of his Lord disfigured in any way.

He wrote a three-volume work expounding the Faith again, and refuting Apollinarius without once mentioning his name. Such consideration proved that the love he bore for the erring person still gripped his heart in spite of his grief at the error. After this last defence, Athanasius laid down his pen, and did not take it up again. He had used it superbly as a faithful and profound portrayer of the Saviour of mankind, thus providing all truth seekers down through the ages with a bright beacon to guide them into the paths of Truth about Him and in Him. Arius could no more say "He is only human"; Apollinarius could no more say "He is only Divine". For Athanasius had proven to all those who had 'ears to hear' and 'eyes to see' that the Christ made the two into a perfect unity and was the God-man-that ineluctable and ineffable mystery, eternally surpassing the thought and eternally captivating the heart.<sup>59</sup> He was both fully God, and also fully man. That is why only through Him could God reveal Himself and impart divine life. Christians who believed otherwise would be idolatrous, for if they worshipped a Christ who was not Consubstantial with God, they would be worshipping other than God.<sup>60</sup>

186. And now the life of Athanasius was nearing its sunset. Like the Apostle Paul, he "had fought the good fight, he had run the race", he had fulfilled his destiny. He was twenty seven years old when he became Pope, and had guided the Church during forty-six years. Except for the first three and the last five years of his life, which were years of peace, he had fought continuously, steadfastly and fearlessly to defend the Christian faith and to maintain It in its integrity as It had been taught and handed down by the Apostles. Unflinching, unwavering, undaunted he had stood up and faced Emperors, powers and principalities without moving one iota from his single purpose, regardless of the consequences to himself. At certain times during his fight, he could count on and did have many courageous supporters. At other times he seemed almost alone. But even when he was alone, he knew for a certainty that 'one with God is a majority'. And so when he was told that the whole world was against him, he answered, 'And I am against the world'. "Athanasius contra mundum, et mundum contra Athanasius" became a well-known expression of his fearless independence, and his immovable fidelity to his Lord and Saviour.<sup>61</sup>

St. Basil-later called the Great – one of his younger contemporaries among the Church Fathers, said of him, "Athanasius was for the faithful what Pharos (the famous Alexandrian lighthouse)<sup>62</sup> was for ships; when the night was dark and tempests raged, all eyes turned instinctively to him."

187. In gratitude for his labours and his unique contribution, the Church Universal conferred on him the titles of 'the Defender of the Upright Faith' and the more concise one of 'the Apostolic'. This latter title, in which

he is made a compeer of Christ's Apostles, has come to be an indivisible part of his name.

Sixteen centuries have now passed since Athanasius walked on this earth; and yet he is still as much as ever the subject of study and wonder.

A great scholar of his life ended the book he recently wrote about him by describing him in the following terms:- "After sixteen centuries, the Orient and the Occident unite to admire that existence so illustrious and so saintly, so agitated and so prolific, so unhappy and so glorious. Everywhere – wherever the Church lives and reigns-it will link to Its Creed the name of its most heroic of champions, desiring to show Christians of all ages, to what heights of virtue can rise those who give themselves wholly to Christ, and what marvels they can perform with profound convictions. It is time to bring to light the sublime figure of Athanasius as a shining example to us human beings. Convictions waver and characters are becoming pliable; but by his indomitable firmness and his ardent and sovereign love, this immortal Athlete enkindles us to remember of what race we are".<sup>63</sup>

## **XII. NOTES**

1. Abbe P. Barbier. *Vie de St. Athanose*. p.1-3.
2. Jeremiah 1:5.
3. Cf. Ms. no. III Hist. kept in the Church of Abu Sarga in Babylon (Old Cairo) dated the 24th of Tuba, 1424 A.M. (29th Jan. 1708 A.D.) from pp. 63r-129v. (the 1st folio of this mss. is missing.)
4. 1 Samuel 1:24.
5. Cf. Ms. no. IX Hist. kept at the Church of Abba Shenouti in Babylon, ca. 1763 A.D. pp. 165r-231r.
6. St. Luke 2:52.
7. Barbier *op. cit.* pp. 46-7.
8. Acts 7:22.
9. Barbier pp. 58-60.
10. *Ibid.* p. 74; Matt. 5:10.
11. Mgr. Hefele. *op. cit.*; vol. I, p. 266.
12. Barbier, p. 29.
13. *Ibid.* p. 83.
14. *Ibid.* pp. 91-3.

15. Manassa '!'-Qommos *op. cit.* p.149.
16. *Book of Saints of the Ethiopian Church* trans by Wallis Budge, Vol. II, p. 388.
17. Palladius. *Paradise of the Fathers* trans. by W. Budge. Vol. I, p. 60.
18. Ecclesiastes 3:3.
19. Guettee. *op. cit.* Vol. III, pp. 59-60.
20. *Ibid.* vol. III. pp. 60-1.
21. *Ibid.* vol. III, pp. 72-74.
22. *Ibid.* vol. III, pp. 74-77.
23. *Ibid.* pp. 77-9 where he says on p. 78 "Son sejour (Athanasie) en Occident devait naturellement y attirer l'attention d'une maniere plus particuliere sur les erreurs Ariennes et c'est a dater de cette epoque que les Eglises occidentales prirent une part plus directe dans les discussions".
24. *Ibid.* vol. III, pp. 79-80.
25. Hefele. *op. cit.* Vol. I, pp. 441-4 and 452-62; Barbier: *Ibid.* pp. 131-2.
26. Barbier. pp.184-192.
27. Jean A. Moehler. *Athanasie le Grand.* Intro to part 1.

28. Barbier; pp.194-6; Guettee. Vol. Ilt, p. I 1?.
29. Guettee. Vol. III, p.113.
30. For details on this letter, Cf. Guettee. Vol. III, pp. 112-132. It should be noted that the Roman Bishop mentions St. Paul before St. Peter.
31. Already mentioned in this story in the chap. on St. Antoni.
32. Barbier. pp. 205-6.
33. Guettee: Vol. III, pp.135-139.
34. Barbier. pp. 207-9.
35. Guettee. Vol. III, pp.173.4.
36. Barbier. pp. 233-236.
37. Barbier. p. 254.
38. Guettee. Vol. III, pp.194-5; Barbier. pp. 262-65.
39. Barbier. p. 276.
40. Guettee. Vol. III, p.198.
41. Barbier. pp. 285-289.
42. Barbier. pp. 307-8.

43. W. Budge. trans. *Paradise of the Fathers*. Vol. I, p.150.
44. For details of the Arian atrocities under George of Cappadocia, cf: P. Cheneau d'Orleans: *Les Saints de l'Egypte*. Vol. II, pp. 96-99.
45. Barbier. p. 309.
46. Barbier. pp. 316-22.
47. Barbier. pp. 334-5.
48. Guettee. Vol. III, pp. 202-3, and 208-10; Barbier. pp. 335-9.
49. Guettee. Vol. III, p. 237.
50. Guettee. Vol. III, p. 246 and pp. 349-51.
51. Barbier. p. 369.
52. Barbier. pp. 371-2; also J. A. Moehler: *Athanase le Grand* Vol. I, pp.1-60; and Guettee. Vol. III, p. 263. Oration delivered by St. Gregory Theologos at the Cathedral of Constantinople in A.D. 379 in commemoration of Abba Athanasius.
53. *Ency. Brit.*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. VIII, p. 1004 and Vol. X, p. 553, also Barbier. p. 374.
54. Barbier. pp. 381-2.
55. Barbier. p. 389; also S. Soleiman, *op. cit.* V.1, p. 464.



56. Barbier. pp. 390-95.
57. Barbier. pp. 397-402.
58. Psalm 137:5-6.
59. Barbier. pp. 424-9.
60. Duschene. *The Early History of the Church*. Eng. trans. Vol. II, p. 28; also *Ency. Brit.* 14<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol, I, pp, Sg7.g.
61. *Scheff. Ency*, Vol. III, pp, gg5.6,
62. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
63. Barbier. *op. cit.* pp. 429.30.

### *XIII. THE ATHANASIAN AGE*

- A. 188. Macari, the "aged youth".
- B. 189. Didymus, the blind seer.
- C. 190. Syncletiki, a trail-blazer among women.
- D. 191. More consecrated women.  
192. Amma Talida.  
193. Distinguished foreign women visit the Convents of Egypt.
- E. 194. Evolution of Egyptian Ascetism and rise of Cenobitism.  
195. Pakhom, the pagan soldier who made a pledge to become a Christian.  
196. His Baptism in 314 A.D.  
197. His training and spiritual discipline.  
198. Vision of communal life and rules.  
199. First monastery in the world founded by Pakhom and the basic rules for monastic communal life.  
200. Spread of Pakhomian monasteries and their democratic organisation.  
201. Mary, sister of Pakhom, seeks to follow his example.  
202. Mystic teachings of St. Pakhom.  
203. His death in 346 A.D.  
204. His influence upon Western monasticism.
- F. Theodorus, a worthy Successor to the Great Pakhom.  
205. A chosen vessel.  
206. A story about his wisdom in dealing with his monks.  
267. An Athanasian letter.

A. 188. Athanasius alone – the man who by the sheer strength of his character has altered the direction of history – would have sufficed to make any age a brilliant one. But his times were resplendent with other spiritual leaders, all of whom stood side by side with him in perfect solidarity, and thus by their concerted efforts, consolidated the Christian faith.

Eminent among these leaders was Macari, who became known historically as St. Macarius of Egypt.

Macari was a disciple of St. Antoni. This discipleship, together with his own intensive self-training and practice of Christian virtue, gave him an unusual spiritual maturity early in his life, so much so that he came to be called by the Fathers ‘the aged youth’. For “to him was given the gift of performing mighty deeds, and his spiritual foresight and power of interpreting the Scriptures were remarkable indeed.”<sup>1</sup>

Three stories from the many related about him epitomise the heights he attained. The first shows the depth of his humility as revealed in one of his encounters with the Evil one. “The quintessence of the Desert is in the exquisite story”, says Helen Waddell,<sup>2</sup> “frugal as the light of its dawn, of how Macari returning at daybreak, with his bundle of palm leaves, met the Evil one; and the Evil one fainted at him with his sickle but could not reach him, and began to cry out on Macari for the violence he did him. ‘Yet whatever thou dost, I do also and more. Thou dost fast now and then but by no food am I ever refreshed; thou dost keep vigil, but no slumber ever falls upon me. In one thing only dost thou overmaster me’. And when the saint asked what that might be, ‘In thy humility’, he answered. And the Saint fell upon his knees – it may be to repel this last and subtlest temptation – and the devil vanished into the air”.

The second shows the extent of love he succeeded in reaching and in planting in the hearts of the ascetics living under his guidance. "Once a certain brother brought a bunch of grapes to the holy Macari; but he who for love's sake thought not on his own things but on the things of others, carried it to another brother who seemed more feeble. And the sick man gave thanks to God for the kindness of his brother, but he too, thinking more of his neighbour than of himself brought it to another; and he again to another; and so the bunch of grapes was carried round all the cells, scattered as they were over the desert, and no one knowing who first had sent it, it was brought at last to the first giver. And the holy Macari gave thanks that he had seen in the brethren such loving kindness, and he did himself reach after sterner discipline of the life of the spirit."<sup>3</sup>

In the third story, St. Macari proved how tolerant the desert ascetics could be towards those living in the hubbub of life. For, professed monk as he was, he could recognise that those living normal lives in the world might be as holy as the best of monks. One day it was revealed to him that two women married to two brothers, had attained his virtue. Hearing this, he arose and went to the town where the two women lived and was received by them with great honour. But when he inquired of them what was the manner of their life that their virtues were so highly reported of, they informed him that they lived the ordinary life of married women, yet they worshiped God together, refrained from quarrelling and made an agreement never to allow an unseemly word to proceed out of their mouths. Thereupon Macari exclaimed that of a truth there is no difference between the virgin and the wedded, the monk and the man of the world. God gave the breath of life to all, and only asks for their good intentions.<sup>4</sup>

Instructing his disciples one day, he said to them: "If in desiring to rebuke anyone thou art thyself moved to anger, thou dost satisfy thine own passion rather than seek to edify others. In saving another lose not thyself".<sup>5</sup>

Marcari's continuous striving after perfection and the infinite patience, tolerance and understanding he displayed in guiding and teaching others to follow that path drew to him countless disciples. Consequently when he had run his course and departed this life at the age of ninety, he left the wastes of the Nitrian desert thronging with a host of monks whose lives were dedicated to the service of men and the glory of the Heavenly Father.

To this day a monastery bearing the name of Macari still stands in that region of the desert hallowed by his life. And what is more, it is flourishing with spiritual youths and new magnificent buildings.

St. Macari left many writings behind him. His 'Homilies' were translated into French and published by Morel in Paris 1559; his 'Treatises' were published in Toulouse in 1684; a German translation of his works was published by Arnold in 1702; and by Cassedan in 1819, and his biography was published in French by Amelineau in 1894.<sup>6</sup>

B. 189. Another distinguished contemporary of Athanasius was a man called Didymus, who became known as "the Blind Seer of Alexandria". Although he had lost his sight when he was four years old, this handicap did not deter him from seeking to acquire and develop the visions of the mind and soul. Being unusually talented, he was determined to become somebody in spite of his blindness and to harness his talents in the service of the Church.

Didymus prayed for and received inward light, and by the power of that light, succeeded in attaining a vast range of

knowledge. Assiduous in listening to the most learned professors of the great metropolis, he mastered grammar, rhetoric, poetry, philosophy, mathematics and music.<sup>7</sup> None could interpret Plato more clearly; none could speak so well of Aristotle. Everyone marvelled at his power of solving the most complicated problems of geometry. As for his mastery of the sacred science, he outshone his seeing compeers. His prodigious penetration of Holy Writ astounded the learned men of Alexandria. He knew by heart both the Old and the New Testaments: He could not only recite them, but also compare and comment on the texts with all the sureness which the exegetic science demands.<sup>8</sup> Little wonder, then, that he won universal repute. The monks hastened towards him from the depths of their desert to contemplate his radiant figure and listen entranced to his brilliant lectures. While the most illustrious bishops of Syria and Asia Minor found it no derogation to their dignity to sit among his disciples and rejoice in the charm of his eloquence. Their souls were illuminated by his intensely burning Torch.<sup>9</sup> And he counted among his disciples also such personalities as Jerome, Rufinus and Palladius who came to quench their thirst at his pure fountain.<sup>10</sup>

Abba Athanasius found in Didymus a man worthy to be the Dean of the School of Alexandria. On his part, Didymus was an ardent admirer of the audacious and colossal genius of his Pope, and he supported him staunchly in his battle for the Orthodox Faith.

Entitled the Blind Seer of Alexandria, Didymus devised the means by which the blind could learn and pursue their studies. His technique consisted of carving the script on wood, and thus enable the blind to read through the medium of touch. In this ingenious way Didymus anticipated Braille by about fifteen centuries. His method was used by the Church for several centuries, then was lost in the trail of

the destructions and ravages which inevitably resulted from persecutions and political strife.<sup>11</sup>

When Abba Athanasius was a fugitive hounded by Julian the Apostate, Didymus, like all the Faithful, prayed fervently and constantly for him. One night, after having kept total abstinence throughout the day and supplicating God in great earnestness, he dozed off. As he lay, half awake in the early hours preceding dawn, he heard a distinct voice saying: Julian is dead. Rise; eat; and go disclose the fact to Athanasius. Didymus woke up immediately and carefully noted the date and the hour. Later, he found that the Apostate had died at that very hour; and though wounded in the morning, he had survived till after midnight.<sup>12</sup>

After serving for over half a century as teacher, dean and exegete, Didymus died about A.D. 395, leaving behind the world of darkness which could not conquer his soaring spirit, to live in the world of Light which he had glimpsed while still in this world.

C. 190. The next personality to ponder over here is a feminine one who blazed the same trail for women that Saint Antoni blazed for men. For inasmuch as he became the 'Father of monks' she became the 'Mother of nuns' – that phalanx of holy, dedicated women who voluntarily relinquished this world with all its pleasures in order to make of seeking the kingdom of God the single goal of their lives.

The name of this trail-blazer is Syncletiki's parents, rich aristocrats from Upper Egypt, had moved to Alexandria and settled there because they had high hopes for their children to whom they wanted to give the best possible education, which included sending them to the city's renowned School.

The high hopes and expectations of Syncletiki's

parents were not destined to be realised, however; for bereavement and sorrow cut them short. Of their two sons, one died as a lad, and the other on the eve of a brilliant marriage. This loss set Syncletiki thinking, and for a while she retreated within her own soul. She concluded that the gleams of this world – marriage, sumptuous clothes, glittering jewels, etc., were but shadows of a far brighter gleam beyond. And as she pondered and meditated, she resolved to relinquish them and to dedicate her life to God. Since her parents were already bereaved, however, and she could not bear to hurt their already broken hearts, she decided to stay with them as long as they lived. Nonetheless, she disclosed to them her intentions; and though they tried to dissuade her, and urged her to marry that they might find solace in her offspring, she courteously affirmed that she had already pledged herself to the service of Christ. Finding her unshakeable, they consented to her wish. Consequently, she followed a strict rule of life under the paternal roof. Her fasts and her vigils were continuous, but far from spoiling her beauty, by some special grace they enhanced it by an undefineable sweetness, which made her face so radiant that it seemed to reflect an inward light.

Syncletiki spent several years in this way. At the death of her parents she sold her inheritance and distributed it among the poor. Then she left her opulent home and went to live in a deserted area near the family sepulchre by the gate of the city. There, her contemplation, her renouncement, and her devotion grew more intense. Gradually the aroma of her saintliness pervaded the whole city of Alexandria, attracting many a young lady to go and visit her. All were charmed by her magnetism and spirituality, and some resolved to stay with her and live under her guidance. And so she began to have her own disciples whom she taught with patience and humility. The



themes she stressed were the love of God and of one's neighbour, and the importance of practicing Christian virtues. She fortified the souls of her disciples with divine Wisdom, and her instruction carried weight because it was the outcome of an experience: not a lesson was given which had not been actually lived.

The saintly Syncletiki lived to be eighty years old. She enjoyed good health almost all her life, unaffected by her fasts, vigils, or hardships. Towards the end, however, she became gravely ill, and during her last three and a half years she could hardly move or do anything for herself. Like Job, she endured her affliction patiently, and her intimate disciples tended her with the loving care of devoted daughters.

Three days before her death, she saw in a vision a host of angels descending from on high and inviting her to follow in their train. She became transfigured as if enveloped in a celestial light. Then she breathed her last in radiant ecstasy.

The biographer and panegyrist of St. Syncletiki is none other, than Athanasius the Apostolic himself, and this was an added glory to her who renounced the transient that she may attain the permanent.<sup>13</sup>

D. 191. The example of total consecration, laid down by Syncletiki, did not die with her. The seed she had sown bore rich fruit in the years that followed, and many women, responding to the Grace of God that touched the sensitive spirits within them, chose to follow the same path. Singly or in groups, they retreated to far away spots to meditate, worship Christ and train themselves to follow His example. Thus they patiently developed their characters.

These consecrated women formed an integral part of the early Church, for they rendered to It invaluable services. The life they chose was not one of withdrawal but of

preparation and self-discipline. And when there was need for their help and succour, they were trained and ready to answer it positively. They sought ascetic excellence – and through the power with which it infused them, were able to become saints and effective Christian workers.

As time went by and organised monastic life was developed, numerous monasteries for men and convents for women spread over the land of Egypt. These monasteries and convents were training grounds for many of ‘God's Athletes’, the stories of whose lives have enriched the annals of the Coptic Church.

192. One of the many handmaidens of Christ, whose name has come down to us, was a venerated nun called Amma (i.e., mother) Talida. She was the founder of a convent in the vicinity of a town called ‘Antinoe’, in the vicinity of Fayoum and had sixty nuns living under her guidance and "Motherhood". A strong bond of love knit them together, and they learned to serve with cheerful hearts.

One of Amma Talida's rules was that the convent gate remain unlocked day and night, and be a place of refuge to whoever was in need. Despite that, no thief or vagabond ever ventured in, and not one of the sisters went out without her permission. Fearlessness reigned within the convent, and peace pervaded the whole region.

Amma Talida lived to a ripe old age, having spent eighty years in the pursuit of ascetic excellence.<sup>14</sup>

193. The renown of the Egyptian women who renounced the world and aspired after spiritual perfection as taught by the Master, attracted women from different parts of the world. A number of them came to the Nile Valley to see these saintly virgins and endeavoured to follow their example. The most noted of foreign women who came was

Juliana from Caesarea of Cappadocia in whose house Origen had found shelter for two years, and who was given one of his books by Symmachus the expositor of the Jews; Melania the Great who was of Spanish origin and had grown up in Rome where her father held consular rank in the imperial city; Melania the younger, a Roman noblewoman who followed in the footsteps of her namesake; Olympias who was, for sometime, the daughter-in-law of the sub-prefect of Constantinople; and Candida, daughter of Trajan the General.<sup>15</sup>

E. 194. Everything substantial in human life must grow and evolve; maturity comes with the years and is always a process of mutation. Men learn by experience; they test; they eliminate; and by that very process of testing and eliminating, grow and attain higher levels. The upward path is hard and rugged, and those who climb must inure themselves to patient toiling.

The Egyptian Fathers who blazed the trail for humanity by consecrating their lives to God, realised that they could attain Christian Perfection only by daily striving. And their mode of life evolved from utter solitude to communal life.

The first few individuals who made the decision to live the ascetic life, renounced the world and went into the desert where each lived alone – completely unaware of others. Independently, each found himself a natural cave in which he spent his span of life in utter solitude and silence. These few individuals endured unimagineable hardships such as the hot glaring sun, the extreme cold, lacking the bare necessities in a hostile arid desert, the wild beasts and the marauding nomads – all these over and above total abnegation of the human instincts, and the craving for companionship. Yet amid all these hardships, a good

number of these solitaires persisted in following their chosen path, became saints and outlived a century!

Out of their experience, the men who subsequently sought to perfect themselves learned that they could reach their goal just as well by living within the vicinity of one another. Each could live in a separate cell, and spend his days in silent contemplation, yet his soul could benefit by the proximity of others seeking the same perfection. They clustered, therefore, round the souls of such masters as St. Antoni, St. Macari and their compeers. This second stage in the history of asceticism came to be known as "the Antanian Monasticism".

The third and final stage in the evolution of this phenomena of consecration was that of communal life. Its system and regulations were instituted by Pakhom who earned the titles of Father of Cenobitism, and 'the Great'.

195. Born of pagan parents in one of the southerly towns of Upper Egypt (ca. 290 A.D.), Pakhom was conscripted into the army at the age of twenty by Emperor Constantine. During one of the long toilsome marches in which he and his fellow conscripts had received very little food and drink, a group of kindly, charitable people of the town of Latopolis (present town of Esnah in the province of Aswan) came out with quantities of food and water, and personally served the conscripts. Surprised that such acts of mercy were being shown towards utter strangers, Pakhom was curious to know the reason. He was told that they were Christians who were merely practicing the injunctions of their Lord, Jesus Christ. Hearing of this, Pakhom said to himself: "If this be the way Christians behave, I would like to be a Christian" and then and there he made a secret pledge that if he returned safely from war, he would seek to know and serve this Lord called the Christ.

196. With the victory of Constantine, the conscripts were released, and Pakhom was among them. Remembering the pledge he had made, he set himself to the task of studying Christianity, and was baptised about 314 A.D. It was no doubt an act of divine guidance for in him Christianity found a prominent leader who left an indelible mark on It throughout the centuries.

Adopting Christianity with all the ardour of his soaring youth, Pakhom sought out an aged hermit to be his teacher. He was called Palamon, and Pakhom lived with him for three years, serving him lovingly and drinking at his spiritual fountain, and thus "leading a life of ascetic excellence, and crowned with the love of God and man".<sup>16</sup> When his teacher was satisfied with his spiritual attainments, he suggested to him to lead a solitary life, in order to develop further in spiritual self-discipline.

197. In compliance with this advice, Pakhom lived by himself in the region of Tabennisi.<sup>17</sup> In his solitude, he meditated upon the lot of hermits and solitaries, and the hardships and inner conflicts they inevitably faced and contended with. With this came the realisation that the weaker brothers fell by the wayside and were never able to tread this thorny pathway, so he kept pondering over the most amenable way to help them. As he prayed and kept the strictest possible ascetic regimen, he concluded that veritable virtue must spring from the depths of the human soul and is never an external embellishment; and that duty freely accepted and freely accomplished outweighs any fantastic heroism. Virtue and duty, however, could be absorbed by good example, hence communal life would be a good way for following the ascetic path.

198. This conclusion which Pakhom reached was confirmed by a celestial vision wherein he saw an angel of the Lord appearing to him and bidding him to go and seek the scattered hermits and gather them in a monastery. In confirmation of the fact that his vision was real and not imaginary, he received crystal-clear instructions as to the rules which were to be the basis of life among the community of monks.<sup>18</sup>

Elated and joyful, Pakhom did two things. First he set himself to the task of writing down his rules clearly and concisely. Individual liberty was to be his watchword. Whoever joined his community of monks would be asked to perform only a minimum number of duties, after which he would be free to occupy himself with whatever best suited him, according to his own talents and initiative. The only condition concomitant with such liberty would be that it clash not with the required general order.

The second thing Pakhom did was to go to his old teacher and give him a report on his vision and his Heavenly Visitant. The saintly man rejoiced with him and told him to take immediate action. Thereupon Pakhom returned to Tabennisi and founded the first monastery throughout the world.

In so doing-according to S.J. Ryan – “Pakhom blazed the trail for all seekers after Christian perfection, for, in profound realisation of Divine Truth, and unbroken communion with God, often high and mystical in its intimacy, the monks of Egypt set an example from which the faithful, since, have never ceased to profit”.<sup>19</sup>

199. The method whereby Pakhom organised his first monastery – and the ones he founded subsequently – proved the depth of his psychological insight. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he divided his monks into grades, grouping them

according to their outstanding traits, and designating each group with an alphabetical designation such as 'iota', 'exsi', etc.<sup>20</sup> The letter marking each group was an index to its level of education and the kind of work that would be assigned to each group – manual, tutorial, professional, etc.

Pakhom laid down rules that regulated all. aspects of communal monastic life – the probationary period for novices, their final acceptance into the monastery after passing the tests prepared for them, how they were to dress, occupy themselves, eat together, worship together, etc. Work was mandatory because it was both a means of self-support and a factor contributing to mental and spiritual well-being. Moreover it was to be considered an integral part of the life, undertaken not merely for an occupation but also for its own sake. For each monastery was to be a sort of agricultural and industrial colony<sup>21</sup> – self-sufficient as well as contributing to the needy who would seek its help.

Public communal worship was required and – except for reason of sickness – attendance at services obligatory. Private worship was personal and each monk was free to set his own rules for it.

200. The Pakhomian type of monastery appealed greatly to many of the men who sought the ascetic life. This led Pakhom to establish other monasteries modelled after his first one in other parts of Egypt. Altogether he established during his life nine monasteries for men and one convent for women". They all came to be known as the Pakhomian monasteries, and he instituted a method for their governance and for linking them together so that in modern terms, it could be described as democratic.

Although each monastery was a self-contained, independent unit, it was also a member in a group of monasteries in a geographical area. This group formed a

"tribe", and its "chief" was elected by the abbots – or heads – of the member monasteries who held regular conferences together. All the 'chiefs of' the tribes' were subject to the 'Supreme Head' of the Pakhomian Monasteries, who exercised his authority by two means: inspection visits whenever he wanted to, and the convocation of general assemblies twice a year. The first of these assemblies was held at Easter time, and gave the monks of all the monasteries the opportunity to celebrate jointly the most important of Christian festivals. The second assembly was held in August of each year, and in which the general affairs of the monasteries were discussed, reports were presented on the various activities of each of them, suggestions and future plans made, etc. Then the 'Supreme Head' divided the work and the responsibilities for the following year, and concluded the meeting by holding a liturgical service at the end of which he gave the blessing and benediction, and then all departed in peace.

During his life, Pakhom was the Supreme Head of all the Pakhomian monasteries.

The concern of Pakhom for others was not confined to his monks. It was a real Christian concern for all human beings. Because of it, he inserted in his 'constitution' clauses for the care of the sick and the needy, the strangers, the wayfarers, etc. The monks were enjoined to welcome anybody who knocked at the door of the monastery, wash his feet and look after his needs. Each monastery had a guest house close to the gate, within its walls, yet apart from the cells.<sup>23</sup>

201. The establishment of the first convent for women – organised along the same lines and governed by the same rules as the Pakhomian monasteries – came about when Mary, the sister of Pakhom came one day and tried to pay



him a visit. Arriving at the gate of her brother's monastery, she inquired after him. Pakhom sent her the following message with the doorkeeper: "Sufficient unto you to know that I am well. Search your heart diligently; if you feel inclined towards the service of God, tell me and I will ask the builders among the brethren to build a convent for you. I trust that many will come and share your life. Thus will you be the means for their salvation". Mary pondered these words and was moved to accept them. Thereupon St. Pakhom built for her a convent in the vicinity of Tabennisi near his own monastery. Those who flocked to her were many, and the same regulations were laid for them as for the monks. A special dress was designed for them. Rules for cooperation between the monks and nuns were laid down. If the nuns needed new cells, the brethren built them for them; and if the brethren needed new clothes or the repair of old ones, the sisters sewed them, and soon St. Pakhom assigned an old father, deeply knowledgeable in spiritual matters, to be the father-confessor for the nuns.

202. The mystic teachings of St. Pakhom are expressed clearly in the following excerpts. One day the brethren eagerly sought him and asked him to explain how it is that God grants to some the power to perform miracles. He straightway answered: "Do not think that performing miracles is a wonder – the real wonder is to perform miracles in the realm of the spirit. For, if you lead an idol-worshipper to the knowledge of Christ, you have resuscitated the dead; if you win a heretic to Orthodoxy you have opened the eyes of the blind; if you cause an evil person to repent you have healed a cripple; if you transform a miser into a generous person you have cured a withered hand; and if you transfigure a bad-tempered lout into a gentleman you have

cast out a devil. What more glorious powers can a man desire?”<sup>24</sup>

Pakhom impressed upon his monks that the greatest sin was that of despairing of God’s mercy; that wherever God is sought, He is found, saying: “Prefer no place to another, thinking I shall meet God here, or I shall meet Him there, for He is everywhere. Behold where Judas was and where he ended; where the thief was and what he attained.”<sup>25</sup>

Once, an old brother was ill enough to be put in the house assigned for the sick. Passion Week drew nigh and the sick brother expressed his desire to fast. But Pakhom said to him: “We live by the law of Grace, and not under the law of vengeance. You can fast this most Holy Week when God restores your health.”<sup>26</sup>

It was Abba Pakhom’s custom – after the evening public prayers – to spend an hour or two with all the brethren for discussion or discourse. One day he was asked how best to amend others. He answered: “Amending others is certainly a virtue greatly to be desired. Now if you see an erring brother, take him aside and gently exhort him. Should he fidget or grow impatient at your solicitation, stop immediately with a kindly smile. Behave as an expert doctor who is eager to clear away an abscess. When he finds the patient crying of pain at the dissecting knife, he ceases from scraping and resorts to a softening poultice. He repeats those mitigating means intermittently with the dissecting knife until he clears away the abscess with the minimum pain to the patient. Thus should it be with the spiritual healing: be patient, serene and long-suffering – knowing that anger never won a soul. Be sure that a teacher will never succeed in influencing his disciples until he acts accordingly. Then, and only then will he be followed and revered.”<sup>27</sup>

203. In the year 346 A.D. the plague decimated the whole land, invading the very monasteries. St. Pakhom, like a good shepherd, went about visiting the sick to comfort them, trying to alleviate their pain and praying for them. After the feast of the Ascension, he felt the symptoms of the disease. So he gathered his monks together and exhorted them to live by the law of cenobitism, and above all to keep the bond of love. Then, he rested in the peace of his Lord after spending a life of consecrated service and strenuous aspiration.<sup>28</sup>

204. The monastic rules of Pakhom were made known to the West by Abba Athanasius when he was in Treves, then in Rome during his first and second banishments. These were translated into Latin by Jerome in A.D. 404, and thus spread among the Italians. During the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century St. John Cassianus published a book in four volumes about the lives of the Egyptian Fathers, their regulations and their teachings. He, then tried to put into practice those teachings in the monasteries he founded in the south of France.

Another Western monk called Dionysius Erigenus (who died in A.D. 556) translated into Latin the biography of Abba Pakhom together with his regulations. By all these means, the impact of St. Pakhom was felt in the West and constituted a close link with the Coptic Church. "Monasticism never forgot that it originated in Egypt, and personal relations between the houses in the East and the West were frequent in the early centuries."<sup>29</sup>

In Ireland, the earliest monastic buildings were planned in small churches clustered round one another, thus presenting a most striking resemblance to similar buildings in Egypt. Irish monasticism was very active during its early centuries: by means of its activities, it spread throughout Western Britain and Northumbria, and penetrated into northern France, Switzerland, South Germany and Italy.<sup>30</sup>

But probably the deepest impact of Abba Pakhom on Europe was that exercised on the Benedictine Order. St. Benedict, the Italian saint, legislated the same laws concerning obedience, labour and orderliness – in some cases, almost word for word. And, as St. Benedict enjoyed great prestige among the Latins, the Pakhomian teachings, after which his were modelled, spread widely and rapidly. From then onwards, Western monasticism took on a new phase: a phase both spiritual and social in harmony with the human mystical monasticism of St. Pakhom.

If we trace the Pakhomian influence even farther down the centuries, we may say that among its results was the rise of the Cistercian and Carthusian Orders during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders in the Thirteenth. These orders were ultimately responsible for the rise of the Humanistic movement leading to the institution of the universities. Thus, the movement that was started by Abba Pakhom in Upper Egypt reverberated in the great spiritual and intellectual movements of Europe, and was the initial cause for raising in that same continent those sanctuaries of learning and of science wherein were preserved the noblest creations of human thought.<sup>31</sup>

F. 205. Theodorus was a blessed youth indeed, full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. At the age of twelve he began to show his inclination towards the meditative, worshipful life. His parents watched him half-concerned, half-happy, convinced that he was spiritually attuned in a very special way. Yet they deemed him too young for such spiritual soaring. When, for two years, he persisted in his meditation and his ascetism, they complied with his ardent desire to be a monk. Thereupon, he went to Latopolis where he met Pecusius – a venerable old monk – who took him to the

monastery of Pakhom. With eyes ever fixed on the man of God, Theodorus grew day by day in saintliness. He had his visions and his hours of inward illumination. These, he described to his spiritual father with the simplicity of a child. And so great was the love which bound them, that Theodorus was not only the inseparable disciple, but became the biographer of Pakhom.

In due time, this devoted disciple succeeded his teacher and became the Supreme Head of the Pakhomian monasteries.

206. A story about him says that some brethren came to him, accusing a brother of theft and insisting on dismissing him from the monastery. Theodorus tempered their anger by asking them to give him time to pray in quest of God's guidance. As he did so, he was forewarned by the spirit that the thief was another brother known for saintliness. This same brother was soon conscience-stricken; so he went to Theodorus and pleaded guilty. Theodorus told him, "My son, since you have confessed your sin, it is remitted. Your courage in declaring your guilt and the innocence of your brother intercedes for you. You are absolved". Then summoning the brother who had been falsely accused, Theodorus said to him: "My son, you have suffered deeply because of the false accusation against you. Your brethren were mistaken, but not God Who permitted such error that you may be thoroughly purged". Finally, Theodorus called the denunciators, gave them their stolen possession and said: Our God desires us to be merciful and to forgive our brethren seventy times seven. Forget this affair, I pray you, and remind yourselves that you are all in need of God's mercy".<sup>32</sup>

207. When Theodorus went unto his reward, the letter of condolence written by Abba Athanasius was the best eulogy he could get. In it he said: "I heard this very instant that the blessed Theodorus has been translated into the Mansions of Light. If his services were to end here, then indeed I would have mingled my tears with yours and wept bitterly. But we are certain that he still serves while delighting in eternal glory. Would to God that we come to a similar end. Would to God one of us conduct his frail bark like him to the haven of our celestial home. Brethren, greatly beloved and greatly desired, weep not over Theodorus, nor lament his passing; rather exert your powers – each one of you – to follow his exemplary life. As for you, beloved Orsisius, (the monk who was to become Supreme Head of the monasteries) now that Theodorus has rested in peace, bear the burden of guiding the brethren. Visit them in their monasteries; strengthen and edify them. While Theodorus was present in the body, the two of you shared the responsibility of shepherding the brethren. Now that he is absent, fulfil your duty doubly.

"To conclude, I entreat all the brethren to pray for the establishment of peace within the Church. Thanks be to God we were enabled to celebrate Easter and Pentecost in complete tranquility; and this benevolence of our Lord has overwhelmed us with joy. When you receive this letter, salute all the brethren in the name of my priests who share with me our condolence to you. I implore God to keep you all in good health, my brethren, dearly beloved and truly faithful.

Athanasius-By the Grace of God.<sup>33</sup>  
Bishop of the Church of Alexandria"

### *XIII. NOTES*

1. Helen Waddell. *The Desert Fathers*. p. 60.
2. Helen Waddell. *Introduction*. p.17.
3. Helen Waddell. p. 80; also in: *The Wit and Wisdom of the Christian Fathers of Egypt*. trans. from Syriac by W. Budge. B 1, p. 25.86.
4. E. White. *The history of the monasteries of Nitria and Scete*. pt. 3, p. 71.
5. Waddell. p.102.
6. *Ency. des Sciences Religieuses*. Under 'Macaire'. Also S. Soleiman *op. cit.* p. 509.
7. Barbier. *op. cit.* p. 243.
8. Amedee Thierry. *Revue des deux mondes*. May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1865.
9. Barbier. p. 24.
10. *Ency. des Sc. Rel.*, vol. III, p. 732.
11. W. Budge. (trans.) *Paradise of the Fathers*. vol. I, p: 40.
12. Manassa'1 Qommos. *op. cit.* p. 22.
13. P. Ch. d'Orleans: *op. cit.* vol.1, pp. 26-32.

14. W. Budge. *Paradise...* vol. I, p.153.
15. W. Budge. *Paradise ...* vol. I, pp.156-6.
16. W. Budga. *ibid.* vol. I, p. 1-44; also: M. E. Amelineau: *Etude Historique sur St. Pachome et le Cenobitisme Primitif dans la Haute Egypte d'apres les Monuments Coptes.* p. 306.
17. i.e. "the palms of Isis" – so-called because in ancient times the village was dedicated to the goddess Isis. It lies in the vicinity of Denderah, in the upper reaches of the Nile.
18. W. Budge. *Paradise ...* vol. I, pp. 144-6; also Barbier: *op. cit.* pp.121-3.
19. In his book *Irish Monasticism*, p. 38.
20. W. Budge. *Paradise ...* vol. I, p.146.
21. *Ency. Brit.*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., vol.18, p. 688.
22. *Ency. Brit.*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., vol.18, p. 688.
23. A.S. Atiya. Nash'at ur rahbana 'l Masihiya fi Misr (or 'The origin of Christian monasticism in Egypt') pub. in *Risalat Mari Mena*, Alexandria; 1948, pp.161-175.
24. Arabic Ms. No. 287 Hist., Coptic Museum; 'Abba Pakham Abush-Sharikah' ed. with comment by Fr. Abd'l-Masih al Mas udi 'l Baramusi. p. 66.
25. *Ibid.* pp. 117-18.



26. St. Pakhom. Arabic ms. No. 40 Hist., found in St. Mark's Church at Rosetta, and now kept in St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria p. 32.
27. Arabic Ms. No. 50 Hist. kept at the Library of the Coptic Papacy in Cairo p.117.
28. A.S. Atiya. *op. cit.* p.166.
29. G.H. Costigan. "Sculpture and painting in Coptic Art" pub. In 'Le Bulletin de l'Association ...' tome 3, p. 57.
30. *Ericy. des Sc. Rel.*, vol. III, p. 670.
31. A.S. Atiya, *op. cit.* p.179-181.
32. P. Ch. d'Orleans. *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 29-46.
33. *Ibid.* vol. •II, pp. 73-83.

**XIV. - A. PETROS II, THE SUCCESSOR OF  
ATHANASIUS**

- 208. Petros II consecrated Pope.
- 209. Emperor Valens persecutes him and his flock.
- 210. Arian seeming success an empty bauble.
- 211. Banishment of all Orthodox Bishops.
- 212. Moses the Egyptian and his defiant courage.
- 213. Petros II returns to Alexandria at death of Emperor Valens.
- 214. Theodosius succeeds Valens.

***B. A Mother unto many***

- 215. Theodora's childhood.
- 216. Spiritual aspiration.
- 217. Gracious motherhood.

A. 208. Petros was a priest of Alexandria and a close disciple of Athanasius the Apostolic. He had assimilated his zeal and intrepidity. When Athanasius needed someone to send to Asia Minor in order to reinstate the Orthodox Faith and confirm the faithful there, he selected him and commissioned him to fulfil that task. Having accomplished it, Petros returned to Alexandria and resumed his secretariat by the side of his illustrious teacher.

As soon as Athanasius rested in the Lord, the Copts lost no time in consecrating Petros his successor and 21<sup>st</sup> Head of the Church of Alexandria.

209. This immediate action on the part of the Copts infuriated Emperor Valens, and he decided to take his revenge on the new-elect and his electors. Thereupon, he

ordered the banishment of Abba Petros II, once more imposing an intruder on St. Mark's Chair by the name of Lucius. To safeguard his minion, he sent with him a contingent of soldiers in addition to the any in Egypt. Lucius thus entered into the Egyptian metropolis with confident composure.

History repeated itself, and the Copts and their Pope were again subjected to persecutions and to the harshest kind of treatment.

But once more St. Mark's Successor managed to elude his would-be persecutors and to hide in the home of one of the faithful, from whence he could undertake his ecclesiastic duties.

210. During this period, it seemed to many that Arianism was once more on the ascendance. Appearances, however, were illusory: the Arians, in spite of their political triumph, were far short of victory. "Now the Church knew herself better; and the Formula of Nicea was acknowledged to be the expression of the True Faith even by those who yielded to fear of constraint."<sup>1</sup>

211. Frustrated by his inability to lay hands on Abba Petros, Emperor Valens ordered the banishment of all the bishops who confessed the Consubstantial Redeemer. Among these Orthodox bishops was Abba Melas of Rhinocorrura.<sup>2</sup> The soldiers sent to escort him to exile arrived one evening when the venerable man of God was in Church cleaning the lamps and lighting them. Deeming this work below the dignity of a bishop, the soldiers asked him to lead them to Abba Melas. He took them to his house, assuring them that the bishop will be duly told of their arrival. He prepared supper for them and waited on them himself. When they had eaten to satiety, he disclosed to

them his identity. Touched to the quick by his humility and his kindness, they offered to give him the chance to escape, but smiling benignly at them, he refused their offer and declared that he would rather be exiled for the Truth than enjoy freedom.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of the legitimate Pope, Lucius, supported by the Civil authorities, continued his atrocities. Meeting with resolute refusal everywhere, he infringed on the silence of the desert; his soldiers violated the very cells of the solitaires and dragged them out, beating some and exiling others. Even such an outstanding saint as Abba Macari was not spared, but was banished to the island of Philae.

212. The attempts to break the spirit of the Copts and impose Arianism on them were vain and futile. This truth was forced upon the authorities with a shocking incident. It so happened that there lived in the Eastern Desert a monk who had great renown among the tribes of that region. He was called Moses the Egyptian.

A few years before Valens had assumed the purple, those desert tribes had all coalesced under the sway of a queen called Mauvia. Their coalition made them an irresistible force, and they became a thorn in the Emperor's side, so he sought to sign a treaty with them. Queen Mauvia consented to come to terms with him on one condition—that Moses the Egyptian be consecrated Bishop for her people. She, herself, was still a pagan, but had re-echoed her people's wish, and they all adopted Christianity since it had been first preached to them by Origen. So eager was Valens to safeguard the Eastern border of his Empire, that he readily acquiesced and ordered his men to facilitate the journey of Moses to Alexandria where he would be consecrated. Arriving in the city Moses found that all the Orthodox

bishops were in exile, and that only Lucius was there. Facing him and his armed men, he emphatically declared: "I am not worthy of this honour of being ordained bishop; but if necessity is laid upon me, I would still categorically refuse to be ordained by a blasphemer against our Lord and an intruder on the most honoured Chair of St. Mark." This public affront enraged the transgressors, but they had to swallow their pride as they could not over-rule the imperial order. All they could do was to expend every effort to try and convince Moses to accept the consecration administered by Lucius, but all their efforts were fruitless.

At the same time, Queen Mauvia insisted on having the man of her people's choice. Finally Moses was taken to the nearest of the rightful exiled bishops, and-in spite of the tyrants - consecrated Bishop by them amidst joyful triumph of his people.

Once consecrated by those whom he esteemed, Bishop Moses the Egyptian happily joined his people. He set himself to the service of those who had elected him, shepherding them in purity, equity and righteousness all his life. Through his constancy and his example, he was able also to win the Queen to the Orthodox Faith.<sup>4</sup>

213. Despite torments and trials, the Egyptians remained true to their Creed, and clamoured for the return of their exiled Pope and bishops. Finally toward the end of A.D. 378, Abba Petros II courageously returned to Alexandria, and his people went out to meet him with great joy. At this popular manifestation, Lucius took fright and fled to Constantinople. Valens at the time was entangled in the pernicious war with the Persians which proved fatal to him. After his death Lucius lost his mainstay, and Abba Petros settled peacefully among his people. The exiled bishops all returned to their Sees.

214. The throne of Valens was inherited by Theodosius who was appalled by the state of the Church of Constantinople. His predecessors leaning towards Arianism had dragged It into endless internecine dissensions, and it needed to be regenerated. He therefore appealed to Abba Petros, who responded to him by sending some Orthodox teachers from Alexandria to Constantinople to help in restoring it. They worked under the guidance of one of Orthodoxy's staunchest champions, the Great Gregory of Nazianzus, surnamed Theologus (329-389). When he was called to the capital by the Emperor, he responded heartily, and together with the Alexandrian teachers and those whom he picked, laboured so zealously and well that the Orthodox party gathered strength speedily.<sup>5</sup>

Petros II spent the rest of his life in endeavouring to uplift his people. He guided the Church through storm and strife, but God granted him to reach the haven of peace before releasing him from the bonds of the body.

B. 215. Amid the trials and tribulations, the Faith of the Egyptians burned like an intense beacon. Rufinus of Aquila witnessed to them saying: "But of their humility, their courtesy, their loving kindness, what am I to say? Nowhere have I seen love so in flower, nowhere so quick compassion or hospitality so eager. Nowhere have I seen such meditation upon Holy Writ or understanding of It, or such discipline of sacred learning: well-nigh might you judge each one of them a doctor in the wisdom of God."<sup>6</sup>

One of those who thus radiated the Love of Christ was the blessed Theodora. She was an only child of wealthy Alexandrian parents, and was sent to the School of that metropolis. In their eagerness to have her married, they showered her with fine jewels and smart clothes, discussing

with her the possible suitors. All their efforts were met with resolute refusal for she had set her heart on higher service.

216. When she received her heritage she used it to build a church on the outskirts of Alexandria, and on its top she built a room for herself. Following an ascetic lifestyle, she ate frugally and wore simple clothes; and spent her time feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, the stranger and the imprisoned. The more the needy came to her, the greater was her charity.

After many years, she entreated Abba Athanasius to consecrate her as a nun. On examination, he also honoured her with the Schema. This investiture so flooded her with Divine Grace that she was counted worthy of heavenly visions and of discerning spirits. In addition, she was given insight into the human soul, enabling her to succour all who sought her help in conquering their inward conflicts.

217. After years of such devoted service Theodora was elected Amma (mother) to many sisters in a convent near Alexandria. She taught them in earnestness and meekness of soul; maintaining that prayer, fasting and love were the only weapons of God's Athletes against the assaults of evil.

Throughout her long life, she strove to the utmost to keep aflame the Torch of Christian love and service.<sup>7</sup>

#### *XIV. NOTES*

1. J. Neale: *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 20?.
2. On the boundary between Egypt and Phoenicia (Lebanon).
3. Ch. d'Orleans: *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp.150-2.
4. *Ibid.* vol. II, pp. 283-5; Moehler, vol. III, p. 280.
5. *Ency. Brit.* 11<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. XII, p. 563.
6. Helen Waddell: *op. cit.*, p. 75.
7. W. Budge: *The Book of the Saints ...* vol. III, pp. 801-2; as Sadig 'L Amin, (Arabic), vol. II, pp. 77-8.



## **XV. THE SECOND ECUMENICAL COUNCIL**

### **A. A New Elect.**

218. Timotheos, a priest of Alexandria, succeeds Abba Petros II.
219. Second Ecumenical Council convoked at Constantinople.
220. Council condemns heresy and adds to Nicene Creed statement about the Holy Spirit.
221. Other questions discussed by Council.
222. Timotheos returns to Alexandria.

### **B. A Highway-man becomes a Saint.**

223. The Divine Spark in the midst of darkness.
224. Moses is guided by the spirit to go to the Natrun valley.
225. He is ordained priest, then Abbot.
226. Some anecdotes depicting the spiritual heights he reached.
227. Moses receives the crown of martyrdom.

A. 218. When the Chair of Alexandria became vacant at the death of Abba Petros II, Timotheos, another disciple of Athanasius, and an illustrious priest and teacher was elected to fill it. He had distinguished himself as one of those who had been sent to Constantinople to help in rehabilitating its Church. For his various faithful services he was consecrated the twenty-second successor of St. Mark the Apostle.

219. At that time another heresy was being proclaimed by Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople, who had announced his denial of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Bishops of the Orthodox Faith, who considered themselves trustees of the Apostolic legacy, exchanged views on this subject, and came to the conclusion that another ecumenical council was imperative: Emperor Theodosius himself shared their view concerning the need for calling such an assembly and hence issued an invitation to all Bishops to convene in Constantinople in May of the year 381 A.D. One hundred and fifty of them responded to his invitation, and their meeting together constituted the second ecumenical Council. Emperor Theodosius attended the inaugural session and gave an address in which he welcomed the members and expressed his joy at their assembly.<sup>1</sup>

220. The Council of Constantinople discussed a number of matters of interest to all churches, top priority being given to the examination of the Macedonian heresy. After a thorough consideration, it was unanimously condemned, and in consequence, the Council expanded the Nicene Creed by adding to it the clause concerning the Holy Spirit, and thus putting it in the form still upheld to the present day by all Orthodox Churches. The expansion included also the affirmation of the faith in the Church Universal, the oneness

of baptism arid in awaiting the resurrection of the dead and life eternal.

221. One of the principles discussed and re-affirmed at this Council was the principle – stated clearly in the fourteenth canon of the Apostolic regulations, forbidding the transfer of a bishop from the See over which he was originally ordained to another See. The text of the canon affirms that "it is not permitted that a bishop leave his diocese for another even if he be constrained to do so, unless there be a very good reason for that, such as his greater usefulness to the other See. In such a case the decision must not be made by him alone but through the judgment and exhortations of numerous bishops."<sup>2</sup> At the Council of Nicea, this principle was inserted as the 15<sup>th</sup> of its twenty canons, on the grounds that sacerdotal honour is granted by God, that episcopal dignity is not dependent on the magnitude of a See, and that, consequently, a bishop of an unknown See need not aspire to one that is of greater importance or renown<sup>3</sup> since all are of equal dignity.

There was a reason for raising this whole question once more at the Council of Constantinople. Macedonius having been condemned, some members were inclined to replace him by Gregory, the Theologoc. But Gregory had already been ordained Bishop over a little-known town in Asia Minor called Sazima, and this raised the question of the transfer. The Theologoc was a man of deep spiritual insight and had served the imperial city with great zeal; thus there would have been justification for his transfer.<sup>4</sup> Timothcos of Alexandria, however, thought that it would be preferable not to break the Apostolic rule, and in a spirit of brotherly love counselled Gregory to remain constant to it. The Theologoc willingly accepted this advice, for he "considered the head of Alexandria the head of the world."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore he

convinced the dissenters of the wisdom of Timotheos' counsel. Consequently Nectarius was ordained Bishop over Constantinople.

222. When the Council came to an end, Timotheos and his delegation returned to Alexandria. He and his people enjoyed the peace extended by Emperor Theodosius. In this peaceful atmosphere, he built several churches, won back to Orthodoxy many of the Arians, and wrote several epistles, most of which have been lost. He also wrote the biographies of a number of the saintly monks.

In a rescript of Emperor Theodosius written to Optaius, an imperial officer, the Alexandrian Pope is spoken of in the highest terms. His great humility and his contempt of worldly praise are especially noted.<sup>6</sup>

B. 223. One of the most remarkable men who lived during the times of Abba Timotheos was a man who came to be known in Coptic Church history as St. Moses the Black.

Originally, Moses had been the slave of a high-ranking Egyptian nobleman, but having been terribly unruly, his owner could not stand him and dispensed with him.

Delighting in his new state, he took himself to a deserted place, gathered around him some seventy robbers and became the terror of the region. Gigantic in stature, his physical force was more like a brute than a human being, and so he killed and pillaged ruthlessly.<sup>7</sup>

Yet even while he moved in abysmal sin the Divine Spark scintillated within him. At times he would look up to the sun and murmur: "O sun, if you are God tell me. O God Whom I do not know, declare Thyself to me."

224. One day, as he thus meditated, he heard a Voice saying: "Arise, go to the desert of Wadi-n-Natron where

you will find holy man to tell you of God." Upon hearing this voice, he got up directly, buckled on his sword by sheer habit, and went to the hallowed spot. When he first entered it, he met Isidorus, priest of the monks of Scete of whom the brethren said that whenever he spoke to them, he invariably repeated: "Forgive your brother, that you also may be forgiven."<sup>8</sup> As his eyes fell on him, Isidorus felt alarmed. Moses hastened to calm his fears by relating to him the cause of his coming. Overjoyed, Isidorus immediately led him to Abba Macari who took him under his tutelage. Moses responded so readily and happily that he was first baptised, then adorned with the Schema. He was also instructed to live alone in a cell in the vicinity of his teacher. In this seclusion, he strained all his powers after spiritual excellence hoping thereby to atone for his past sins.

As he fasted and prayed, and meditated on God's mercy, the Evil one did not leave him in peace; he depicted before his horrified eyes all his past wickedness. At times, the temptation was so fierce that he well nigh fell back. At such trials, he would go to Isidorus for counsel. The saintly priest would say to him: "Be not distressed, these are but the pangs of your spiritual birth. Continue in your striving till delivery is attained." Encouraged and comforted, Moses would return to his cell.

225. The earnest striving of the one-time-highwayman finally triumphed, and he became so filled with Divine Grace that the brethren chose him to be a priest over them. After being ordained, he became Abbot to five hundred monks. One day as he sat discoursing with them, some chance passers-by reviled him, but he answered them not. Later on, he was asked by his monks if he was troubled by the reviling. Moses answered: "Although I was troubled, I did not speak, because the perfection of a monk consists of two parts: the

impassibility of the bodily senses and that of the senses of the soul. Impassibility of the first senses is effected when he is reviled yet restrains his tongue despite inward agitation; as for the impassibility of the soul, it takes place when he who is abused feels no anger within."<sup>9</sup>

226. Moses realised at last that love was the crown of all spiritual virtues and he tried to practise it towards everyone. One day, it happened that a brother was found guilty of a serious transgression, and the elder brethren assembled to judge him, and sent word to Moses to attend their meeting. On his way to the assembly, he trudged along carrying on his back an old basket full of sand. Astounded, the brethren asked him: "What is this, holy father?!" He replied: "My sins are trailing behind me and I do not see them, and I come to judge another." Hearing this, they forgave their brother, told him to go and sin no more, and left him in peace.<sup>10</sup>

One day, some men came to visit Abba Moses. Wanting to boil some lentils for them, he found that he had no water. He walked out under the open sky, then came back to them. He repeated this action several times, when lo, it began to rain. Immediately, he took out some of his utensils and collected the falling drops. During the meal, one of them asked: "Why were you going out and in?" He answered: "I went out telling God that He guided me to this place and is therefore responsible for supplying me with the water I need for my guests."<sup>11</sup>

227. Once Moses and some of his monks went to visit Abba Macari. While they were sitting together, Macari said: "I see one of you wearing the crown of martyrdom." Moses answered: "Perchance it is I for it is written 'they that use the sword shall perish by the sword'."<sup>12</sup> Sometime later a horde of nomads raided the monastery. In that raid he,

together with seven of his monks, attained the crown of martyrdom.

"Consider, O my friends, the effect of repentance: it has transformed a slave who was a thief, an adulterer and an assassin, into a priest, a comforter and counsellor, a saint whom God endowed with the gift of performing miracles, and whom the Church remembers in the Liturgy."<sup>13</sup>

## XV. NOTES

1. Hefele: *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 191; K. Macaires: "La Constitution Divine de L'Eglise" pp. 277-280.
2. Hefele, vol. I, pp. 620-1; Guettee: *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 408.
3. Guettee, vol.111, p. 1 19; "La Primaute du Pape" by a Dominican Monk, p. 373.
4. Guettee, vol. III, pp. 474-83.
5. In No. 21 of his own epistles.
6. Neale: *op. cit.* vol.1, p. 210.
7. Budge: *Paradise ...* vol. I, p. 215.
8. Budge: *The Wit and Wisdom of the Christian Fathers of Egypt*, Bk.1, p.130, s.430.
9. *Ibid.*, Bk. 2, p. 427, s. 668.
10. *Ibid.*, Bk.1, p.161, s. 542; H. Waddell: *op. cit.*, p.135.
11. Copto-Arabic Ms. No. 469 Hist., Coptic Mus. folio 362r-386r ( 13 60 A. D).
12. Matt. 27:57.
13. As-Sadig'L Amin ... vol. II, pp. 204-6.



**XVI. AN ORPHAN FROM MEMPHIS BECOMES  
23d ALEXANDRIAN POPE**

- A. 228. How Theophilus and his sister became wards of Abba Athanasius.
- 229. His ordination as priest and then election as Pope.
- 230. His discovery of a treasure and its consequences.
- 231. By permission of Emperor Theodosius, he transforms pagan temples into Churches, beginning with the Serapium.
- 232. The mutually beneficial friendship between him and the Bishop of the Pentapolis.
- 233. Isidorus and the 'Tall' brothers.
- 234. Laws of Abba Theophilus.
- 235. Theophilus in historical perspective.
- 236. Prominent contemporaries of Abba Theophilus.
- B. 237. The fine arts in Christian Egypt.

A. 228. In the line of succession to the chair of St. Mark, a man by the name of Theophilus became the twenty-third Pope of the See of Alexandria. His coming to this supreme honour was, indeed, one of the countless proofs of God's Providence. Theophilus and an only sister, both born in Memphis,<sup>1</sup> had lost both parents at a very tender age. An Ethiopian slave woman who had been nursing them since their birth, took charge of them and assumed responsibility for their upbringing. When they both reached adolescence; the nurse decided it would be in their best interest to take them to live in Alexandria so that they might attend school there. It was a wise decision, and though she did not know it then, it determined the destiny of both Theophilus and his sister.

One Sunday she escorted the two children to Church, and Providence so willed that the celebrant of the Liturgy on that day would be the illustrious Athanasius. As he scanned his flock during the general blessing, his eagle eyes noted the two children with the Ethiopian woman. Somehow, he felt an inward urge to find out who they were, so he sent a deacon to ask them to stay after the Service. Upon interrogating them and discovering that they were orphans, he took them under his tutelage then and there. He entrusted the girl to some devout women to educate her; and when she attained a marriageable age, he had her married to a young man whom he knew well. She was destined to become the mother of one of the greatest men who ever adorned the Chair of St. Mark: namely Kyrillos, the "Pillar of Faith" and the Pope who succeeded her brother.

229. As for Theophilus, he became one of the many disciples of Athanasius. Endowed with a keen intelligence, he assimilated from his apostolic teacher much of both his erudition and his zeal. He was therefore appointed one of his secretaries and at the same time ordained a priest. In this clerical position, he displayed a learning and an eloquence that won for him popular favour. In consequence, when Abba Timotheos died, Theophilus was elected and consecrated the twenty-third Pope of the Church of Alexandria.

230. Abba Theophilus expressed his zeal in a keen desire to erect new churches. One day, as he sat in the garden of his teacher, Athanasius, he surveyed the panorama before him and perceived a discordant note. A few paces away, some mounds scarred the scenery. It struck him then that his great teacher had wished to build a church in the names of John the Baptist and the prophet Elijah, and it would be most

appropriate to tear down the mounds and replace them with that church. A rich and devout woman happened to be among those who were visiting him at the time. No sooner had he expressed the idea than she volunteered to pay the cost of removing the mounds. While they were being removed, the workers delighted in discovering a valuable treasure beneath them. They advised the Pope, and he, in turn advised the Emperor. Theodosius came to Alexandria especially to see the treasure, and finding it of great worth, decided to share it with Abba Theophilus. Delighted with his share, "the ineffable Theophilus"<sup>2</sup> used it to build new churches and monasteries. The church, desired by Abba Athanasius, was the first among several others to rise as a result. He also embellished the church of St. Mena of "majestic renown."<sup>3</sup>

Among the monasteries he undertook to build is one of great historical value and standing to this day in the desert adjacent to the city of Assiut in Upper Egypt. It is called "al-Moharraq" monastery, and was constructed on a site hallowed by the stay of the Holy Family during their sojourn in Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

The oldest building within its enclosure is the Church of the Blessed Virgin. On the eve of his intention to journey that he may consecrate it, Abba Theophilus had a dream in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to him and told him, "How can you consecrate a spot which my Son sanctified by His very presence bodily?" Theophilus replied: "Most honoured Queen, I did not know it. But since you have deigned to tell me this fact, will you condescend to describe to me the whole journey that I may write it down for my people?" The Holy Virgin graciously acquiesced.<sup>5</sup>

231. While emperor Theodosius was in Alexandria, Abba Theophilus convinced him of the sagacity of transforming the

old pagan temples into churches. He accepted and forthwith an imperial edict was issued to that effect.<sup>6</sup>

The first temple to be transformed was the Serapium. Its colossal dimensions comprised three temples for the worship of Serapis, Isis, and Anubis.<sup>7</sup> This dream in marble was also the sanctuary of knowledge: it comprised the famous "Library of Alexandria," as well as a Museum.

After the work of transformation was set in motion, the section which served as the inner sanctuary of Serapis was modified to become the church. Removing the colossus of Serapis, the workers found that it had carved on its base, a cross encircled by hieroglyphs meaning "the life to come."<sup>8</sup> This symbolic inscription worked like magic in transforming many a pagan into a Christian.

232. In conformity with his zeal for the extension of God's kingdom; Abba Theophilus maintained a keen interest in the Christian community of North Africa, in the five towns of the Pentapolis. This community was part of the See of St. Mark's Chair, and constituted a flourishing Church that kept in touch with Alexandria, and looked to it for inspiration. During the times of Abba Theophilus, it enjoyed the leadership of a bishop called Bishop Synesius whose vigorous and attractive personality widened his circle of contacts. A close friendship developed between him and St. Mark's Successor a fact substantiated by numerous letters exchanged between them and still extant. This fraternal fellowship helped both the Pope and his Suffragan<sup>8</sup> to serve the Church in greater measure.<sup>10</sup>

233. The activities of Abba Theophilus in church expansion demanded the cooperation of leaders from among his flock. He was blessed with having such leaders who were eager to harness their talents to the service of Christ.

Among them was an ascetic of great repute for his excessive charity, whose name was Isidorus. Having retired to the desert in his early youth, he became, through constant training and practice, an astute Christian, and his virtues shone in splendour. When the hospital adjoining the Church in Alexandria was in need of an administrator, the Pope assigned this responsibility to him.

Working in the metropolis gave Isidorus ample opportunity to serve not only the sick but also the strangers and the needy.<sup>11</sup>

While in the monastery, a close tie of Christian love had developed between this wondrous man and four brothers invariably described as ‘The Tall’ brothers because of their stature. They and their two sisters had all embraced the ascetic life and striven after spiritual excellence; and now they were all among the staunch supporters of Abba Theophilus.<sup>12</sup> In appreciation of their virtue and their erudition, the Pope consecrated one of them Bishop of Hermopolis (in middle Upper Egypt).

234. During his life Abba Theophilus passed a number of canons – or Church laws – that are considered among his valuable contributions to posterity. One of these concerned the choice of priests for specific churches, and he asserted that the final decision on such a choice should ultimately rest with the people he is going to serve. To this day this democratic principle is generally accepted in the Coptic Church.

235. Abba Theophilus-like a number of other Egyptian Fathers – is still a subject of interest to Church historians. Some liken him to a despotic Pharaoh, while others regarded him as a Church leader of great ability and energy.

In his history of the Egyptian Saints, Pere Ch. d'Orleans began speaking of him by sharply criticising him, but ended his section on him thus: "To counterbalance these defects the most serious qualities adorned him to the envy of others. He was characterised by considerable knowledge, indefectible faith, a rare talent for administration, an indomitable energy, and a perfect integrity of conduct. Those who are troubled by any aspects in the behaviour of Theophilus must remember that no man, however high his position may be, is immune from error ..."<sup>14</sup>

The life of Abba Theophilus ended in peace and serenity, and he passed away like a candle which flickers then is snuffed out. It has been pertinently said of him that "he died an upright man, and is reckoned among the chief doctors of the church Universal."<sup>15</sup>

236. Among the 'Teachers of the Church' who were contemporaries of Abba Theophilus, and who were so prominent that they greatly enriched the Church legacy, the following three especially deserve to be singled out:-

1. *Abba Pishoi*, a man of exceeding saintliness whom the Coptic Liturgy describes as "the perfect man, the Christ's beloved." To this day, one of the four monasteries still adorning the Natrun Valley in the Western desert bears his name, and numerous stories testifying to his holiness are recorded in the Coptic Synaxarium and other Church histories.<sup>16</sup>

2. *Abba Yoannis the Short*, another saint mentioned in the Coptic Liturgy as well as in the Synaxarium.<sup>17</sup> In commemoration of him, a number of monasteries and churches bearing his name were built throughout Egypt. However, all of them with just one exception were

destroyed or fell into ruins. The one remaining to this day is in a small town that also bears the saint's name and is located in the vicinity of Mallawi (the ancient Arsinoe) in middle Upper Egypt.

2. *Abba Paphnuti*, an outstanding Egyptian ascetic who was also a writer. He gained special renown because he became the biographer of the monks, both those who preceded him and those who were his contemporaries.

B. 237. At this point in the story of the Copts, it seems appropriate to mention the development of the art that came to be distinguished later as Coptic art.

As already mentioned, the Copts were the descendants of the ancient Egyptians, a point that must be frequently emphasised so that it will not be forgotten. Over a period of three centuries after Christ, these people had adopted Christianity in spite of all the fierce upheavals which shook their country intermittently for the sake of breaking their faith. Furthermore the artistic spark within their collective consciousness had not been extinguished. It had been rooted so deeply into civilisation, already thousands of years old, which they had inherited, that it had occasion to flower whenever a sensitive and talented individual responded to it. And so there was no lack of artists in the country. There were painters, sculptors and craftsmen; textile workers, brass engravers and wood carvers. During the Ptolemaic period and through the first two of three Christian centuries the various foreign influences affected Egyptian art and could be detected through the themes the Egyptian artists used even when the dominant features were definitely those of their ancient heritage. They were subtly interwoven with them. However, this happened only in an interim period,

for gradually foreign influences faded away and Egyptian art became purely Egyptian and in time fiercely nationalistic. The inspiration drawn from the ancient Egyptian religion was replaced by that drawn from Christianity, and Christian-Egyptian art came to be known (and still is known) as Coptic Art.

Like their forefathers, Coptic artists were preoccupied with the hereafter, and continued to use symbolic themes. One of the favourite images was the struggle between Good and Evil – or the ancient battle between Horus and Set, portrayed in the light of the New Faith.

Together with symbolism, Coptic art was decorative and didactic. “More than anything else, it reflected in its images the different beliefs, philosophical theories and conceptions of the universe and its Creator.”<sup>18</sup>



## XVI. NOTES

1. About 40 kilometres south of Cairo, this was the oldest capital of Pharaonic Egypt. It has now been reduced to the status of a simple village.
2. This is how Abba Theophilus is described by the French writer Pere Ch. d'Orleans in his book "Les Saints de l'Egypte." Vol. 11, p. 619.
3. Ward-Perkins, Christian antiquities of the Cyrenaican Pentapolis. Pub. In *Le Bulletin de la Societe d'archaeologie Copte*. Tome ix (1943) pp. 132-3.
4. Matt. 3:13-15.
5. W. Budge. Legends of Our Lady Mary the Perpetual Virgin and her Mother Hannah – including "The history of the Virgin Mary as told by Her to Theophilus Patriach of Alexandria." (A. Folio 90al, Brit. Mus. Orient. No. 604, Fol. 5a and No. 605 Fol. 162a) pp. 61-2; and "The narrative of the Virgin Mary as told by Herself to Timothy Patriach of Alexandria" (Brit. Museum Ms. Orient. No. 604 Fol. 25b ff) p.99.
6. In: *Le Bulletin ...* Tome VI (1940) pp. 161-7 in a reprinted article entitled "Les Monuments Coptes d'apres le Pere Michel Jullien." The article had been written during his visit to Egypt in 1902. In it he asserts that the Copts never destroyed the age-old temples, but rather conserved them that they may transform them into churches.

7. Breccia: “Alexandrea ad Egyptum” p. 97; P. d’Orleans, *op. Cit.* Vol. P. 405; Sozomen B VIII s. 15; Socrates B V ss. 16-17; Bufinus B II ss. 22-30; Theodoret B V s. 2; Aptonius: “Description de l’Acropole d’Alexandrie”; K. Macaire: “Etude Nouvelle Sur le Serapeum d’Alexandrie” p. 36’ Guettee. *Op. Cit.* Vol. IV, pp. 93-4 and the detailed footnotes on these same pages and vol. V, pp. 472-2.
8. Neale: *ip. Cit.* Vol. 1, p. 213, where he says: “Some Western historians were inclined to see in this description, the imagination of Egyptian writers. Recent discoveries in the Yucatan have substantiated this so-called Egyptian Imagination”.
9. A term applied to any bishop in relation to the Archbishop or Metropolitan who is his superior.
10. W. Perkins: *op. Cit.* Tome IX (1943) p. 124.
11. Pere Ch. d’Orleans, vol. 1, pp. 138-49.
12. W. Budge. *Paradise...* vol. I, pp. 89-91.
13. Ency. des Sciences Rel. vol. XII, p. 101.
14. *In* his book “Les Saints ...” vol. I, p. 144.
15. es-Seifi: *ad-Dilala’l lami’a.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. P. 117.
16. Coptic Synaxarium. In Arabic. Vol. II, p. 246.

17. Coptic Synaxarium. In Arabic. Vol. I, p. 87.
18. G.H. Costigan. "Sculpture and Painting in Coptic Art". Pub. In 'Le bulletin d'Archeologie Copte.' T. III (1937), p. 58.

## ***XVII. GREATER STRIVINGS***

- A. *Kyrillos, the 'Pillar of Faith'*
- B. *Shenouda the Archimandrite*
- C. *By the Waters of Jordan*

- A. 238. Kyrillos, the 'Pillar of Faith', succeeds Abba Theophilus.
- 239. Refutes Julian's essays.
- 240. The rise of the Nestorian heresy.
- 241. Kyrillos strongly defends Orthodoxy against Nestorianism.
- 242. Exchange of letters between Kyrillos and Nestorius.
- 243. Council of Alexandria.
- 244. Kyrillian letters to a number of personalities.
- 245. Second Alexandrian Council.
- 246. Nestorius rouses Emperor against Kyrillos.
- 247. Emperor convokes third Ecumenical Council.
- 248. Kyrillos sails to Ephesus with delegation.
- 249. Aggressiveness of Nestorius.
- 250. Delay of John of Antioch.
- 251. Triple summons of Council refused by Nestorius.
- 252. Inaugural session.
- 253. Message from Bishop of Carthage.
- 254. Ephesian populace.
- 255. Two Kyrillian letters to clergy and people of Constantinople.
- 256. Late arrival of John of Antioch in Ephesus.

- 257. Antiochene Conventicle.
- 258. Interception of Council's letters.
- 259. Arrival of Roman delegates.
- 260. Unanimous condemnation of Nestorius.
- 261. Council's letter to Constantinople.
- 262. Examination of Antiochene verdict.
- 263. Ephesian Council's Creed.
- 264. Treachery of Irenaeus.
- 265. Kyrillian letters to Constantinople.
- 266. Dalmatius, the Solitary, meets the Emperor.
- 267. Imperial invitation to the two parties.
- 268. Ordination of Maximianus Bishop of Constantinople.
- 269. Letter of Xystus on Kyrillos.
- 270. Persistent antagonism of John of Antioch.
- 271. Towards reconciliation.
- 272. Joy of reconciliation.
- 273. Continued Kyrillian striving.
- 274. Death of Kyrillos and his assessment.

A. 238. In the year 412, when the death of Abba Theophilus left the Chair of St. Mark vacant, the man who succeeded him was one who achieved high rank in Church history, and upon whom were conferred descriptive titles of honour such as "the Daring Lion", "the Burnished Lamp", "the Great", and more specifically "the Pillar of the Faith".

He was deemed worthy of these titles because of the forcefulness of his character, his exceeding zeal for Orthodoxy, and his prolific writings in its defence and its exposition. This man was Kyrillos the First, the twenty-fourth Pope of the Church of Alexandria. The English

version of his name is Cyril, given here for the sake of those who would like to read more about him in any of the English-language historical sources. In this story, however, Kyrillos, the Coptic version of his name, will be used for the sake of consistency.

Kyrillos was none other than the nephew of Theophilus, his predecessor. He was thirty-six years old when he was unanimously elected to take the helm of his Church. In describing his character and his personality the writer of the 'History of the Patriarchs'<sup>1</sup> says that "he walked with head high, eyes alert, and a decided air. His words were concise, clear, penetrating and winsomely warm. He combined in his character sincere piety and sprightliness, affability coupled with intransigence towards heretics and a constant readiness to refute their quibblings."

As a lad, Kyrillos had been sent by his uncle to live in the monastery of St. Macari, where he had the opportunity of assimilating the divine wisdom of the desert Fathers. With lightning perception and eager attentiveness, he had concentrated on his spiritual preceptors. Moreover, he was endowed with such grace and such eagle-like intelligence that he could retain in his memory whatever he read. After having acquired all the education the desert could give, Kyrillos returned to Alexandria where his uncle ordained him priest. "When he stood up to chant the Scriptures in Church, no man wished him to hold his peace because of the sweetness of his voice."<sup>2</sup>

239. No sooner had Abba Kyrillos been consecrated Pope than he dedicated all his powers to the defence of the Church. Among the favourite readings of the young people of Alexandria at the time were ten essays that had

been written by Emperor Julian after his apostasy. Kyrillos directly set himself to refute them in terms that were clear, strong and convincing. From that time onwards, he carried on his writing activities, and the scribes of Alexandria were kept busy copying by hand his sparkling epistles, and forceful books.<sup>3</sup>

240. One of the main causes that motivated Abba Kyrillos to do so much writing was the rise, during his times, of a new interpretation of the mystery of the Incarnation which, in the light of the Nicene Creed and of the Orthodox faith was a heresy.<sup>4</sup> The promulgator of this interpretation was Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople. According to the Nestorian concept, Christ was two separate persons, the one divine and beyond the reach of human frailty, and the other human and susceptible to all the fragility of the flesh. The divine Christ could neither suffer nor die, and therefore, on the Cross it was the human Christ alone who suffered and died apart from the divine Christ.

241. Kyrillos could neither accept this interpretation nor keep quiet about it. In his Paschal letters, special epistles to his own as well as other churches, and in full-length books, he expounded the Orthodox doctrine of the indivisible union of the divine and human natures of Christ, and how this was the faith that was taught both by the Scriptures and the Nicene Fathers, and to which all true believers should adhere. One of the metaphors Kyrillos used to illustrate his defence was that of the iron molten in an excessively high degree of heat. In that state the iron and the heat were united into one, and though their substances were two, their union was complete without mixing, nor fusion nor change. No one could

either separate or divide them. Such were the two natures of the Son of God.

A further point made by Nestorius and strongly contested by Kyrillos related to the blessed Virgin Mary. The Orthodox believers glorified and honoured her by calling her the “Theotokos” or “Mother-of-God”. Nestorius had spoken out against this title, and here, again, Kyrillos made his stand crystal clear. “I am astounded”, he said in one of his letters, “that some can hesitate to call the Blessed Virgin ‘Theotokos’. If Jesus Christ is God, it follows that His mother is the ‘Mother’ who bore Him forever. This is what the Apostles taught us and the doctrine of our Fathers. Not that the nature of the Word originated with Mary – but because within her was formed the sacred Body to which the Word was hypostatically united we exclaim with John the Evangelist, ‘the Word was made flesh’. And just as the human mother, has no share in creating the soul of her child, yet is considered the mother of the whole person, and not merely the mother of his physical nature; so it is with Mary who is the Mother of Christ in His entirety and hence is indeed the Mother-of-God.”<sup>5</sup>

242. The letters and writings of Kyrillos circulated far and wide in the Christian world, edifying and thrilling the Orthodox believers. And although he did not specifically mention Nestorius by name in them, nor make any allusions to what was happening in Constantinople, the anger of Nestorius was nevertheless greatly aroused and he gave expression to this anger by writing a personal letter to the successor of St. Mark, chiding him for his outspokenness against him.

The Alexandrian Pope hastened to answer him. It was not against him as a person that he had spoken out.



Rather was he fulfilling his duty as a shepherd responsible for leading his flock into the right path. He then expounded the Orthodox Doctrine to Nestorius, told him to search the Scriptures wherein he would find it clearly supported and then urged him to cease promulgating an idea which was tantamount to blasphemy. He then added, "... you have no power to fight against God Who was crucified for us in truth; and died in the body, although He is continually living in the power of His Godhead; it is He who sitteth at the Right Hand of the Father while the angels, principalities and powers worship him."<sup>6</sup>

The correspondence between Kyrillos and Nestorius continued for sometime – Kyrillos trying with all the power of his eloquence and logic to convince Nestorius of his departure from Orthodoxy, and Nestorius obstinately refusing to be convinced or to accede that he had fallen into a heretic way of thinking. A situation developed that was somewhat similar to that which had developed between Athanasius and Arius, and Kyrillos was just as able to cope with it, and just as full of faith and fiery zeal in his tenacious stand against Nestorius as Athanasius had been against Arius. And that is how and why the Orthodox faith was preserved in its integrity and the Nicene Creed remained intact and both were handed down to posterity as a precious legacy that most Eastern Orthodox Churches and some Western Christian Churches still respect and adhere to as the basic foundations of their faith. Here is the witness of Dr. Gengler: "...just as the illustrious Athanasius saved the Faith concerning the Logos by his obstinate yet sagacious defence of the 'homoosios', so did Kyrillos, in defending the 'Theotokos', maintaining the Orthodox Doctrine concerning the incarnation of the Logos. This was fully recognised by the contemporaries of Kyrillos, and they

designated him by the well-earned title of ‘second Athanasius’... From the very first he saw – as Athanasius had seen in the Arian question – the whole gamut of the dispute; he had no need to render his expressions more precise as the discussions evolved; he sustained in the end what he had sustained from the beginning....”<sup>7</sup>

243. One of the first things he did after getting negative answers to the letters he sent to Nestorius was to convoke a Council in Alexandria of the Bishops and Heads of his own See and discuss with them these letters. At this Council the Fathers re-affirmed the Nicene Creed and approved an introduction which Kyrillos had written to it, suggesting that it be prefixed to the Creed. To this day, the Copts recite this introduction as a preliminary statement to the testimony of their Faith. Translated into English, the introduction says: - “We magnify thee, O Mother of the True Light, and glorify thee, O Saintly Virgin; for You have given birth to the Saviour of Mankind Who came and redeemed us and saved our souls. Glory be to Thee, Lord Jesus the Christ, Pride of the Apostles, Crown of the Martyrs, Joy of the Saints, Permanent Foundation of the Churches, Forgiver of sins...”

244. Besides convoking the Council at Alexandria, Abba Kyrillos also wrote a number of letters to the Heads of other Churches – John, Bishop of Antioch; Jevenal, Bishop of Jerusalem; Celestinus, Bishop of Rome; and Acacius, Bishop of Aleppo. The latter sent him an immediate reply, lauding his efforts and siding with him.<sup>8</sup>

Celestinus, Bishop of Rome, answered him too. On receiving it, Kyrillos did two things. On the one hand, wanting to involve the imperial family in helping to bring

an end to the controversy, he wrote letters to the Emperor, the Empress and the Emperor's three sisters. The letter to the Emperor, especially, was long and detailed. He explained to him the subtle deviations from Orthodoxy of the Nestorian concept, and appealed to him to try and convince Nestorius of his error. In the letters to the Empress and the Emperor's sisters, he urged them to use their influence to preserve Orthodoxy and added at the end a list of the verses in the Old and New Testaments which speak of Christ as God Incarnate, in Whom there is neither separateness nor division.<sup>9</sup>

245. On the other hand, Kyrillos convoked a second Council at Alexandria.

This second Alexandrian Council again resolved to try convincing Nestorius of his error. A decision was taken to write to him another letter the first part of which was to be an exposition of the Nicene Creed, and the second part an affirmation of the true faith, followed by twelve anathemas. It read thus: "conforming to the Faith of the Fathers, we declare that the unique Logos of God has taken flesh of the Virgin, has made this flesh His very own, submitted Himself to human birth, passed out of the Virgin's womb as a child without ceasing to be what He is and remaining in the body as He is – namely Very God by nature. The flesh was not changed into the nature of the divine, just as the divine Logos was not changed into the nature of the flesh for It was not submitted to any change. Being yet a child, and even while in the womb of His Mother, the Logos filled the entire world, He governed it conjointly with His Father and the Holy Spirit – for Divinity knows no limit. The Logos is united to the flesh hypostatically. We therefore believe in One Single Son and Lord Jesus Christ; we separate not the man from the

God; we do not believe that He is simply united under the semblance of dignity and power; these are new words alien to the Faith... If we, too, say, as did St. Paul (in Col. 2:9) that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, we apprehend that God dwells not in Him as He dwells in His saints, but that the divine and the human are united in Christ in the fashion that the soul is united to the body in a human being. There is, therefore, One Christ, One Son, One Lord”.<sup>10</sup> If he were really ‘Orthodox’ as he had claimed, Nestorius was asked to prove it by signing both the letter and the anathemas. Thus he would vindicate himself and clarify his attitude before all believers.

The messengers who bore this letter bore simultaneously two other Kyrillian letters; one to the priests, the deacons and the people of Constantinople, and the other to the monks of that same city.<sup>11</sup>

246. Nestorius not only refused his signature, but also exerted every effort to antagonise the Emperor against Kyrillos. His efforts succeeded, at least temporarily, so that Theodosius wrote to the Alexandrian Prelate asking him to relent in his attitude to Nestorius so as to avoid the consequences of his wrath.

The Emperor’s letter widely missed the mark, for if Kyrillos had been relentless in his attitude, it was not against a person but against “a whole system of principles whose perspective threatened to subvert the very core of the Christian Faith”.<sup>12</sup> And Kyrillos was determined to defend his Faith with every fibre of his being regardless of what this might bring upon him. Already Nestorius and some of his staunch and influential supporters had slandered and maligned him – which was inconsequential to him. What was of the greatest import to him, however,

as it had been to Athanasius in his fight against Arianism – was to give precise definitions of the Orthodox Faith and to maintain it in its full purity and integrity.

247. Besides, the Nestorian controversy had already involved so many people and aroused so much reaction among both the high and the lowly that it could not be resolved by just an imperial letter carrying a threat to Abba Kyrillos. More decisive action on an ecumenical scale had to be taken, and the Emperor himself realised that. When, therefore, the people of Constantinople themselves urged him to call a Council of all the bishops to deal with this subject he responded to their plea and issued an invitation to the Bishops of all Churches to attend its convocation at the city of Ephesus in June of the year 431 A.D. Kyrillos was invited on the authority of his own dignity but the attitudes of the Emperor and of Nestorius towards him had not been changed.

When the letter of convocation reached the bishops of Africa, they decided by common consent to entrust Abba Kyrillos with the responsibility of representing them. In this decision they declared that he was the organ of Orthodoxy.<sup>13</sup> Celestinus had also said to him, “the power of our See is with you”. Thus he united in his person three authorities: the authority of his own See, as well as that of the Sees of Africa and of Rome. Nonetheless, the Bishop of Rome sent his delegates to the Council to represent his Church and his person.

248. No sooner did Abba Kyrillos receive the Emperor’s invitation than he made plans to sail for Ephesus, even though he had heard of the letter that Nestorius had sent to Celestinus telling him that should “the proud Pharaoh” set foot in Ephesus, he will have to

give a strict account of his deeds and his words". Being one of the most intrepid men of all times, he disregarded all danger and threats to his own person in his fiery zeal to defend the Faith.<sup>14</sup> When he sailed, he took with him a strong delegation of Coptic ecclesiastics which included his outstanding contemporary Abba Shenouda of Akhmim.<sup>15</sup> Upon arrival, Memnon, Bishop of Ephesus, an Egyptian by birth, met them with warm cordiality and a fraternal welcome.

Celestinus, Bishop of Rome, sent three delegates: the Bishops Arcadius and Projectus to represent the Roman council, and the priest Philip to represent him personally.

As the date fixed for the council drew near, the Bishops gradually collected: two hundred of them hastened to stand and once more defend the Faith and prove themselves indeed the worthy successors of the Nicene Fathers.

249. Desirous to intimidate the august Bishops, Nestorius came to Ephesus as a man going to battle, surrounded by forty partisans and a big number of armed men.<sup>16</sup> One of his companions was Irenaeus, an influential nobleman of Constantinople. In addition, Candidianus, the imperial commissioner representing Emperor Theodosius at the council, waived aside his neutrality and stood by Nestorius even though he had been only commissioned to see that order prevailed. Instead of keeping his strict impartiality, however, he allowed his troops to stand sentinels round the house of Nestorius.

250. Meantime, John of Antioch delayed in arriving. On the day of Pentecost, one day before the date set for the Council to open, he sent a letter to Abba Kyrillos,

excusing his tardiness on account of the long journey and the death of some of his horses, and affirming his arrival within five or six days. During this time two of John's bishops arrived, and emphatically declared that he had ordered them to say that the opening of the Council should not be deferred because of him, and that the assembled dignitaries should go ahead and do what they deemed best. The Fathers concluded that he was loath to attend a council wherein his friend was to be questioned, and decided to begin their sessions. This was on the twenty-second of June in the Church of "the Mother-of-God" at Ephesus.<sup>17</sup>

Once more Candidianus, the Emperor's commissioner, infringed the law, and tried to dissuade them from meeting, under pretext that the Emperor wished them to wait for John of Antioch. Abba Kyrillos and the Fathers asked him to show them the imperial letter that authorised him to speak in his name. When Candidianus produced the letter of Theodosius, the Council found that the Emperor had merely told him in it that he wished that the meetings be conducted in orderliness for establishing peace within the Church. He also stated that Irenaeus the nobleman was present at Ephesus in his capacity as a friend to Nestorius and had not been empowered with any authority. Thereupon the Fathers finally inaugurated the Council meetings.<sup>18</sup>

251. After establishing the order of the meetings and electing Kyrillos to preside over them, they sent a triple summons to Nestorius, in obedience to canon law. Nestorius decided to disregard these summons, however, and refused to come and attend the meetings. In face of his obstinate refusal, the Council met without him.

252. At the inaugural session, Juvenal of Jerusalem requested that they begin with a reading of the Creed, declaring that it was the basis on which to build all their discussions as well as their final judgment. Thereupon, Peter, a priest from Alexandria and chief notary to the Council, read the Creed. He followed this by reading the last two letters exchanged between Kyrillos and Nestorius: the letter of Abba Kyrillos at the end of which were the twelve anathemas, and the reply of Nestorius to it.

253. At this point, Bessola, a messenger from Carthage, came forward to read his Bishop's message. It had a double purport: the bishop excused himself for being unable to attend; then re-affirmed his church's trust in Abba Kyrillos for defending the Faith.

This first session of the Council lasted throughout the day and far into the night. The members debated every detail of the case for which they convened, and then passed the sentence of excommunication, degradation on Nestorius.<sup>19</sup> Abba Kyrillos, aware of what his opponents were capable of, had the minutes recorded with meticulous care.

254. As the day wore on, the people of Ephesus gradually collected until they formed great crowds outside the Church where the Council was meeting. When finally the session ended and the Fathers went out, they were surrounded by these crowds who anxiously enquired after the verdict. Hearing it, they shouted for joy. Many of them lit torches, others brought their incense-burners. All formed one long procession for the Bishops, and thus escorted them to their abodes. The city squares glittered as on feast days.



255. Abba Kyrillos wrote immediately to the clergy and people of the Church of Constantinople informing them of the proceedings of the Council. At the conclusion of his letter he said: “Nothing great is every achieved easily; no wonder we are faced with tribulations, but we say continuously with the Psalmist: ‘Wait on the Lord; be of good courage and He shall strengthen they heart.’<sup>20</sup> We are certain that whoever strives after virtue will bear its fruits; that moral courage will receive its reward from God.”<sup>21</sup>

Abba Kyrillos, also, preached two sermons in the Church of the Mother-of-God, both of which centred round the perfect union of Christ’s divinity with His humanity; and on Mary who is both Virgin and Mother at one and the same time.<sup>22</sup>

256. A few days after the first session of the Council of Ephesus John of Antioch arrived with thirty-two of his bishops. As they approached the city, Candidianus and Nestorius sent an escort of soldiers to meet them – apparently to honour them, but in actual fact to bar the way before the delegates of the Council, who were compelled to follow in the rear until John reached his lodging, and were left at the gate for two whole hours to be met for only a few minutes by Bishop John.<sup>23</sup> They returned and reported of their treatment to the Council which held an immediate session, and carefully noted all that had happened.

257. In compliance with his Nestorian partisans, John held a conventicle of forty-three bishops under his own presidency. They accused Abba Kyrillos and Memnon, Bishop of Ephesus, of having hastened to open the

sessions instead of waiting for them. Then after making their own deliberations on the twelve anathemas set forth by the Alexandrian Pope, they decided to depose him together with Memnon.<sup>24</sup> Candidianus then attempted to raise a new bishop over Ephesus, but the populace was so roused that he had to forego this though he ordered his troops to beat them.

Failing to impose a minion of theirs on the See of Ephesus, the Antiochenes requested Candidianus to prevent Abba Kyrillos and all his supporters from celebrating the Holy Liturgy in the city. Once more they failed.<sup>25</sup>

258. Nestorius and his partisans continued their intrigues to disrupt or annul the Council's meetings and decisions. They saw to it that their own letters reached the Emperor whereas those of the Fathers were intercepted. Consequently the Emperor sent a letter to the Council annulling its verdict, and forbidding the Fathers from leaving Ephesus.

All this roused the fury of the Ephesians who remained loyal to their Bishop and barred the way to all the churches before the Antiochene and his group.

259. Amidst this turbulence, Arcadius and Projectus, delegates of the Roman Church, with Philip the personal envoy of Celestinus arrived. The Council met at the house of Memnon to receive them. At this second session, Philip spoke in the name of the Roman bishop and read his letter to the Council.<sup>26</sup>

260. The following morning, the Fathers met for the third session. The delegates of the West asked to hear the

minutes of the first session. On hearing them, they readily signed the excommunication of Nestorius. A letter was sent to Emperor Theodosius in which he was informed that the Church, in the East and the West, was agreed on excommunicating Nestorius. All those present signed the letter, and also requested the Emperor to withdraw his annulment and to permit them to go back to their respective Sees.

261. The Council sent another letter to the clergy and the people of Constantinople to notify them of the sentence passed on their bishop. This second letter was signed thus: “Kyrillos, Bishop of Alexandria, I sign in accord with the Council”; his signature was followed by that of “Philip the Priest, delegate of the Roman bishop”; Juvenal of Jerusalem; Arcadius and Projectus, delegates of the West; Firmus of Caesarea; Flavianus of Philippi; Memnon of Ephesus; Theodoret of Ancyra; and Verminianus of Pergamon.” These signatures were followed by the words: “Though the number of those who deposed Nestorius is two hundred, yet we judged the preceding signatures sufficient.”<sup>27</sup>

262. At this juncture the Fathers considered their work terminated, and only awaited the Emperor’s reply. But both Kyrillos and Memnon, requested them to examine the sentence passed on them by the Antiochenes. Consequently, they met for the fourth session in the church of the Mother-of-God. Kyrillos and Memnon absented themselves so that the Fathers may be able to discuss them freely. The presidency was ceded to Juvenal of Jerusalem who came next in rank to the Alexandrian Pope. Messengers were sent to summon John of Antioch, but he heeded not the triple summons. At his refusal, the

session began. After discussing the matter, the Council members concluded that John was reprehensible for two errors: he had no right to pass judgement on the president of an ecumenical council; he had detached himself and formed a separatist council.

The following day, the Council met for the fifth session, again under the presidency of Juvenal. Once more they sent their messengers thrice to the Antiochene, who persisted in his refusal. In consequence, the Council decreed that John and his supporters be cut off from the communion of the church, and affirmed their appreciation of Kyrillos and Memnon.<sup>28</sup> A letter containing the proceedings of these sessions was to to Emperor Theodosius with the request that he validate them.

263. Five days later, the Council met for the sixth session, this time under the presidency of Abba Kyrillos. After examining the doctrinal teachings, they affirmed their adherence to the Creed of Nicea and Constantinople and set their anathema on whomsoever adds or detracts a word from it.

The following day, the Council met for the seventh and last session in which they settled the administrative problem of the Church of Cyprus, granting it independence. Six canons were also laid down relating to matters of discipline.

264. Meanwhile Ireneus, the nobleman, went to meet the Emperor, before whom he attacked “the Egyptian and his friends”, deluding him into the belief that Kyrillos and Memnon had been deposed with Nestorius.

Theodosius had his misgivings on the veracity of this news, so he sent another courtier – Count John the State Treasurer – to Ephesus bearing the order endorsing

the deposition and imprisonment of Kyrillos and Memnon.<sup>29</sup>

When the imperial message became known, anger and consternation seized the people. As for the Antiochenes they were elated, thinking they had scored a triumph.

265. The Emperor, however, accorded the Ephesian Council Fathers the permission to send a deputation to the imperial city. Subsequently, Abba Kyrillos addressed – from his prison – a letter to the clergy and people of Constantinople. With it, he sent another to the three Egyptian Bishops who were his apocrisiaries at Constantinople, two of whom had attended the first session of the Council.

A third letter was sent by the Council to all the bishops and other clergymen who were present at Constantinople, which ended on this note: “Rest assured that if those in authority will that we die, we will not change our resolution concerning the Christ”. This letter was signed by Juvenal of Jerusalem, who, since the imprisonment of Abba Kyrillos, had resumed the Council’s presidency.<sup>30</sup>

The letters of the Alexandrian Pope and the Council were entrusted to a courageous Orthodox disguised as a mendicant. He hid them in a hollow cane, and thus carried them to those for whom they were destined.<sup>31</sup>

266. When the letters became known at Constantinople, clergy and people staunchly supported the Ephesian Council Fathers. At their head was the hermit Dalmatius who had never gone out of his cell for forty-eight years, and whom Emperor Theodosius venerated highly and

frequently visited. At this moment, Dalmatius realised that it was incumbent on him to break his habit and lead the people to the palace. They walked through the streets chanting the psalms. When they arrived in front of the imperial palace, they all stopped while Dalmatius went in. After the interview, the Emperor sent a letter to Ephesus, summoning each of the two parties to send eight delegates to meet him.

267. As soon as the Emperor's letter was read, the Council chose their delegates and sent them speedily. But when the Antiochene delegates reached Chalcedon, they received an imperial message to remain where they were, lest their appearance at the capital cause a riot. The Emperor, in company with the Fathers joined them. When they all met, the Antiochenes endeavoured to start the doctrinal discussions anew. The Emperor, now completely changed, discountenanced them, declaring that the ecumenical council's verdict should be considered final, and that he had therefore ratified the sentence passed on Nestorius and ordered his exile. He had also ordered the release of Kyrillos and Memnon.

He, then, invited all the Bishops of the Ephesian Council to come to Constantinople in order to consecrate a new Bishop for it, granting his permission to those who wished to return to their Sees to do so. Kyrillos participated in the consecration ceremony and then immediately returned to his See.<sup>32</sup>

268. A monk by the name of Maximianus was chosen and consecrated to replace Nestorius. Soon after his consecration, he wrote to Abba Kyrillos saying: "Thy desire, O servant of God has been fulfilled, thy labours for the Cause of the Faith have been accomplished; thou hast

been made a spectacle unto angels and men. Not only has thou believed in Christ, but has borne for Him all kinds of ills. Thou hast been accounted worthy to bear His marks in the body... Thou hast been able to do all things in Christ Who strengthens thee; thou hast overcome Satan by patience; thou has despised torments and tramped on the fury of rulers...”<sup>33</sup>

269. A few months later, Xystus succeeded Celestinus to the Chair of Rome. Writing to the clergy and people of Constantinople, he said them of Abba Kyrillos: “In no work of an apostle was this apostolic man wanting: he conjured, he admonished, he rebuked”.<sup>34</sup>

270. As for John of Antioch, he persisted in his antagonism to Abba Kyrillos. Twice he held local councils and deposed him, together with the seven bishops who assisted him in consecrating Maximianus.

271. This behaviour disappointed the Emperor. Taking counsel with Bishop Maximianus, he sent Aristolaus, one of his Generals, to Alexandria to confer with Abba Kyrillos on his readiness for a reconciliation with the Bishop of Antioch.

When Aristolaus met the Alexandrian Pope and made known to him the purpose of his message, Abba Kyrillos expressed to him his willingness for such a reconciliation. Accordingly he sent a letter to John of Antioch comprising the Orthodox Doctrine and the reasons for the sentence passed on Nestorius.

Another mediator for peace was Acacius, Bishop of Melitene who wrote to all his colleagues in the Orient including John of Antioch exhorting them to establish

peace. He seized this chance to express his joy in Abba Kyrillos.<sup>35</sup>

In response, John of Antioch delegated the aged Bishop Paul of Emissa as his ambassador to the Alexandrian Prelate, and entrusted him with a personal letter to him, which was the first correspondence of the Antiochene to St. Mark's Successor since the appearance of the Nestorian heresy.

272. John also, convoked his bishops, and after discussing with them the message of Kyrillos, signed it. Again he wrote to Kyrillos telling him to push into oblivion his past opposition, and asking for his counsel on certain Church matters. Thus, at last, a reconciliation was realised between the Apostolic Sees of Alexandria and Antioch, and no one rejoiced over it as much as Abba Kyrillos himself. When he announced this reconciliation, a number of his adherents questioned his leniency, but realised the extent of his sagacity when they learned that John's recognition of the Orthodox Doctrine was the basis for it.<sup>36</sup>

When Xystus, Bishop of Rome, heard that peace had been established among the churches of the Orient, he sent a letter of congratulation to Abba Kyrillos, addressing him as "the intrepid defender of Orthodoxy".<sup>37</sup>

273. Having taken action towards establishing peace, Abba Kyrillos set himself diligently to compose the rupture which had so pathetically distracted the Eastern Churches; he wrote; he admonished; he negotiated with zeal and vigour. At the same time, he continued to write for the edification and strengthening of his own people's faith.



One of the noblest legacies bequeathed by him to the Church is the Liturgy which bears his name. According to tradition, it had been given orally by St. Mark himself, but Kyrillos completed it and had it manscribed.<sup>38</sup> This Liturgy overflows with deep spiritual insight and reverberates the inner most yearnings towards God. It is an ancient custom in the Coptic Church, to chant it during Lent and during the Coptic month of Kyahk (the month at the end of which Christmas is celebrated and in which the Theotokos is specifically glorified).

Abba Kyrillos continued the tradition decreed by the Nicean Council of writing the Paschal epistle in which he announced to the Churches the date of Easter. The homilies he wrote on different occasions all had but one aim which was the spiritual guidance of his flock, pointing to the importance of prayer, fasting, penitence, and other church practices. Among his many other writings may be cited commentaries on all the books of the Old and the New Testaments, a treatise in dialogue form on the Trinity, a book 'On the Right Way' and another 'On the Incarnation', and numerous others. In all mystical, apologetical and theological subjects, he was prolific and forceful, and what is extant of his writings proves the wide sweep of his erudition, and his mastery of exegetic science.<sup>39</sup>

274. To many people, Abba Kyrillos may seem enigmatic, for they cannot conceive of a man who accepts open attacks and severe criticism – even from his friends – in defence of an abstraction. But to Abba Kyrillos, this abstraction was life. He fully realised the import of the great deposit of which he was guardian; and for this sacred deposit he was willing to forego any insult aimed

at him, and any danger he was exposed to. Even those who accused him of high-handedness, acknowledged his sagacity and his integrity. These very traits, so incomprehensible to many, have earned for him the gratitude of the Church Universal, and the titles cited at the beginning of the chapter. Wherever the believers in Orthodoxy and in the Incarnate Word are, they allot first place to Athanasius and second to Kyrillos among the defenders of Divine Truth.

His ceaseless activity took heavy toll of his health. Worn out by labours rather than by years, he entered into the joy of his Lord after steering the Church through storm and calm during thirty-one years and eight months.

- B. 275. Shenouda's Intense Striving.
- 276. His Tumultuous Age.
- 277. He Shelters Twenty Thousand People.
- 278. His Care for Monks and Nuns.
- 279. The Red and the White Monasteries.

B. 275. Shenouda of Akhmim was among the Fathers who had accompanied Abba Kyrillos to Ephesus, a man historians consider as one of the 'giants' of the Coptic Church.

Shenouda had been born to God-fearing parents, and his father owned a farm and flocks of cattle. Like David of old, his father sent him to attend to the sheep while yet he was little boy, for wealthy though he was, he believed in hard honest labour as the surest way for training in responsibility.

When he was ten years old, he was put under the guidance of Abba Pijol, his maternal uncle, and Abbot of the Red Monastery in Upper Egypt. He proved to be spiritually attuned to a rare degree, and strove continuously after spiritual excellence. The intensity of his yearning after righteousness was such that he attained great sanctity and enjoyed studying as well as teaching others both monks and laity. One day, some old ascetics in the monastery heard a voice saying: "Behold Shenouda is become an Archimandrite" (i.e., Chief of Anchorites) and so when Abba Pijol entered into the joy of his Lord, Shenouda was elected to take his place as Abbot. Under his guidance, the number of monks reached four thousand: eighteen hundred of them in the Red monastery and the rest in the White monastery,<sup>40</sup> while a few of them preferred the solitary life.

276. Shenouda lived in an age seething with intense emotions and startling upheavals. It was an age in which the Ephesus ecumenical council convened, succeeded by a council likened to a court of appeal, then followed by the Council of Chalcedon wherein started the rift between the churches. This same age witnessed the passing away of paganism from Egypt after the desperate effort of Julian the Apostate to resuscitate it. Finally, it was an age in which Egyptian nationalism re-asserted itself forcefully against all imperial encroachments. This nationalistic awareness flared up with an intensity which bewildered the rulers of Egypt.<sup>41</sup> And, in the midst of all these upheavals, Shenouda towered like a beacon light. He was a lover of solitude, yet he shared the life of the world to the full, and was one of the prime movers of his compatriots against all Hellenistic tendencies. He used his talents for oratory and writing to inflame the crowds, using the pure Saidic dialect of Upper Egypt. Under his impetus, this dialect became the language of literature. To all who heard him or read his writings, his words had the potency of magic.

277. But his magic was not the magic of words only; he went about feeding the hungry clothing the naked, and sheltering the homeless. The schools adjoined to his monasteries did not serve the ascetics alone; they served those living in the world as well. And the doctors among his monks administered their science to all alike.

One instance of his outpouring love was evidenced when the Bagat tribe raided the region of Akhmim capturing families wholesale, killing and pillaging. Hearing of this catastrophe, Shenouda crossed the Nile, and went to the chief other Bagats saying: "Take the spoils and give me the people". The chief readily

accepted, and handed over to him twenty thousand captives. Shenouda sheltered them in his monasteries for three months: the sick he put under the care of the doctors, the children under the tutelage of the educators, while the social servers looked after the aged and the infirm. All these specialists were from among his monks. During these three months, ninety-four of the refugees died, and fifty-two babies were born. This instance indicates the well-knit organisation of the monks under the vigilant eyes of the Archimandrite.<sup>42</sup>

278. Shenouda was not only a guide to monks, but fathered also eighteen hundred nuns.<sup>43</sup> To these, he wrote several letters: teaching, guiding and admonishing. Fortunately, many of his writings are extant; they depict for us his clear thinking and his deep spiritual insight.

Shenouda was blessed with an unusually long life. He lived to a hundred and eighteen years. His fatherhood over monasteries and convents lasted sixty-six years.

During his long life, Shenouda watched his people closely. His sympathy for them was boundless. Consequently he became their spokesman and their defendand. And because he identified himself altogether with them, he embodied their nationalistic aspirations and led them to the realisation of their higher selves. For those reasons, he is considered the liberator of Egyptian thought from the shackles of Byzantium, and the truest representative of Pharaonic genius.

279. The White monastery with which Shenouda is identified is unique among Christian edifices: it is more like a pharaonic temple than a Christian sanctuary. It stands on the edge of the desert west of Sohag near the ancient town of Atrib. Historians reckon that it was built

in the lifetime of Shenouda. The only remaining part of it is the Church, adjoined by the house of the priest.

As for the Red monastery, it gets its name from the red bricks of which it is built. Nothing remains of it save the church also, and people called it by the name of “Abba Pishoi”, a saintly monk of that era.

These two monasteries were not destroyed except in the eighteenth century during the battles waged between the Mamelukes and the Franks.<sup>44</sup>

### C. 280. A Life of Contrasts

280. Side by side with the men who strove after perfection stood the women “Athletes of God”. Mary the Errant, or the Repentant, is a striking example. Of great beauty, she spent her youth in sin. Such was her delight in seducing men, that at the age of twenty-nine, she went to Jerusalem during Passion Week that she may delude even those who went for worship and spiritual experience. One day, she felt an inward urge to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Before its gate she felt transfixed. Stupefied, she was overwhelmed with remorse. In a flash she realised how unworthy she was of entering that Sanctuary wherein the Saviour of mankind was buried. At that very moment she entreated the Mother-of-God to come to her rescue, vowing that she would renounce the world of sin. As she entered her prayers she felt released and went into the Church. After the celebration of the glorious Easter Service, she stood long before the icon of the Blessed Virgin praying with great fervour. As she prayed, she heard a Voice telling her to retreat into the desert by the Jordan river. She obeyed immediately. There she spent forty-seven years during which she did not stay in a single spot. Any cave or ravine was good

enough shelter for her, and she contented herself with the wild plants she chanced upon. During the forty-fifth year of her errantry, Zosima – an Abbot of an eastern desert monastery – discovered her. She related to him her story in all its starkness and begged him to bring her the Holy Eucharist the following year. He complied with her wish. A year later he sought her but chanced upon her dead body with a slip of paper next to her head on which were written: “Return to the earth that which belongs to the earth and pray for me”.

A painted picture of this saint who reached dizzy spiritual heights is in the Museum of Modern Art in Philadelphia (U.S.A), while a chapel in her name is among the side chapels of Notre Dame (Paris).<sup>45</sup>

All seekers after Christian perfection glorify the Heavenly Father Whose Grace so floods the hearts of those who cleave unto Him and thus raises them from the abyss of despair up to the Light where He Himself appears.

## XVII. NOTES

1. Severus of Ashmunein: *op. Cit.*, p. 430.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 431; Guettee IV, p. 368.
3. Coptic mss. Translated into French by Amelineau in "Monuments pour Servir a l'Histoire de l'Egypte Chretienne aux IV eme et V Siecles", and into Arabic by the monk Angelius el-Moharraqi in the monthly "Nahdat'l Kanayis", Nov. 1955, p. 280; mgr. Postel: "Histoire de l'Eglise, p. 144.
4. Hefele II, p. 364, where he states that Kyrillos and the Orthodox Bishops read a whole serie sof the writings of the Fathers, then continues: "...Pierre le venerable martyr et evaque d'Alexandrie disait: "Le Dieu Logos est ne et a pris chair dans un corps virginal"... Athanase enseigne: "Le Logos est en verite et, dans toute la riguer du mot, devenu homme; sans cela il ne serait pas notre Sauveur". ...et Theophile d'Alexandrie dit aussi "que Dieu est ne et qu'Il est. mort."...
5. Guettee, IV, p. 315.
6. *History of the Patriarchs*, p.434; Hefele II, pp. 333-5; Guettee IV p. 320 says: "Certaines personnes trouvaient le zelee de Cyrille excessif. On rencontre, en toute occasion, de ces hommes moderes qui ne comprennent ni la foi ni les devoirs qu'elle impose, et placent la sagesse dands une espece d'indifference."



7. Cf. Hefele 11, p. 364.
8. *Al-Manar Bulletin*, vol. 1, p. 4, Beirut, 16<sup>th</sup> of Ailool 1899.
9. *Al-Manar Bulletin*, no. 50, p. 542, Beirut 26<sup>th</sup> of Aab, 1899.
10. Hefele II, pp. 344-5.
11. *Al-Manar*, vol. II, no. 3, p. 34, Beirut, 30<sup>th</sup> of Ailool 1899; Guettee IV, pp. 335-6, and 468.
12. Hefele II, p. 356.
13. Guettee IV, p. 474.
14. *Ibid.* IV, p. 338.
15. A town in Upper Egypt in the province of Sohag.
16. Hefele II, p. 360.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 361-2.
18. *Al-Manar*, vol. II, no. 6, p. 82, Beirut, 21<sup>st</sup> of Teshreen al-Awwal 1899.
19. Guettee. Vol. IV, pp. 342-3 and 350-1; Hefele. Vol. II, p. 364; *al-Manar*, vol. 2, no. 7. Beirut, 28<sup>th</sup> of Teshreen al-Awwal, pp. 100-101.
20. Ps. 27:14.

21. *Al-Manar*, vol. II, no. 10. Beirut, 18<sup>th</sup> of Teshreen the second, 1899, pp. 145-6.
22. *Al-Manar*, vol. II, no. 11, Beirut, 25<sup>th</sup> of Teshreen the second, pp. 161-3.
23. Guettee. Vol. IV, pp. 344-5; Hefelee. Vol. II, p. 371.
24. Guettee. Vol. IV, p. 355; *Al-Manar*, vol. II, no. 13, Beirut, 9<sup>th</sup> of Kanoon 1<sup>st</sup>, 1899, p. 194.
25. Hefelee, vol. II, p. 374.
26. Guettee. Vol. IV, p. 329, where the author regrets the l'Abbe Darras abused the correspondence of Celestinus to Kyrillos, reading into it meanings which do not exist.
27. Guettee. *La Papaute...* p. 94; also *Ibid.* vol. IV, p. 361.
28. *Al-Manar*, vol. II, no. 19, Beirut, 20<sup>th</sup> of Kanoon 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1900, pp. 289-81; and no. 20, 27<sup>th</sup> of Kanoon 2<sup>nd</sup>, pp. 305-6. Also Guettee: *Histoire...* IV, p. 362-4.
29. Hefelee. vol. II, pp. 398-400.
30. *Ibid.* II, pp. 400-402.
31. *Ibid.* II, pp. 405; Guettee. Vol. IV, p. 372.
32. Guettee. IV, pp. 375-8.

33. *Al-Manar*. vol. II, no. 47, 10<sup>th</sup> of Aab, 1900, pp. 737-8; Neale, *op. Cit.* I, pp. 270-1.
34. Neale. I, p. 271.
35. Hefele. II, p. 436.
36. Guettee. IV, pp. 382-3.
37. *Ibid.* IV, p. 384.
38. Ms. no. 375, Theol. Library of the Coptic Museum, p. 206.
39. Guettee. IV, pp. 471-4.
40. Two monasteries in the towns of Akhmim and Sohag in Upper Egypt.
41. P. Jouguet, *De l'Egypte Grecque a l'Egypte Copte*. Pub. In the 1935 annual issue of *Le Bulletin de l'Association des Amis de l'Art Copte*.
42. A.S. Atiya 'al-Kanisatu'l Qibtiya wa ruh'l Qawmeya fi Misr fi'l 'asr'l Bizanti'. Pub. In vol. 3 (1950) of *al-Magallah'l Misriyya lit-tarikh* (The Egyptian Historical Magazine).
43. Mackean. *Christian Monasticism in Egypt to the close f the fourth century*. P. 120 (Publ. By S.P.C.K.)

44. A.J. Butler. I, pp. 351-9; L. Habashi. "Shenouda' pub. In *Risalat Mari Mina*, no. 4, pp. 111-150.
45. Regamey: "Les Rus Beaux Textes sur La Vierge Marie" pp. 67-9; Ch. d'Orleans: *op. cit.*, I, pp. 451-69; Coptic Synaxarium, II, pp. 67-73.

## ***XVIII. THE RUPTURE BETWEEN THE CHURCHES OF EAST AND WEST***

### **An Intrepid Confessor**

“For, when the One Great Scorer comes  
to write against your name,  
Not have you lost or have you won  
But how you played the game.”

#### **A. *At Ephesus***

281. Election of Abba Dioscorus.
  282. Appearance of the Eutychian heresy.
  283. Local council and its effects.
  284. Leo writes to Eutyches.
  285. Flavianus and Leo correspond.
  286. Demand for a general council.
  287. Emperor's letter to Abba Dioscorus.
  288. Leo's letters to Emperor and his sister Pulcheria.
  289. Acceptance of Leo to Emperor's invitation.
  290. Bishops who attended.
  291. Diverse letters to Council.
  292. Written confession of Eutyches.
  293. His accusation of Flavianus.
  294. Reinstating Eutyches and condemning Flavianus.
  295. Flavianus reacts.
  296. Leo supports him.
  297. Emperor's respect for Council.
  298. Vain attempts of Leo.
281. When Kyrillos the Great went to his reward, the Copts elected Dioscorus to succeed him and became the 25<sup>th</sup> Head of their Church. He was well-liked, trusted,

and respected by his own people. He had accompanied his predecessor to the third Ecumenical Council and was quite aware of what had transpired there and of the attitudes of some of the churches towards the Church of Alexandria. Because of the influence of the court, and the prominence of Abba Kyrillos, those attitudes seemed to have subsided. In fact they had only been held in abeyance, and were to resurge in full strength as the events in the life of Abba Dioscorus were to prove.

As described by one of the great church historians, Dioscorus was “a man of excellent disposition and much beloved for his humility and also for his fiery zeal for the faith, his great courage, and his presence of mind,”<sup>1</sup> virtues which stood him in good stead during the times of tribulation he was destined to face.

282. The specific event which started the series of actions and reactions that involved Dioscorus and finally led to the rupture between the Churches of Africa and Asia and their sister churches in the West, was the appearance of a new heresy promulgated by a man called Eutyches. This Eutyches was an ascetic who had spent several decades in strict monastic training, and was superior of a monastery in Constantinople. He opposed Nestorianism vehemently, and in his ardent wish to eradicate it, expressed a counter view about Christ that erred from the Orthodox view established by Nicea and the two subsequent ecumenical Councils. He denied the physical body of the Christ altogether, and said that He had passed through the womb of the Virgin in an ethereal fashion.

The erroneous view of Eutyches was reported to Flavianus, Bishop of Constantinople, who wrote to him immediately point out where he erred and asked him to

cease from spreading this teaching. At the same time, Flavianus, having heard that Eutyches had written to Leo I, Bishop of Rome, wrote to him also. Leo answered Flavianus by what is known as the ‘Tomes’, or an exposition of the Dogma. The expressions of Leo in his Tomos savoured of Nestorianism.<sup>2</sup>

283. When all his friendly efforts failed, and served only to publicise the Eutychian heresy, Flavianus convoked a local council to discuss the controversy. Florentius was imperial deputy at this council.

Eutyches was duly thrice summoned; he ignored the first two but answered the third. By the time he arrived, the Council was holding its seventh session. As soon as he appeared, Eusebius, Bishop of Dorylaeum, accused him of being a heresiarch. This accusation was followed by the reading of Leo’s Tomos. Eutyches was then asked to declare his faith. Instead of giving a direct answer, he presented a written confession so full of ambiguous terms that it angered the convening bishops. Florentius, the imperial commissioner, intervened, requesting Eutyches to answer as clearly as possible. When he did not do so, the Council decreed that he was to be excommunicated. The verdict based on Leo’s Tomos was more Nestorian than Orthodox, and greatly alarmed the people of Constantinople. Eutyches, sensing this popular anger, took advantage of it and wrote appeals to Emperor Theodosius, to the bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Thessalonica.<sup>3</sup>

284. The Roman Prelate sent him the following answer: “To the beloved son Eutyches the Priest, from Leo the Bishop – We have gathered from your letter that some people of wicked aims have once more asserted the heresy

of Nestorius. We are glad because of your zeal and your care in this matter. We doubt not, therefore, that God Who granted us the Universal Faith will succour you in your endeavour. As for us, having heard of the hypocrisy of those who are following this heresy, we are bound by God's Grace to cut off this evil. And may God the Almighty guard you, my son."<sup>4</sup>

285. Upon hearing that Eutyches had appealed to the bishops of other churches, Flavianus thought it fit to write to them also to explain and justify his actions. The answer he received from Leo stated that Eutyches had complained of having been unjustly excommunicated and ended on this wise: "...Eutyches promised in his letter to correct the error he committed against the Doctrine. In this case, we should evade all discord and uphold Christian Love with no aim other than the Truth. We know what Eutyches did, but he seems to be worthy of the sacerdotal honour, even though denuded of all wisdom and knowledge."<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the Roman Bishop wrote to the Emperor proclaiming to him that he rejoiced because "the Emperor, not only had an imperial heart, but a sacerdotal one too."<sup>6</sup>

286. Pursuing the matter, the party of Eutyches succeeded in persuading Emperor Theodosius to convoke a general council. Then, in anticipation of this assembly, Eutyches wrote again to several bishops among whom was Abba Dioscorus, hoping thereby to move the whole church in his favour before the council actually assembled.

287. The site selected by the Emperor for this Council was Ephesus again, and the date fixed for its inauguration



was August first, A.D. 449. When he sent his circular letter to all the bishops, inviting them to the Council, the Emperor sent in addition three letters to Abba Dioscorus: one requesting him to preside over the council; another making an express demand that Theodoret the Nestorian bishop of Cyrrhus be excluded from the council because he had not repented after his deposition by the third ecumenical council; and the third letter was a special invitation to the Egyptian Archimandrite Barsumas, to attend and represent the archimandrites of the Orient at the Council.<sup>7</sup>

The Emperor's goal in convoking the council was to reconsider the sentence passed on Eutyches by the Flavian council, thus deeming it a court of appeal.

288. Upon hearing of the imperial decision to hold this council, Leo was filled with misgivings. He wrote to the Emperor saying that it would have been preferable not to convoke a council. He also sent several letters to Flavianus urging him to remain true to the Faith, and at the same time deal kindly with Eutyches.<sup>8</sup> In addition he sent a letter to Pulcheria, eldest sister of the Emperor, which he began by lauding her on her great zeal, then added that Eutyches fell into the heresy by ignorance rather than wickedness, and saying that if he came to himself he should be pardoned.<sup>9</sup>

289. Yet, even though he would have preferred to have the Emperor revoke the convocation of a council, when the time for it came Leo sent three delegates to attend it,<sup>10</sup> for he knew just as well as all others, that the Emperor of Constantinople alone had the prerogative of convoking an ecumenical council. And after the legates of Rome had left, he wrote a few lines to Flavianus announcing to him

their departure and adding: “to sum up, the council convoked by the Emperor was not altogether necessary.”<sup>11</sup>

290. The council opened its sessions a week later than the scheduled date. “The Patriarch of Alexandria presided as well by virtue of his dignity as by the express demand of the Emperor.”<sup>12</sup>

Juvenal of Jerusalem and Domnus of Antioch were also charged by the Emperor to share the presidency with Abba Dioscorus.

From the acts of this second Ephesian council, it is evident that one hundred and thirty bishops attended it.

291. The Emperor appointed two imperial deputies to attend the Council, and dispatched a letter to Proclus, Pro-consul of Asia, asking him to support with his authority the two imperial commissioners, and to defend the council against the intrigues of the Nestorians.

At the opening session, the Roman delegates delayed in arriving. When the council sent for them, Dolcitus answered: “The letters entrusted to us by Leo chief Bishop of Rome bade us attend the holy synod when examining the case of the priest, the God-loving Archimandrite Eutyches; and not to attend it while conferring on other matters.”<sup>13</sup> Then John the chief notary began by reading the imperial letter of convocation, which also contained the Emperor’s wish that peace be established within the Church.

As soon as the reading ended, the delegates of the West declared that they carried a message from their Prelate. At this declaration, Abba Dioscorus exclaimed: “Let the message of our brother and Co-bishop Leo to this Council be read.” The chief notary, however,

declared that there were other letters from the Emperor which should be read first. The delegates from the West acquiesced. Then Juvenal of Jerusalem ordered the reading of the imperial missives, one of which related to the admittance of the Archimandrite Barsumas into the council.<sup>14</sup>

Abba Dioscorus then asked if there was any question concerning the Faith legated by the Fathers. All present replied that they strictly adhered to it. “In which case, declared Abba Dioscorus, we are not assembled to search into the Doctrine, but simply to examine the acts of the local council held by Flavianus.”<sup>15</sup>

292. Here Eutyches was called upon to proclaim his faith. Instead of speaking, he handed to the chief notary a declaration of his faith in his own handwriting requesting him to read it aloud; he said: “Since my youth, I diligently sought to live in retreat. Today I am exposed to a grave danger because in my strict fidelity to the Faith, and my refusal to admit any innovation. I sincerely uphold the faith declared at Nicea; and rely continuously on the writings legated to the Church by Abba Kyrillos of blessed memory.” No sooner had this name been mentioned than the Fathers declared that they all upheld the faith expounded so clearly by that Alexandrian Patriarch. Then John, chief notary resumed reading the confession of Eutyches, which said: “I believe in One God the Almighty, Maker of the visible and the invisible; and in the Lord Jesus the Christ the Only Begotten Son – I mean that He is Consubstantial with the Father; by Him were all things made, in heaven and on earth; He is the One, Who, for us mankind and for our salvation, came down from heaven; He was incarnate and became man; He suffered and rose from the dead on the third day; He

ascended up to heaven from whence He shall come again to judge the living and the dead.

“As for all those who say that there was a time when the Son was not, or that He was not before He was born, or that He was created out of nothing or that He is of a different substance, or that His two natures were mixed or mingled, - all those who say such things are excommunicated by the mouth of the Church Universal. This is the faith I declare, and which I have received from my fathers; in this faith was I born, and in it was I baptised and consecrated, and ordained priest; by it I lived unto this day and I shall uphold it until I depart from this life.”

Pondering this written confession, the assembled bishops found it clearly Orthodox. It was followed by an anathema on all heretics from Simeon the magician to Nestorius. After the anathemas, the document of Eutyches stated: “While I was living in this faith and persevering in prayers, Eusebius Bishop of Dorylaeum calumniated me before Flavianus the honoured Bishop of Constantinople, stating unjustly that I was a heretic and beguiling me through some vain words. A council was held with the premeditated intention of degrading me whether I responded to its summons or not. This evil intention was made clear to me through the chief guard of the imperial office.”<sup>16</sup>

293. Eutyches, then, affirmed by mouth that the minutes of the Flavian council were falsified, and appealed for justice. At this point Abba Dioscorus requested the reading of the Flavian Council minutes. The bishops unanimously consented with the exception of the Roman legates who suggested reading the message sent by their own bishop. Eutyches interrupted; he explained his

mistrust of the two Western legates because they were the friends of Flavianus. Consequently, it was decided to hear the minutes of the Flavian council (of Constantinople) on the proceedings of which both Flavianus and Eutyches presented written reports.<sup>17</sup>

The reading of these reports followed and then Flavianus stood up to defend himself. For the second time his justification savoured of Nestoriansim, so much had Leo's Tomos confused his thoughts.

294. Having heard both accuser and defendant, and discussing the case at length, Abba Dioscorus asked the bishops to pronounce their verdict. In answer, Juvenal of Jerusalem who was the first to speak said: "Since Eutyches confesses the Creed of Nicea and accepts what the Fathers declared in the great Council assembled in this same city, it is clear to me that he is an Orthodox. Therefore, I suggest that he be reconfirmed in his sacerdocy and in his abbotcy over his monks." The council responded: "This is true and just." Domnus of Antioch followed by saying: "When I received from Constantinople the verdict passed by Flavianus and his Council, I signed it, but after hearing the written declaration submitted to this council by Eutyches, I find that he is an Orthodox. For he clearly states that he upholds the Faith of the three hundred and eighteen assembled at Nicea as well as the Fathers who assembled in this city. In consequence, I consent to his worthiness of the priesthood and of the supervision of his monks."<sup>18</sup> Stephen of Ephesus and Thasius of Caesarea of Cappadocia made similar statements concerning the orthodoxy of Eutyches and his fitness to be reinstated.

The estimate of these four bishops was accepted by all those assembled with them and so they unanimously

acquitted Eutyches. At this unanimity, Abba Dioscorus said: "I confirm the judgment of this holy council, and I decree that Eutyches be counted among the priests and resume being archmandrite of his monastery as before."<sup>19</sup>

The first to sign the verdict were Juvenal of Jerusalem and Domnus of Antioch; the last was Barsumas the Archmandrite. Abba Dioscorus, after approving the affixed signatures, signed his own.<sup>20</sup>

An inevitable consequence of the acquittal of Eutyches was the condemnation of Flavianus and those who signed with him, for the Orthodox Church had already established the principle that ex-communication was a two-edged sword, if passed unjustly must rebound on whoever pronounced it. The Fathers of Ephesus informed the Emperor, therefore that their verdict was the reinstatement of Eutyches and the excommunication of the seven bishops who had condemned him. Theodosius set his seal to it and banished Flavianus and his co-bishops.

295. Flavianus immediately resolved to make an appeal. He perceived that all the assembled bishops had signed his condemnation; that among them there were three who had consented with him to the ex-communication of Eutyches but had rescinded their verdict; that the bishops of Jerusalem and Antioch had also turned against him.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding, he sent an encyclic letter to all the bishops of Orient and Occident, declaring to the Bishop of Rome specifically that he had relied on his Tomos when he condemned Eutyches.<sup>22</sup>

296. As noted before the bishop of Rome had been unfavourably inclined towards the convocation of this second Council of Ephesus. He reacted to the appeal of

Flavianus by writing a letter to Emperor Theodosius in which he strongly attacked what he unfairly called the 'Dioscorian' council, appealing to the Emperor to give his consent to the convocation of another council somewhere in Italy.<sup>23</sup> To add pressure to his entreaty, Leo enlisted the aid of Valentinianus III, Emperor of the West, his wife Empress Eudoxia, and his mother Galla Placida. Each of them wrote to the Emperor of the East endorsing Leo's plea.

297. Emperor Theodosius answered each of them separately, saying that the second Ephesian council was "an assembly of pious bishops who had behaved according to the fear of God, and in conformity with the Orthodox Faith as I know for certainty. It would, therefore, be better that you do not interfere in the matter, hence why another council?"<sup>24</sup>

298. Meantime, Leo persisted in his endeavour, and sent letters to the clergy of Constantinople, to its people and to its archmandrites, hoping thereby to provoke them.<sup>25</sup> But all his efforts were fruitless because the Emperor, to emphasise his respect for the Dioscorian council, authorised the people of Constantinople to elect a new Bishop, entreating them to concentrate on an Orthodox, and evade all Nestorians. Accordingly Anatolius was chosen to fill the vacated chair.<sup>26</sup>

This choice angered the Bishop of Rome because the new elect had originally been a deacon from Alexandria, and an apocrisiary of the Alexandrian Pope in Constantinople.<sup>27</sup>

Abba Dioscorus presided over the ceremony of consecrating Anatolius Bishop of Constantinople, then set sail for his native shores.

**B.     *At Chalcedon***

299. Theodosius dies heirless.
300. Pulcheria discards her vow.
301. Her lust for power.
302. Correspondence of Leo and Marcianus.
303. Marcianus ready to convoke a Council.
304. Leo's letter to Marcianus.
305. Prerogative of Eastern Emperor.
306. Pulcheria's letter to Leo.
307. Leo's answer.
308. Inaugurating Council.
309. Accusing Dioscorus falsely.
310. Tumult and vacillation.
311. Minutes of 'Dioscorian' Council.
312. Protest of the Egyptians.
313. Another false accusation.
314. Bishop of Seleucia.
315. Dioscorus confesses his Faith.
316. Adjournment and re-assembling.
317. Farcical summons.
318. Council's verdict.
319. Anger of civil judges.
320. Orthodoxy of Dioscorus.
321. Emperor exiles Dioscorus.
322. Four friends share his exile voluntarily.
323. Correspondents and visits to the exiled Pope.
324. Rest of Abba Dioscorus.
325. Witness of some Fathers.
326. Theopistus write the biography of Dioscorus.

299. Such was the state of affairs when Emperor Theodosius died heirless in A.D. 450. His eldest sister – Pulcheria – had the lust for power. So jealous had she



been in guarding her father's throne, that she had selected her brother's wife for him. Also, she had taken the nun's vow, enforcing it on her two younger sisters. All these measures had been aimed at barring the way before any would-be rival to her brother. When her brother's wife bore him no children, Pulcheria urged him to marry another wife, heedless of the Christian ideal of monogamy. Theodosius, however, silenced her by seeking the counsel of the Egyptian Desert Fathers who advised him to maintain his principle of monogamy and he obeyed them.<sup>28</sup>

300. Pulcheria, finding that all her efforts had been in vain and still avid for power, renounced her oath of virginity and married General Marcianus whom she raised to the throne. Her marriage was sanctioned by Leo who readily gave her his blessing, while all other bishops were not quite ready to validate such a marriage because it was in disregard of a sacred vow willingly taken.

301. Being of such mettle, Pulcheria could stand no power but her own, so she was insensately jealous of St. Mark's Successor because of the authority he wielded.<sup>29</sup> Thus her accession to the throne afforded Leo with the long-sought opportunity to hold the council for which he had vainly solicited Emperor Theodosius. He therefore sent a letter of congratulations to the new imperial couple at the end of which he suggested the convocation of a council. Each of them wrote him a separate answer.

302. Several other letters were also exchanged between the Bishop of Rome and Emperor Marcianus. Their special interest lies in the fact that they reveal the inward motives of Leo. Two of these letters were sent in

succession to the Emperor. In the first, he said: “From Leo the Bishop to Marcianus the Trumphant: Know, O King, that I have received your letter with great joy. I pondered over it and understood its symbols... Accept now this short letter carried to you by the deacons of Anatolius. Later on, by God’s Will, I shall send you another letter with my own delegates in which I will tell you of all that is worthy concerning the holy churches and the concord between the venerable clergymen.”<sup>30</sup>

The second letter which followed shortly after, stated: “From Leo the Bishop to Marcianus the Triumphant – Know, O King, that after I gave the answer to your monks... I received with joy the letter of your Tenderness... it was a source of great joy to me, for I gathered from it your resolve to amend Church affairs... Be it known unto you, O great king, that my reliance on God’s Guidance is coupled with my hope that through your love, matters will be straightened out. Now, therefore, I do entreat and implore you by the Mystery of Salvation, to strengthen your heart, and by your authority forbid any deluded ignorant dissenter from examining the Faith in his craftiness... It is neither fitting nor proper that we should revert to worldly discussions and search into the meaning of what ignorant men say and stray from the confirmed Truth as though there is some doubt with regard to It. It is not our duty to doubt Eutyches, whether he has erred because of his evil principles or not; we should not suspect the judgment of Dioscorus against Flavianus of blessed memory whether it was deceitful or not; but a number of bishops have repented and have made known to us the evil that has happened. They have asked to be forgiven for all their short-comings. Therefore, we should not investigate their faith, we should accept and forgive them.”<sup>31</sup>

“... It is not our duty to doubt Eutyches... we should not suspect the judgment of Dioscorus against Flavianus... we should not investigate their (the bishops’) faith, we should accept and forgive them...” A deliberating reader may well wonder what interest motivated the Roman bishop to grant his forgiveness, or on what possible basis could forgiveness be justified without investigation? For what reason should a council be held, if he was neither doubting Eutyches nor suspecting the judgment of Dioscorus against Flavianus?...

All these first letters of Leo show that he advocated kindness towards Eutyches. It is not astonishing that a bishop would take such an attitude, but it certainly is astonishing to see how he forgot his own counsel when his delegates intrigued with some other bishops at Chalcedon against Abba Dioscorus, maliciously presumed that he supported Eutyches in his heresy.

303. After this correspondence, Marcianus declared his readiness to convoke a council. Leo then requested him to hold it in some place in Italy. This request was refused, for Marcianus used his prerogative as Emperor of the East, to fix the time and place he chose.<sup>32</sup>

304. Leo, however, retracted this request for a council, and sent the following answer: “From Leo the Bishop to Marcianus the Triumphant – I ask of you to delay a little the convocation of the requested council for the reconciliation of the churches of the Orient because certain bishops who cannot come now because of the wars raging in their countries may be able to attend later on without fear or worry. I know by your devotion that you give first place to heavenly matters, preferring them

to worldly ones. Therefore, I do not gainsay your wishes in any way, in that I desire that the Orthodox Faith which is One, should be established in the hearts of all the faithful. As for Nestorius and Eutyches, they have both erred from the purity of the faith. And though they differ in words, both are equally cunning.<sup>33</sup> Everyone should, therefore, disdain their teaching altogether... And though I cannot come in person, yet will I send my delegates... they are Paschasinus and Lecentius, the bishops, together with a priest.”<sup>34</sup>

305. Thus, the Bishop of Rome accepted to attend the council convoked by Marcianus, at the time and place designated by the Emperor. His acceptance came after he had actually retracted his desire for calling a council. This behaviour is but another proof of the many inconsistencies displayed in his attitudes and thinking.<sup>35</sup>

306. Empress Pulcheria was active too. She sent a letter to Leo saying: “From Pulcheria the Triumphant to the venerable Father, the bishop of the great city of Rome, - know – O Father – that we have received the letter of your holiness with the great honour due to all bishops. Reading it, we knew that your faith was pure... I myself, and my husband the strong king, diligently believe according to your faith. As for doubts, heresies and dissensions, they are far from us. Then I would like to tell you of the venerable Anatolius, Bishop of this great city, that he upholds the Orthodox Faith and confesses the Apostolic teachings. He has evicted the heresy sown by some in the Church. You will know his true faith from the letter he sent you... As for me, I would like to tell you that my tender husband has brought the body of Flavianus, of blessed memory, from the place of exile to

the great city of Constantinople, and has buried it with great honour in the Church of the Apostles where his predecessors, the bishops, are buried. My husband has also ordered the return of all the exiled bishops who were agreed with Bishop Flavianus of blessed memory concerning the faith, that the assembled bishops may judge their case, and restore them to their Sees according to the merit of their labours.”<sup>36</sup> (It should be noted here that Marcianus, even though Emperor, had absolutely no right to order the return of the exiled bishops; and that Pulcheria, by declaring beforehand their restoration to their Sees, had also exposed the pre-meditated intention she and her husband had towards their case. Why, then, was it necessary to call another Council to pass judgment on it?)

307. Leo answered the Empress, thanking her particularly for the succour she gave to his legates, the return of the exiled bishops, and the honour paid to the mortal remains of Flavianus.<sup>37</sup>

To the Orthodox bishops, the compliance of Pulcheria to Leo’s faith implied her slipping into Nestorianism unawares, just as Flavianus had done when judging Eutyches.

It is evident from all these letters that the whole Church was made intensely aware of the renewed Eutychian case; that even before the council assembled, all those concerned were already taking sides.

When Marcianus decided on convoking the Council, his first plan was to select Nicea, as its site, for on more than one occasion he had likened himself to Constantine the Great. Under the influence of Pulcheria, however, and because of the threat of the Huns, he decided on Chalcedon, a town near Constantinople.<sup>38</sup>

308. The council of Chalcedon was inaugurated on the eighth of October 451 A.D. No two historians are agreed on the number of bishops who attended it, but they all agree that both Pulcheria and Marcianus attended the opening sessions, and that they had appointed to it nineteen civil judges as court commissioners. These civil judges were charged with directing the sessions and establishing order, thus forming a cabinet for the council, which occupied the centre of the church of St. Euphemia, the meeting place of the council.

To the right of the Emperor and Empress sat Abba Dioscorus, Juvenal of Jerusalem, and Heraclas of Corinth, the Bishops of Egypt, Illyria and Palestine. To the left sat the Bishop of Constantinople, the delegates of the Roman Bishop, and the bishops of Antioch, Caesarea, Ephesus, Pontus, Achaia and Thracia.

Togther with the civil authorities, the Bishops (who, since then, were given the title of Patriach)<sup>39</sup> presided over the council, consecutively – all except Abba Dioscorus, against whom ill-will was manifested, according to a previously laid plan, from the very outset. For no sooner did the council assemble than Paschasinus – one of the Roman delegates – rose and requested the imperial officers to evict Abba Dioscorus, otherwise he and his colleagues would have to withdraw from the assembly. Being asked why, his associate – Lucentius – answered that “this man came not to sit among the saints, but to give an account of what he had committed at Ephesus”. Here one of the bishops asked: “But what has he committed?” To which Lucentius answered that he had dared convoke a council without the authorisation of the bishop of Rome. It is amazing that in the face of this flagrant pretentiousness, none produced the letter of

convocation that had been signed by the late Emperor Theodosius, neither did anyone say that the Emperors of the Orient only could authorise such Council convocation.<sup>40</sup> Marcianus sat silently listening though he had insisted on fixing the time and place of that very council wherein such prevarication was uttered. One of the dismayed bishops simply remarked: “If you are come to judge, why do you, then, accuse?”

To maintain peace and evade a needless disturbance, “the Godfearing”<sup>41</sup> Dioscorus left his place, and sat beside the civil judges in the midst of the church.<sup>42</sup>

309. The Roman delegates persisted in carrying out their plan. They accused Abba Dioscorus of breaking the canons, to which he replied: “Who of us is the law breaker: I, who responded to the request of Emperor Theodosius by sitting at the second Ephesian council and by refusing admittance to Theodoret the Nestorian bishop of Cyrrhus in deference to the verdict passed upon him by the third ecumenical council, or you, who have permitted this same Nestorian to sit among you, when he has been cut off from the church Body and has not repented since his disposition?”<sup>43</sup>

This query of Abba Dioscorus was left unanswered. Dissembling it, Eusebius of Doryloeuum stood up assuming the role of accuser: he pretended that he and his colleagues had been unjustly condemned by Dioscorus at Ephesus. Following this verbal accusation, he handed a written one in which he stated that Dioscorus was Eutychian. This accusation was accepted unquestioningly by the council which had declared, at the same time, its formal acceptance of the membership of Theodoret Bishop of Cyrrhus.

310. Such an act denoted the complete disregard of the Chalcedonians for the decrees of the third ecumenical council. As soon as Theodoret appeared, the Egyptians protested loudly, and were loudly responded to. A tumult arose. Regrettably, the civil judges had to remind the bishops that their behaviour was not in accordance with the Christian spirit; and that they should speak quietly and soberly.

311. When the tumult subsided, Abba Dioscorus asked that the minutes of the second council of Ephesus be read. After the first part was read the Alexandrian Patriarch turned to the moderators of the council and said: “You can see from these minutes that Emperor Theodosius, of blessed memory, is the one at whose request the past council was convoked. You can also see that it was the Emperor who had entrusted the direction of that council to Bishops Juveral of Jerusalem, Domnus of Antioch and myself. The three of us, together with all those who were assembled there, passed the judgment, after each expressed his opinion freely. Unanimously we all agreed to the verdict of acquitting Eutyches, and then each put his signature to it.”<sup>44</sup>

Here, the Oriental bishops cried out: “We did not consent except under coercion; we condemned Flavianus against our will; we signed a blank paper under the threat of being beaten by the imperial guards.”

312. This cry was asserted by the Bishop of Ephesus who swore to its veracity under oath. Roused by his behaviour, the Egyptians cried out: “A soldier of Christ fears no worldly power; light a fire and we will show you how martyrs can die”. And Abba Dioscorus added quietly, “It would have been more compatible with a



bishop's dignity to refuse signing what he knows not specifically when it is that which concerns the majesty of the Faith".<sup>45</sup>

313. Complete silence ensued. Then one of the bishops accused Abba Dioscorus and his monks, headed by Barsumas, of having assassinated bishop Flavianus. Thereupon the Egyptians requested the reading of Pulcheria's letter to Leo, in answer to his plea for the convocation of a council, and his reply to her. Both these letters disclosed that Flavianus died in exile, and his body was brought to Constantinople by Pulcheria and Marcianus with due honour. After reading them, the accuser felt shamed and discomfited. His feelings permeated those bishops who were in league with him. To dispel the tension, the imperial deputies asked the chief notary to resume reading the minutes of the Ephesian-Dioscorian council. He read to the point which mentioned the Tomos of Leo; immediately the delegates of the West interposed asking Abba Dioscorus why the letter of their bishop had not been read. He replied: "I ordered its reading, not once but twice".<sup>46</sup> Again he was asked: "Then why was it not read?" He answered: "Ask my colleagues the bishops of Jerusalem and Antioch. Juvenal then said: "When Dioscorus ordered its reading, the chief notary had presented to us all the letters of his imperial majesty Theodosius, of blessed memory, - and these were naturally given precedence. After reading them, none of the notaries reminded us of Leo's Tomos, so it was simply forgotten".

This answer seemed to have satisfied the questioners, for they kept quiet.

314. Once more, the chief notary resumed the reading of the minutes. After reading the confession of Eutyches, Basilius bishop of Seleucia exclaimed that he had not accepted this Eutychian declaration and that his signature was forged. Immediately Abba Dioscorus rejoined: “I know not why Basilius denies his signature when he knows that he consented to a pure Orthodox teaching”.

At this remark, the bishops unanimously exclaimed that it was their duty as well as their trust to preserve the Faith bequeathed to the Church Universal by the Fathers of Nicea who framed the Constitution – or Creed – of true Orthodoxy, and to transmit that Faith, pure and intact from one generation to the other. What they said was the echo of the assertions of Abba Dioscorus who had repeated before all those present that he firmly upheld the teachings of Athanasius and Kyrillos. So the bishops responded to his assertions with the words: “Dioscorus, Head of the Bishops keeps the Faith”.<sup>47</sup>

Having uttered these words, the bishops were faced with the necessity of setting in a clear-cut manner their stand in relation to the Eutychian heresy. They asked Abba Dioscorus to be the first one to declare his faith in the nature of Christ. He replied: “If a piece of iron, heated to white heat, be struck on the anvil, it is the iron which receives the blows and not the white heat, even though the iron and the white had form one indivisible whole. And though indivisible, the heat mingles not with the iron, nor is it fused into it, nor changed by it. This same is true of the iron, and is in a measure, symbolic of the incarnation of Our Lord where the divine and the human natures united without mixing, fusion, nor change, though neither parted from the other – not even for a moment or the twinkling of an eye.”<sup>48</sup> This unity, the

Fathers of the Alexandrian Church define as “the one Nature of God the Word made flesh” and is synonymous with St. John’s saying “the Word was made flesh”.<sup>49</sup>

315. Finding that Dioscorus was impeccable, the Chalcedonians decided to press him a little further, so they asked him: “If Eutyches has uttered by mouth what was contrary to the written confession submitted to you, what would your judgment be?” He replied: “If Eutyches has, indeed, denied the faith written by him and submitted to us, I would not decree his ex-communication only but would order burning him too. As for me, I steadfastly uphold the Faith of the Orthodox Church: One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic. Neither Eutyches nor any other person can make me swerve from this most holy Faith”.<sup>50</sup>

This frank avowal fell like a thunderbolt on all the opponents of Abba Dioscorus and greatly moved the Oriental bishops; they cried out immediately: “We have sinned and we ask for forgiveness”. Again they were asked to validate their accusation that Dioscorus assassinated Flavianus, and for the third time they repeated: “We have sinned and we ask for forgiveness”.

Despite this triple avowal, the Chacedonians persisted in their efforts of antagonism, they submitted Leo’s Tomos to Abba Dioscorus that the may express his opinion on it. When he read, it he found it to be more Nestorian than Orthodox. Immediately and without any hesitation he declared that it deviated from Orthodoxy, and hence he ex-communicated it and its author. Many of the assembled bishops shared this same view of Abba Dioscorus concerning the Tomos of Leo, but did not possess the courage of conviction that he had,<sup>51</sup> therefore they kept silent. Others were assailed by doubts over the

Tomos, and their faces expressed their perplexity. The civil judges observing their confusion asked: “Are they are thought-provoking terms in this Tomos?” The Bishops assumed that there were none, but asked for an adjournment of five days that they may inquire into the exact meaning of some Latin terms.<sup>52</sup> Their request was immediately granted.<sup>53</sup>

316. Three days later (instead of the five requested) the bishops resumed the official Council meetings without informing the civil judges.

317. Upon assembling, they sent deputies to the abode of Abba Dioscorus to inform him of their meeting and to request him to come to the Council. Dioscorus was virtually under house arrest, for Pulcheria had appointed guards around his house, with orders that they bar his way and that of his bishops. When the delegates of the council came to him, he remarked to them that only three days had elapsed since the adjournment, and asked if the imperial commissioners had been notified. To the first remark, he received no answer; to the second he was told that in church matters the attendance of the laity was irrelevant. He then asked them if they had spoken to his guards that they may allow him to go out. They replied: “We were not sent to speak to your guards, but to invite you, personally, to come to the council”.

This so-called invitation was enacted twice again, so as to give the semblance of a triple summons<sup>54</sup> in accordance with church regulations.

After the second summons, the assembled bishops admitted some men who had presumably come to accuse Abba Dioscorus. Their accusations centred around material subjects, which had no relation whatsoever to the

faith. One of these accusations was the age old one of preventing the Egyptian corn from being sent to other parts of the Empire, the very accusation which had angered Constantine against Athanasius the Apostolic more than a century earlier. When this accusation needed proof, other accusations were not wanting.

And when, to all appearances, the Alexandrian Pope refused the Council's enacted triple summons, his case was discussed in his absence and the absence of all the Egyptian bishops as well as those who sided with them.<sup>55</sup> The legates of Rome accused him by saying that he had prevented the reading of Leo's Tomos at the Ephesian 'Dioscorian' council; that instead of repenting, he dared pass the sentence of ex-communication on the Roman bishop and his Tomos; and that – since he had refused to respond to the synod's triple invitation, he had thereby pronounced his own condemnation.

318. Consequently, the Council pronounced against Abba Dioscorus the following sentence: "From the great ecumenical and holy council, convoked by the Grace of God in compliance with the decree of our pious Godfearing kings<sup>56</sup> at Chalcedon of Bithynia, in the church of St. Euphemia the triumphant martyr – to Dioscorus: Be it known unto you that, because of your disdain of church canons, and the disobedience which you have committed with regard to the holy synod by refusing to appear after our triple summons without counting all your other crimes; [which were not specified] you have been, on the thirteenth of October, 451 A.D., deposed of your Episcopal dignity by the Holy Synod, and declared incapable of fulfilling your ecclesiastical functions."<sup>57</sup>

319. When the civil judges (being the imperial commissioners) heard of what had happened, they were filled with anger. Going straight to the Council, they openly declared that the council's judgment was glaringly inequitable, and that the session held in their absence was illegal. They endeavoured to make them revoke the sentence but failed. Consequently they exclaimed to the assembled bishops: "You shall give account unto God of what you have committed against Dioscorus whom you deposed in the absence of the Emperor, and in our absence too".<sup>58</sup>

320. In his account of these unfortunate events that took place at Chalcedon, Mar S. Ya'Kub, Antiochene Patriarch and historian, gives a number of reasons for the unfairness and illegality of the verdict passed on Abba Dioscorus. Most important among them were: - that he was an impeccable Orthodox; - that no deviation was attributed to the Council of Ephesus (called the Dioscorian); that the verdict was passed in his absence and he was given no chance to defend himself; that the session was held before the date set for it and without official notification of all those who ought to have been present; and that all those who passed it were Nestorians.<sup>59</sup>

While Mgr. Hefele – a Catholic Cardinal – records the witness of Bishop Anatolius which, when translated reads: "Dioscorus was not deposed because of his Orthodox Faith, but because he had ex-communicated Leo 1 (of Rome) and had not obeyed the Synod". After inserting this witness, Mgr. Hefele adds: "In the synodal decree against Dioscorus, there is no express mention of his heresy, and the sentence passed on him by the Pope's (Leo) legates says nothing either".<sup>60</sup>

The Council, having passed this inequitable verdict on Abba Dioscorus, continued to convene. In the session reckoned the fifth, the discussion centred round the Faith, and Anatolius, Bishop of Constantinople, seized the opportunity to declare that the orthodoxy of Abba Dioscorus was impeccable. The veracity of this witness is clearly manifested by the fact that despite its injustice, the Council could only depose Abba Dioscorus, but could neither degrade nor ex-communicate him. Had they really found that he swerved from Orthodoxy, they would not have been satisfied with a sentence of deposition alone.

The Council held several sessions after passing its sentence on Abba Dioscorus, and discussed several worldly matters, one of which was: who among them would be first and have more prerogatives. Sadly enough, this revealed the unworthy intentions and ambitions of a few among them, who – quite obviously – wanted to bring the heretofore highly influential Coptic Church of Alexandria to a position of inferiority, so that Constantinople and Rome could gain superiority over it.

321. Before the Council wound up its final sessions, word came from Marcianus that he had ratified its sentence and decreed the exile of Abba Dioscorus to the island of Gangra – off the coast of Asian Minor. The imperial confirmation was necessary on account of the immense possessions administered by the Patriarch of Alexandria.<sup>61</sup> And, with the ratification, the Emperor gave the bishops the permission to return to their Sees.

322. Abba Dioscorus was voluntarily accompanied in his exile by four Egyptian clergymen: two bishops, an archdeacon and Theopistus his secretary. As for the

saintly Bishop Macari of Edko, he fain would have gone with them too. But Abba Dioscorus told him, “You go back to our beloved country, for the Crown of martyrdom awaits you in the very city where St. Mark shed his own blood”. Abba Macari readily complied and returned to Alexandria. In due time he joined the innumerable host of triumphant Egyptians who joyfully dared to pay the toll of blood for their Orthodox Christian Faith.

323. The exile of Abba Dioscorus, did not stop many of his friends from remaining faithful to him, and keeping in touch with him either through correspondence or whenever possible, through personal visits. Among those who corresponded with him was a bishop from Iberia (present day Spain) called Peter. In the first letter he sent him, he gave him a full report of what happened in Chalcedon after his departure. The answers of Dioscorus to Peter were always full of the serene sense of resignation of the person who felt he had done rightly and had stood up for his faith without bowing to worldly power. He also displayed a spirit of forgiveness for those who had wronged him and “spitefully used him and persecuted him”.<sup>62</sup>

One of his visitors was a merchant from Egypt who stopped by the island shores one day, and wept bitterly at the sight of his exiled Patriarch. The man-of-God comforted him by saying: “My son, as long as we conserve intact the faith legated to us, we are safe despite all physical woes”. The merchant offered him some money saying: “Holy Father, accept this gift because you are in a strange land”. Abba Dioscorus replied: “My son, we are not in a strange land – God Who created the whole world and Who has given us the courage to fight for the true faith is able to make us feel that we are not stringers



in any land, for – as the Psalmist says – the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”. The merchant’s heart was comforted, but he so earnestly begged Abba Dioscorus to accept his donation that he finally prevailed on him. This money, the Man-of-God distributed among the poor.<sup>63</sup> Abba Dioscorus assented, adding that it also symbolised the blessed Virgin Who bore Christ within her womb, but was not scorched thereby.

324. Five years after this sentence of exile had been pronounced, the maligned Head of the Church of Alexandria joined the ranks of the Church Triumphant. During his exile, he had succeeded in winning many pagan residents of the island to the Christian faith, and a number of heretics to Orthodoxy – thus serving his Lord even unto the end.

325. But since the Heavenly Father never forgets love’s labour, even against all appearances, He raised for Abba Dioscorus loyal witnesses in different ages. Severus, Patriarch of Antioch in the sixth century said of him: “He was a martyr of Christ; he alone, refused to worship Baal in that false council”. While Mar Zakareya, Bishop of Modally in Asia Minor, described him as “the man whose faith was like that of Athanasius, Kyrillos, and the other Church Doctors. And seeing that this intrepid man – Dioscorus – had trained himself from his tender years in the Orthodox faith, he refused to bow to the doubt-faced idol set up by Leo at Chalcedon”. Abba Petros, 27<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria referred to him as “Christ’s loyal martyr”.<sup>65</sup>

Then over a thousand years after Chalcedon – in 1553 A.D., a Greek prelate – Bishop Georgius of Nimokopion in Asia Minor, made a historical, legal study

of the subject, in which he said that Dioscorus was not judged because his faith was suspect, but because he refused to accept the views or have any communion with Leo, the Patriarch of Rome, and – presumably – was summoned thrice to the Council of Chalcedon, and did not accept the summons.<sup>66</sup>

While a more modern writer<sup>67</sup> made the two following statements that put in a nutshell the goal of the planners of the Council of Chalcedon. He said: “The State was delivered at the close of this period, from its most powerful opponent, the Bishop of Alexandria, though at much too high a cost”; and then he said: “Leo I... made common cause with the Emperor and the Bishop of the Eastern capital and overthrew Dioscorus. But at the moment of his fall, the opposition between the hitherto united powers (Emperor and Head of Roman Church) was destined to emerge”.

326. Theopistus, secretary of Abba Dioscorus, had been a deacon from Alexandria. He had served his Pope some years before the unfortunate Council of Chalcedon. His loyalty and admiration for his intrepid Chief compelled him to go with him to his exile, where he carefully wrote his biography for the edification of later ages. When Abba Dioscorus went unto his reward, Theopistus could not return to his native land for Emperor Marcianus threatened to kill him should he set foot on Egyptian soil. He therefore, went to the Pentapolis where he completed the biography, and sent it to his compatriots.<sup>68</sup> Thus he manifested how the unconquerable spirit of a faithful and righteous man can overcome all storms.

### **C. *Reverberations***

- 327. Far-reaching Results
- 328. Tyranny in face of loyalty
- 329. Leo writes to the intruder.

327. For the Church Universal, the Council of Chalcedon had many unfortunate results, not the least of which was that it sowed the germs of dissension between the Churches founded by the Apostles and so far considered sister churches. Had those who planned the Council been able to forecast its consequences, they might have acted in a totally different manner.

328. When Emperor Marcianus approved the Council's verdict and banished Dioscorus, he sent a message to the Alexandrian people informing them of this verdict and telling them that he had appointed a man by the name of Proterius to occupy his chair. He also warned them against any disobedience.<sup>69</sup> Proterius was sent to Alexandria accompanied by imperial troops who had orders to punish all who refused to submit to him. But the Egyptians, far from being cowed, rose in rebellion, as was their custom when they felt strongly about anything. The Bishops met in an emergency council and decreed their unanimous support of Abba Dioscorus, and their excommunication of Leo and his Tomos, the Chalcedon decrees, and Proterius. To counteract this measure, the imperial troops went to each bishop alone ordering him to sign the Chalcedon decrees. The first bishop approached was Macari of Edko, who wanted to follow Abba Dioscorus to his island exile and was told by him to return to Alexandria where he was going to be martyred. This

forecast came to pass when the imperial officer struck him to death upon his refusal to sign the document presented to him. His martyrdom heralded a wave of persecutions in which an estimated thirty thousand lost their lives.<sup>70</sup>

With the exception of a few churches forcefully taken and given over by the Emperor to the supporters of Chalcedon, all churches were closed. Proterius, mindless of the people or their feelings, proceeded to despoil the churches relegated to him and his partisans.

329. At the approach of Easter, Leo of Rome sent a letter to Proterius asking him to inform him of the date for celebrating it, as this had been the prerogative assigned by the Nicean Council to the Patriarch of Alexandria. This gesture, which was no more than a mere flattery to the Emperor's minion enraged the Egyptians all the more.<sup>71</sup> They persisted in opposing him just as much as he persisted in persecuting them without truce or mercy.

But whatever they were subjected to, and notwithstanding it, the Copts – both clergy and people, remained steadfastly loyal to the exiled Abba Dioscorus, and regarded Proterius as a foreigner and a usurper of a See he had absolutely no right to occupy.

### **XVIII. NOTES**

1. Neale. *Op. cit.* Vol. I, pp. 278-301.
2. Guettee. vol. IV, p. 547; also *The Council of Chalcedon* trans. into Arabic from the original mss. kept at the Vatican Library, by the monk Francis Maria and sanctioned by three Catholic theologians, pp. 28-33.
3. Guettee. vol. IV, p. 579; *The Council of Chalcedon ...* p. 144.
4. *Op. cit.* P. 34. It should be noted here that Leo calls himself 'Bishop' only. This appellation is constantly used by him in his letters to emperors, bishops and councils, (seventeen time sin this work alone). This is one proof, among many, that up to the 5<sup>th</sup> century the title of 'pope' was not in use to designate the Roman Prelate.
5. Guettee. vol. IV, pp. 554-6.
6. Hefele, *op. cit.* vol. II, p. 528.
7. Guettee. vol. IV, pp, 557-9.
8. *Ibid.* p. 561.
9. Hefele, II, pp. 555-7.
10. *Council of Chalcedon... p. 42; Mar Sawiris Ya'kub. Tarikh... vol. II, p. 116.*

11. Hefele, II, p. 558.
12. Neale. I, p. 290.
13. Mar Sawiris Ya'kub. *Op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 118. It should be noted here that the Roman delegate mentions Eutyches with his title despite the verdict of the Flavian council; and that he also describes him as "God-fearing".
14. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 46; Mar Sawiris Ya'kub II, p. 129.
15. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 95.
16. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 25; 49-50, 101-2.
17. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 52-3; Mar Sawiris Ya'kub II, p. 148.
18. Hefele. v. 2, p. 527.
19. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 57-8.
20. Hefele II, p. 567.
21. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 58-60; Guettee, IV, p. 566.
22. Guettee. IV, p. 565, and footnote on same page.
23. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 62-3.

24. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 63-7; Mar Sawiris Ya'kub v. II, p. 150.
25. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 67-72.
26. Guettee. IV, p. 572; G. Massarra. *Tarikh...* I, p. 225.
27. Guettee. IV, p. 574.
28. Guettee. IV, pp. 302-4; Wallis-Budge: *The book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church.* II, p. 606.
29. Neale. I, p. 210, in which, among other things, he says, "The power of the Prelate of Alexandria was, in some respects, greater than that of the Bishop of Rome over his own prelates, and the civil authority attached to the office was exceedingly great."
30. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 72-4.
31. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 72-4.
32. Abbbe P. Guettee, *La Papaute Schismatique.* P. 98.
33. Here is the first sign of Leo's changed attitude towards Eutyches whom he puts on the same footing with Nestorius.
34. Guette, *Histoire...* IV, pp. 578-580; *Chalcedon...* pp. 74-6 and 88.
35. Mar Sawiris Ya'kub II, p. 150.

36. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 75-6.
37. Hefele. II. P. 590.
38. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 75-9.
39. Guettee. IV, pp. 582-3; *Papaute...* p. 100.
40. *Ency. des Sciences Religieuses.* vol. III, p. 293, where it is stated that “les empereurs d’Orient eurent, seuls, sans contredit, le droit de convoquer les conciles generaux.” Also: Guettee, IV, p. 480.
41. This is the adjective used to describe Abba Dioscorus in: *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 83; Guettee. IV, p. 584.
42. Guettee. IV, p. 584; Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 158-160.
43. Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 160-5. On p. 163 he states: “In fact, the Council of Chalcedon was convoked to execute personal objectives...”.
44. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 84-90; Guettee. IV, p. 595.
45. Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 169. Mgr. Y. ed-Debs Maronite Bishop: *Council of Chalcedon*, chap. 17, section 189.
46. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 93.



47. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 97.
48. Yassa ‘Abd ‘l Masih. *The Faith and Practices of the Coptic Church.* P. 17; *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 117.
49. St. John 1:14.
50. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 99.
51. Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 170-1; *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 99-101.
52. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 170.
53. Guette. *La Papaute...* p. 101.
54. *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 172; Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 174.
55. Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 176-9.
56. Meaning Pulcheria and her husband – and thus avowing the imperial right of convocation from the first sentence of their decree.
57. Guettee. *Histoire.* IV, p. 594; also *Council of Chalcedon...* p. 187-190.
58. Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 176-7.
59. Mar Sawiris Ya’kub II, p. 1176-7.

60. In his book *Histoire des Conciles*, vol. III, p. 59 and its footnote. It should be noted that Leo I was one of four bishops of Rome to be excommunicated. The three others are: Liberius by Hilarius Bishop of Poitiers who was under Rome's jurisdiction; Honorius by the Council of Constantinople held in A.D. 680; and Nicolaus by Photios the Constantinople Bishop in the eleventh century. Yet none of the excommunicators was so much as reprimanded for such behaviour; the only exception being Abba Dioscorus. Cf. Guettee, vol. III, pp. 202-3 and 208-10; vol. V, pp. 495-7 and vol. VI, pp. 254-74; Barbier, pp. 340-5; *Ency. des Science Religieuses*. vol. III, p. 292 and vol. VIII, p. 627.
61. Guettee, vol. IV, p. 594.
62. *Histoire de Dioscore* by his disciple Theopistus, trans. From Coptic into French by M.F. Nau, pub. In "Le Journal Asiatique" 2<sup>nd</sup> series, Tome X, No. 2, Mars-Avril 1903, p. 279.
63. *Ibid.* pp. 288-9.
64. *Ibid.* pp. 297-300.
65. *Ibid.* pp. 297-300.
66. In an Epistle in Greek trans. by Y. Abd 'I Masih, entitled; *The Union of the Coptic Church with the Orthodox Church*, p. 59.

67. A. Harnack: 1 – in his book *Outlines of the History of Dogma* trans. by Edwin K. Mitchell, Boston Beacon Press, 1952; and 2 – in his *History of Dogma* trans. by James Millar from 3<sup>rd</sup> German ed. Pub. By Williams & Norgate, London, 1897, vol. III. p. 154.
68. Mar Sawiris Ya'kub II, pp. 202-3.
69. *Council of Chalcedon...* pp. 212-14.
70. *Book of Saints...* trans. by W. Budge, vol. IV, pp. 138-40.
71. Guettee, vol. V, p. 27.

## *XIX. CHOICE AND COUNTERCHOICE*

### *A. Abba Timotheos II*

- 330. Successor of Dioscorus.
- 331. Pastoral Tour.
- 332. Another exiled Pope.
- 333. New Emperor.
- 334. Imperial circular letter.
- 335. Reconciliation between Eastern Orthodox Churches.
- 336. Body of Abba Dioscorus brought to Alexandria.
- 337. Service in peace.

330. In the year A.D. 456, news came that Abba Dioscorus had been translated into the 'Company of the Just'. Throughout the Apostolic See of St. Mark, all hearts were sad, aching at the lonesomeness of the departed Pope at the hour of his death.

The Prefect of Alexandria was out of the city when the sad news came. Seizing the opportunity, clergy and people held a meeting, and unanimously elected Timotheos, one of the Secretaries of Abba Dioscorus, to be the twenty-sixth successor to St. Mark, thus maintaining the Apostolic succession in spite of the odds against them.<sup>1</sup>

When the Prefect returned and received word of what had happened, he was beside himself with rage. In his tyranny and with the support of his Emperor he could not concede to the Egyptians their right to elect their own Patriarch. In this case, he pretended that they should have at least, waited for his return, and under this pretence he refused to acknowledge their new Pope. He insisted on

continuing to support Proterius, and regarded the Egyptians as rebels deserving of punishment.

331. Reacting to this attitude, Abba Timotheos convoked his Bishops, and together they re-affirmed their excommunication of the Council of Chalcedon, and of all who accepted its decrees. The, with a sense of confident rightfulness, he proceeded on a pastoral tour.

During his absence, Count Dionysius, a high ranking officer in the imperial Army, arrived at Alexandria, with orders to subdue the Egyptians to Proterius at all costs. In his attempt to do so, he committed indescribable outrages against them that only increased their resistance and their estrangement.

St. Mark's rightful successor returned from his tour to find the gates of his metropolis closed in his face by order of Count Dionysius. The Egyptians felt more outraged at this imperial arrogance. As their anger mounted in proportion to the tyrannous treatment, they decided to put an end to this tug of war. So they crowded around the palace occupied by Proterius, who became panic-stricken and fled to the baptistry of his church. In their fury they followed him and killed him.<sup>2</sup>

332. At this total disregard of threats and persecutions, and this open rebellion, Emperor Marcianus ordered the exile of Abba Timotheos and his brother to the very same island of Gangra where Dioscorus had been exiled. He hoped that thereby he would break their spirit and that of his people.<sup>3</sup> But this was not to be. And to his dismay, he heard that when the Alexandrian Patriarch was taken to his exile by land instead of by sea in accordance with his decree, and passed through Palestine, Lebanon and Asia

Minor, the multitudes hastened to greet him as if he had been a triumphant hero.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless another intruder was imposed on the Coptic Church, but the Copts unrelentingly regarded him in the same way as they did his predecessor. This continued for seven years. It was a manifestation of aggressive imperialism versus intense nationalism.<sup>5</sup>

333. In A.D. 474, Emperor Marcianus died heirless, and so the throne for which Pulcheria had sacrificed conscience and principle was lost to the family of Theodosius. The new Emperor, whose name was Basiliscus, was no scion of the Theodosian line. He had a court doctor who was an Alexandrian.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptians seized their chance, and with his assistance, asked the new Emperor to allow their Pope to return to his See. Their request was granted, and thus the years of exile for Abba Timotheos came to an end.

334. On his homeward journey, St. Mark's successor paid a visit to Constantinople in order to thank the Emperor and to entreat him to re-establish the Bishops deposed by Marcianus, and to restore peace to the Church of Alexandria. The Emperor agreed readily, and to prove his goodwill asked Abba Timotheos to write a circular letter which he sent himself to all the bishops.

335. The circular of Abba Timotheos promulgated by Emperor Basiliscus was the basis of reconciliation between the Eastern Orthodox churches of Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople and Alexandria.

336. While rejoicing at his unexpected release, Abba Timotheos did not forget his duty towards his

predecessor. He asked the Emperor and got his permission to carry with him the body of the maligned Confessor Abba Dioscorus. Arriving at Alexandria, the crowds hastened to welcome him as well as to participate in honouring the mortal remains of the departed Pope. The procession they formed marched straight to St. Mark's Church where the ritual for the departed was chanted. Then, after burying the body of Dioscorus beside those of his illustrious predecessors, they offered "the Prayer of Thanksgiving" to the Merciful Heavenly Father for allowing Abba Timotheos to see his people and return to his homeland alive.<sup>7</sup>

337. When peace came at last to the Coptic Church, it was as welcome as rain after the drought. It gave Abba Timotheos the opportunity to devote himself to teaching his people, comforting their hearts and strengthening their faith. In addition, he repaired the churches which had been despoiled by the intruders. With heart serene, he reached the end of his days.

## ***B. Abba Petros III***

- 338. Election of successor to Timotheos.
- 339. Zeno usurps the throne and appoints an intruder.
- 340. Egyptian Delegates meet Zeno.
- 341. Bishops of Alexandria and Constantinople exchange letters.
- 342. “The Henoticon”.
- 343. Final Rest of Abba Petros.
- 344. Peace at Last.

338. Abba Petros III, a priest from Alexandria who had been also a disciple of Abba Dioscorus was elected to succeed Timotheos II and become the twenty-seventh Pope. No sooner had he been consecrated, than he convoked his council and emphatically renewed the excommunication of Leo and his Tomos, together with the council of Chalcedon.

339. Meanwhile, the good Emperor Basiliscus was ousted by Zeno who usurped his throne. He started his rule by favouring the Chalcedonians, ordering the banishment of Abba Petros III, and naming his own minion in his stead. For five years, St. Mark’s Chair was again occupied by an intruder. Petros III, however, escaped banishment by secretly going into hiding in the suburbs of his own capital. The authorities were unable to locate him, but he kept in touch with his people and “used to teach them by his letters to be strong.”<sup>8</sup>

340. Meanwhile the leaders among the Copts decided to send a delegation to Constantinople to meet Emperor Zeno and try to convince him that they had the right to



have their own elected Pope to be the Head of their Church.

The negotiations with the Emperor were effective, and in a propitious moment Zeno consented to accord them their request and withdrew his appointee from Alexandria.

341. Fourteen interesting letters were then exchanged between Abba Petros III, and Acacius, Bishop of Constantinople. The sequence of letters is interesting: Abba Petros sent two in succession: in the first he asked Acacius for a re-affirmation of his faith, while the second was a rebuke and an admonition. Bishop Acacius replied in all humility, confessing first that he had transgressed in approving the Chalcedon decrees, and ending by saying: “Shine on us, O Lamp of Orthodoxy, and lighten our path – we who have erred. Be like unto Stephen, the Archdeacon, and cry out unto God for us, we who have persecuted you, and say ‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge’,<sup>10</sup> that we be forgiven.”<sup>11</sup>

342. As a result of this correspondence between the two prelates Abba Petros delegated some of his trustworthy men and sent them to Constantinople, where a local council was held and issued a joint doctrinal declaration known as “The Henoticon”. This was a statement about the re-establishment of the bond of unity between the Orthodox churches, and a strong re-affirmation of the Faith they held in common. “We declare unto you”, it announced to all the Orthodox people of the East, “that we accept no Creed other than that of the three hundred and eighteen Fathers of Nicea, confirmed by the hundred and fifty at Constantinople, and upheld by the two hundred at Ephesus – condemning Arius, Nestorius and

Eutyches. We also accept the twelve anathemas of Abba Kyrillos of blessed memory; we confess that our Lord God Jesus the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God was verily incarnate, while being Consubstantial with the Father in His Divinity; He it is Who descended from heaven and was made flesh by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary the Mother-of-God; He is One, and not two. We say that it is the same Son of God Who performed miracles, and Who suffered voluntarily in the flesh. We refuse altogether those who divide or confound the two natures – such as Nestorius; those who adopt a simple appearance of the Incarnation – such as Eutyches. We anathematise whoever believes, or has believed otherwise, at Chalcedon or any other council – specifically Nestorius, Eutyches and their partisans”.

“Be ye, therefore reconciled one to the other within the Church, our Spiritual Mother, as loving children; and She will grant you Her Manifold blessings. Thus will angels rejoice, and we will give thanks to our Heavenly Father”.<sup>12</sup>

343. The imperial messengers of Bishop Acacius carried “The Henoticon” to Abba Petros in Alexandria. All of them went together to St. Mark’s Church, where the Alexandrian Pope spoke to the multitude who crowded it, explaining to them the doctrines declared in “The Henoticon”. He then asked them to pray that God may prolong the life of the Emperor under whose sway the reconciliation of the churches was effected. They, then, lifted up their voices in “The Prayer of Thanksgiving”.

After such a prolonged and unhappy period of dissension and persecution, this was indeed a joyful reconciliation. Letters of congratulations and fraternal

love were exchanged between Abba Petros and the Bishops of Constantinople and Jerusalem. Writing to Abba Petros, Acacisu addressed him thus: “To the lover-of-God, our brother and co-bishop Petros”; while the bishop of Jerusalem wrote to him in these terms: “To the lover-of-the-Christ, the Chief Priest, my Lord and Brother and my Colleague Petros”.<sup>13</sup>

344. And so it came about at last that the Copts reaped the fruits of their long-suffering, loyalty and steadfastness, and a peaceful life was restored unto them. Abba Petros, capitalised this peace by consecrating himself to the service of his Church and his people whose loyalty to him was wholehearted. For eight years and three months he shepherded them, then departed unto his Lord.

## **XIX. NOTES**

1. Guettee, V, p. 197.
2. A.M. di Ligouri, *Histoire des Heresies*. P. 267.
3. H.B. Sawiris Ya'Kub, *op. cit.*, v. II, p. 210.
4. *Ibid.* p. 219.
5. Duschesene. *Histoire de l'Eglise*. Tome II, p. 22.
6. G. Sobhi, 'Education in Egypt' in *Le Bulletin de la Societe d; Archeologie Copte*. IX, 1943, p. 113.
7. H.B.S. Ya'Kub, II, pp. 229-30.
8. W. Budge, trans., *Book of Ethopian Saints*. I, pp. 204-5.
9. Guettee, V, pp. 44-5.
10. Acts 7:60.
11. Manassa 'l-Qommos. *op. cit.* P. 318.
12. Guettee, V, pp. 44-51; also S. Ya'Kub. II, p. 241.
13. S. Ya'Kub. II, pp. 241-4.

**XX. FLUCTUATING FORTUNES OF THE COPTS  
UNDER THE EASTERN EMPERORS**

- A.** *“A time for peace ...”*  
**B.** *“... and a time for war” (Eccles. 3:8)*  
**C.** *The link with Nubia.*  
**D.** *Daniel, the priest of Scete (Shiheat)*
345. The variations in the Emperors’ treatment of the Copts.  
346. The five successors of Abba Petros III enjoy peace and freedom.  
347. Benevolent Rule of Emperor Anastasius.  
348. Why Emperor Zeno was fair and sympathetic to the Copts.  
349. Anastasius and the cause of his sympathy towards the Copts.  
350. The flourish of cultural and intellectual activities.  
351. Death of Anastasius heralds an era of Byzantine despotism.  
352. Banishment of 32<sup>nd</sup> Coptic Pope and persecution of his people.  
353. Severus, Bishop of Antioch, takes refuge in Egypt.  
354. Election of Abba Theodosius.  
355. Banishment of Abba Theodosius, and the appointment of an intruder.  
356. The Coptic clergymen a source of sustenance to the people.  
357. Justin II becomes Emperor after Justinian.  
358. Death of Abba Theodosius and patient waiting of Copts to elect his successor.  
359. Election of Petros IV.  
360. Damianos succeeds Petros IV.  
361. The evangelisation of Nubia.

362. The life and services of Daniel, priest of Shiheat, and of the monks under him.

A. 345. In the ensuing decades, the story of the Copts was one of fluctuating fortunes, depending on the attitude of the eastern emperors towards them and the extent of sympathy and understanding – or total lack of them – that these Emperors displayed towards the Church of Alexandria and its spiritual Heads. For a period of almost one hundred and fifty years under the nine Emperors that ruled Egypt up to the Arab Conquest, there were times of peace and times of oppression in the land of the Nile. In peace times, the people prospered, the Church flourished and its Popes had scope to carry on their constructive duties of building, teaching, writing and sustaining the faithful. In times of war, the people were subjected to all kinds of oppression and persecution and suffered untold hardships – a situation that was not unfamiliar to them.

But whether they were left in peace or not, and whatever the nature or severity of the hardships they suffered, the Copts in general remained fiercely attached to their own Orthodox Faith and unshakeably loyal to their own elected Patriarchs and none other. No outside ruler, or his imposed governor or minion patriarch, with all the might and power at their command, could break their spirit or sway them from this loyalty. Even when they got bruised and battered, it must be said to their eternal credit that they did not bow their heads. And that is how and why the line of succession of their own Popes was never broken from the time of St. Mark to the present, even in their darkest hour.

346. In the year 480 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Zeno, Abba Petros III died, having accomplished his earthly mission. The five successors who followed him and received the honour of occupying the Chair of St. Mark, as the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Popes of the Church of Alexandria, enjoyed the same peace and freedom that had been granted to the Copts during his times. These five were Abba Arthanasius II, Abba Yoannis I, Abba Yoannis II, Abba Dioscorus II, and Abba Timotheos III. Together they directed the helm of the Church for approximately thirty years.

347. In the year 491 A.D., eleven years after the death of Abba Petros III, Emperor Zeno died and Emperor Anastasius succeeded him to the throne. Fortunately, he was favourably inclined to let the Copts live in peace and govern their own Church as Emperor Zeno had been. He, also, highly respected their spiritual leaders and refused to interfere in their affairs in spite of the fact that he had received several delegations with letters from the Bishop of Rome asking him to annul the 'Henoticon' promulgated by Emperor Zeno, on the pretext that this would reunite the Churches of East and West. Emperor Anastasius, who knew better, because he had been enlightened by the Pope of the Copts regarding the causes of the break and the whole subject, refused to do what the Bishop of Rome asked of him. He decided to let each party carry on practicing its own faith in its own way, and to maintain peace through moderation.

348. Interestingly enough both Emperors Zeno and Anastasius had personal reasons for the kindly attitudes they nurtured towards the Church of Egypt and its

Patriarchs, and in particular towards its saintly desert-dwellers of the monasteries.

Emperor Zeno had only two daughters, one of whom in the prime of her youth and beauty, disappeared suddenly. Sad and forlorn, the Emperor ordered a thorough search he made to find her whereabouts. His orders were carried out but all efforts to find her were in vain. And the Emperor sorrowfully resigned himself that she must have met her death.

The truth was that she had secretly attired herself in men's clothes, gone to port and taken the first ship to Alexandria. From there she went to the monasteries in the Western desert of Egypt where she sought to satisfy the spiritual hunger of her soul. There Providence led her to an old and venerable ascetic named Abba Pimoa to whom she disclosed her identity and the reasons of her coming, asking him to keep her secret and to guide her to the path of truth and divine knowledge. The ascetic complied with her wishes, made her his disciple and, assigning to her a cave in the desert, started teaching her to the lessons of spiritual discipline and growth. She kept her masculine disguise, putting on the garb of a monk, and came to be known in the area as 'Father Hilarion'. Because she grew no beard, it was thought that she was an eunuch, and came to be so nicknamed. For twelve years, she lived her life of seclusion, spending hours and hours in prayer and devotion; and even though she gradually learned to participate in the group worship of her nearest monastery, she kept to herself much of the time, and the only person who knew her real identity was the ascetic, Abba Pimoa.

One day her sister developed an illness that no doctor was able to cure. In desperation lest he lose his



remaining daughter, and having heard that many of the saintly Egyptian desert fathers were endowed with the gift of spiritual healing, Emperor Zeno decided to send her to them with a plea that they try and heal her. She was accompanied by guards and servants carrying all that she may need as well as many gifts to the monasteries.

As was their wont when anybody sought their prayers and intercessions, the desert fathers started a continuous vigil of prayer for the princess. After a few days, they called in the monk Hilarion and asked him to add his prayers to theirs for the healing of the Emperor's daughter. Hilarion, immediately recognising his sister, took her to his own cave, put her on his bed and prayed for her with all the compassionate faith within his soul. Then anointing her with oil and kissing her gently he bade her sleep restfully. On waking up, the princess had a feeling of well-being and cheerfully declared that. Hilarion took her to his brethren and told them that their prayers had effected her healing.

When the princess returned to Constantinople in a state of restored health, and told her parents what had happened, Emperor Zeno was overjoyed, and sent to the monasteries requesting that Hilarion the monk be allowed to visit him in his palace. The Emperor's request was granted. When Hilarion arrived at the palace, he asked the Emperor and Empress (his parents) to give him a solemn pledge to leave him return to the Egyptian desert after he disclosed to them a person secret. When they did that, he told them of his true identity and that in reality he was their daughter disguised in a monk's garb. Zeno and his wife were overwhelmed with joy because they found out their daughter was still alive, and because of the degree of saintliness that 'Hilarion' (alias Princess Hilaria) had reached. After days of festivities at the imperial palace,

Hilarion returned to his elected spiritual home in the Egyptian deserts.

349. The reason why Anastasius was sympathetic was that at one time, before he had become Emperor, he had good cause to flee from the reigning monarch. To hide from him, he took refuge in Egypt just as his Saviour did. During his stay in that country known throughout the ages for mothering the hounded and those who sought refuge, Anastasius made many friends. One of them took him one day to visit a saintly old recluse endowed with the gift of prophecy. The old man, looking at him, told him that the day will come when he will become Emperor and sit upon the throne of Constantinople. When this augury was fulfilled, Anastasius did not forget his many Egyptian friends. In gratitude, he had a church built in the vicinity of the cell which had been occupied by the old recluse, and furnished it with vessels of gold. He also sent rich gifts to the persons who had been considerate of him when he had been hiding in distress.<sup>1</sup>

350. One of the many beneficial fruits of peace that prevailed in Egypt during these years was that it provided the Egyptians with the security needed for pursuing art and science.

Egypt had been the melting pot of Hellenistic, Roman, Persian and diverse other arts, but had overgrown all of them. A new art springing from Egyptian soil flourished, expressing national feelings and thoughts. Textiles, wood, ivory, brass, pottery, and painting were all available media. Often Coptic artists mingled different media to express one motif which gave rise to the description that “the inter-relation of various media is a constant feature of all Coptic Arts”.<sup>2</sup> Yet some artists

preferred the use of one medium. Fragments of delicate masterpieces from this era are still extant in sculpture, portraits, textiles, and other productions. Coptic sculpture has been described as “painting in stone: the designs simple ... the background cut away to give deep strongly contrasting shadows ...” In time this colouristic art of the Copts was to penetrate all of Europe.<sup>3</sup>

The Copts endeavoured to convey a spiritual meaning through their art. It is feasible to say that it is this spiritual content together with its decorative value which attracted European Schools of Art. Baroque and other styles of art were influenced by it to a large extent.<sup>4</sup>

This tendency to give spiritual meaning to their art may account for the fact that the only signature with which most of the artists of the early centuries sealed their creativeness was: “O Lord, those who have laboured for Thee, remember Thou in Thy Kingdom”.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the artists, there were also the writers. One outstanding author of this period is Cosmos who travelled through many lands in A.D., 512. On his return, he set himself to writing a description of his travels. His book is still extant, though in fragments, and is entitled “a Description of Lands in Accordance with Christianity”. Here is a passage extracted from his book: “In the island of Taprona (Ceylon) there is a church with a priest and a congregation of devout believers. And I do not know if the Faith has gone farther or not because I did not venture beyond the limits of this island. There is also a church in the region called Maal (Malabar), where pepper grows; and another in the region known as Kalyan (near Bombay). Its bishop is elected from Persia, who also shepherds the faithful on the island of Dioscoris (Sukutura) in the Indian Ocean ... priests and a multitude

of Christians ...”<sup>6</sup> Thus did Cosmos instruct his compatriots and rouse their imagination.

Scientists, too, found the relaxed atmosphere necessary for study. One of the rare illustrated, hand-written copies of the book of Genesis now kept at the State Library, Vienna, dates from this era. It contains some eighty-eight plates, of great interest and attraction, relevant to this book. But scriptural science is by no means the only field of research. Biology medicine, astronomy and music were given due attention. Unfortunately what remains in these fields is fragmentary because of the incessant upheavals which overtook the ancient land of the Pharaohs. One of the rare extant manuscripts is a book on botany presumably written at the request of a princess.<sup>7</sup>

It may, also, be noted that in the manuscripts of the fifth and sixth centuries, the first elements of a calligraphic character are found. These became the source of inspiration for the illuminated scripts of the Middle Ages, ornamented with floral or geometric designs.<sup>8</sup>

B. 351. With the death of Emperor Anastasius, the era of peace and security for the Copts ended, and an era of Byzantine despotism began. This era was destined to last for almost one hundred and twenty years during which the Emperors of Constantinople subjected the Church of Egypt to all sorts of persecutions and abuses. Their elected Popes were often banished; foreign, intruding imperially-appointed prelates were imposed upon them; many of their churches were destroyed or desecrated, and the people were forced to pay dearly in life and property for their resistance to the rulers and their refusal to accept any other interpretation or form of

Christian Faith but that legated to them by their own Church Fathers.

352. The successor of Anastasius was Emperor Justin I, whose accession to the throne occurred a short time after Timotheos III had been elected 32<sup>nd</sup> Pope of Alexandria. Timotheos had already proven by word and deed that he was worthy of the august Chair to which he was elevated, and that he was a man who had the courage of his convictions.

Unlike Anastasius, Emperor Justin I was a man who liked to interfere in theological controversies, and to impose his way of thinking through the temporal power he possessed. But neither the Pope of Alexandria nor his people were the type to accept this. The result was that a clash occurred between Abba Timotheos and the Emperor as it was bound to occur in such a situation, and in consequence the Coptic Patriarch was banished, and many outrageous acts of oppression and persecution began against the Copts both as individuals and as a Church.

The gap between the East and the West steadily deteriorated and widened.<sup>9</sup> Emperor Justin I expended much effort to try and make the Coptic Pope obey his wishes. He tried to tempt him with offers of worldly power, position and gifts. And when he stubbornly maintained that he would not budget one iota from the Faith legated to him by his forebears the Emperor got enraged and ordered his banishment.

353. Other Eastern Orthodox Church dignitaries were mistreated in like manner by Justin because of their refusal to go along with him in the doctrines he wanted to impose upon them. One of these was Severus, Bishop of Antioch, whom the Emperor not only banished but also

had excommunicated. He gave orders that his tongue be cut, but fortunately for him the order was not executed because of the intercession of Empress Theodora, Justin's wife, who was a good and charitable woman, and whose influence on the Emperor – when he listened to her – was always beneficial. After his excommunication Bishop Severus was permitted to leave Antioch and reside in any place of his choice. He decided to live in Egypt where he quietly withdrew to a monastery to spend the rest of his days.

When Emperor Justin I died and was succeeded by Justinian I, Abba Timotheos was allowed to return to his country though not to his See upon which an intruder had been imposed. So he sought refuge in the desert monasteries. For some time both he and Severus led lives of fugitives because the imperial troops hounded them and would not leave them in peace. Finally, however, they settled in a monastery beyond the knowledge of these troops, and became constant companions. There they found time to communicate with their people, secretly but regularly sent them letters comforting and encouraging them and asking them to remain faithful to the end.

Oppressed and hounded, Abba Timotheos endeavoured with all his God-given powers to fulfil his pastoral duties. For seventeen years he shepherded his people with lovingkindness. Then he was translated unto the 'Mansions of Light'.<sup>10</sup>

354. After the death of Abba Timotheos, the Coptic clergy and people speedily and quietly came together and elected his successor, an ascetic called Theodosius who became the thirty-third Pope of the Church of Alexandria. This did not change matters much regarding Emperor Justinian's attitude. The Emperor also tried to impose his

views on the Head of St. Mark's Church and again he met with the same indomitable refusal. Through an ultimatum that the Emperor sent him through a special messenger, asking him either to accept the Chalcedonian decrees, or suffer the consequences, he replied fearlessly and publicly that he would do no such thing. "The Emperor has power over his corruptible body of mine", he told the messenger, "but my soul belongs to Jesus Christ my Great King. You can do with me whatever you please ... but I will follow in the footsteps of my Fathers, the Teachers of the Apostolic Church".

Displeased but not giving up, the Emperor decided to put his prestige on the line and try again in person to persuade the Alexandrian Pope to comply with his demand. He invited him to Constantinople, received him royally and graciously together with the Empress, then held several private sessions with him. Gently but firmly and frankly the man-of-God made it clear to the Emperor that nothing would ever make him deviate from the Faith defended so boldly and valiantly by all his immortal predecessors.

355. Unable to shake Abba Theodosius by so much as a hairsbreadth, Justinian banished him<sup>11</sup> and gain an intruder, named Paul of Tinnis, was imposed on St. Mark's Chair. This intruder entered Alexandria surrounded by imperial troops.

The Egyptians were enraged; they met the intruder with loud proclamations "This is a new Judas! Down with the betrayer! Down with the intruder!"

Paul of Tinnis remained for a year in Alexandria, during which no one communicated with him except the envoy and the troops who accompanied him, the governor of the city, and his attendants. In desperation, he sent a

detailed account to the Emperor, entreating him to find the means by which to subject the obstinate Egyptians to this rule.

At this news the Emperor was beside himself with rage. He ordered the closing of all churches, setting his seal to them, and guarding them by imperial troops.

The Egyptians were saddened and filled with anguish; yet they neither despaired nor renounced their faith. For another year, they were denied all spiritual consolation, being deprived of the joy of receiving the sacraments. They accepted this deprivation – though it seemed calamitous to them – rather than bend before the tyranny of Justinian’s minion. The only ray of light piercing their darkness came to them from their Pope who wrote them from his exile. Like his predecessors, his writings were regular, comforting and strengthening, enjoining them to be patient and steadfast, and assuring them of God’s infinite, sustaining love.

356. In obedience to their exiled Pope – whom they had come to love and revere to a high degree – the people did remain steadfast in their own Faith. They put up patiently with the increasingly rigorous laws imposed upon them.

Their clergymen, including the saintly monks of the desert increased their prayers, fasting and services for them, and – as they quietly and diligently ministered unto their needs – were a source of great sustenance to them.

The papacy of Abba Theodosius lasted for thirty-two years, of which he spent twenty-eight in exile. But though absent in body, a strong tie of love bound him to his flock. Besides his letters, he sent them a good number of homilies and doctrinal treatises, all aimed at edifying them. In the face of their strong attachment to him, the imperialists jibingly nicknamed them “Theodosians”.<sup>12</sup>



One of the noteworthy clergymen who helped the people greatly during this time of their hardship was Abba Cosmos, Bishop of Antinopolis (an old town on the Nile in Upper Egypt, about 350 kilometres south of Cairo). He shared his Pope's exile for three years, after which he was permitted to return to his native land. Upon his return, he spent a month in Alexandria describing to its people the fortitude of Abba Theodosius. Then he went to his See in time to celebrate the festival of St. Claudius, one of the innumerable martyrs killed by Emperor Diocletian. The people crowded to commemorate this feast, happy at the return of their bishop.

357. Emperor Justinian died while Abba Theodosius was still alive and in exile. His successor was Emperor Justin II, who decided to follow toward the Copts the same policy of persecution and oppression. The behaviour of these two Emperors set the pattern for their successors and thus intensified the discord between Alexandria and Constantinople, one of the elements that led to the final fall of the Eastern Empire.

358. When their 33<sup>rd</sup> Pope died, the Copts bided their time and waited patiently for the opportune moment to elect his successor. Despite the desperate efforts to win them, they kept the Faith and refused to be subject to the minion who had been imposed upon them. They let him be just what he was from the beginning – a foreign figurehead with no love or loyalty to draw upon.

359. The opportune moment for the election of their new Pope came to the Copts with the change of Prefects in the city of Alexandria. The new Prefect appointed at that specific time was well-disposed towards the

Egyptians. He counselled the Church leaders to go quietly to one of their monasteries, promising to leave them unmolested to consecrate their own elect for the vacant Chair of St. Mark. Perceiving his sincerity, they acted upon his counsel. Bishops and lay-leaders from all parts of the country took different routes and quietly converged on the monastery of ‘Azzagag’,<sup>13</sup> in the desert surrounding Alexandria. There, in an atmosphere of serene rejoicing, Abba Petros IV was elected, then consecrated the thirty-fourth Pope of the Coptic Church.

The papacy of this prelate was short-lived, lasting only two years. However, during this short period he fulfilled his pastoral duties well and was a faithful guide and shepherd to his people. Like his immediate predecessors, he had to live away from his capital and most of his communications with his people were through the written word.

Shortly after his election, Abba Petros IV chose a highly learned, saintly monk called Damianos to be his secretary. This monk became his Pope’s right-hand man, assisting him closely in teaching the people and in guiding them in the paths of righteousness.

360. After the death of Abba Petros IV the Copts unanimously decided among themselves that they would elect Damianos as his successor. However it was not until two years later that they were given the freedom of consecrating him. And it was only then that he became, officially, the 35<sup>th</sup> Pope of the See of Alexandria.

Damianos was thus elevated while Justin II was still Emperor, but his papacy lasted for thirty-six years, a period which saw three other Emperors sit on the throne of the Eastern Empire – which was rapidly approaching its

end. These were Tiberius, Maurice and Phocas. Like Justin II, all of them – and particularly Phocas were tyrannical rulers who mercilessly persecuted the Copts with a difference only in degree. The burden of their persecution was so heavy that the people would have cracked, but for the strength their inner resources was receiving from their spiritual leaders. Praying without ceasing that the Almighty God would lift from them the yoke of the Byzantine Empire, they went about their daily business waiting hopefully for better times to come.

Abba Damianos realised that he had to be constantly vigilant and to expend every effort to preserve in his people the light of the Faith. Being an endowed teacher, preacher, writer and theologian, he was equal to the task and performed it most conscientiously. He wrote constantly letters, injunctions, and treatises for the edification of his harassed children. Two of the treatises he was given the wisdom to write were entitled “The Logos” (or the Word) and “The Mystagogia” (or the Sacramental Mysteries). Both aimed at clarifying and explaining to the Copts the church teachings concerning the Christ, the Incarnate Word, and the seven sacraments of the Church. His style and writing demonstrated beyond doubt the zeal which the Egyptians still conserved for the sacred sciences, and that they still preferred to elect to the Chair of St. Mark men who were the most learned among the monks and worthy successors of Athanasius and Kyrillos.<sup>14</sup>

During the papacy of Abba Damianos, there were outstanding Bishops whom the people held in great veneration. Foremost among them were Yoannis, Bishop of Burullus, Yoannis his disciple, and Pisentheos of Qeft, who together with their colleagues assisted Abba Damianos in tending the vineyard of the Lord. It is

regrettable that no biographies of these bishops were found though a number of their writings are still in existence.

Bishop Pisen-theos of Qeft was especially renowned for his God-given gift of healing and for his extreme compassion for the needy and the suffering.

Among the treasures acquired by the Coptic Museum in 1943, is a letter on limestone found with the Jeme<sup>15</sup> documents. It is a petition sent by a widow to Pisen-theos “the true high priest”. The widow was in a sorry plight indeed; the Persians, then ruling the land, had confiscated her possessions, leaving her nothing but a pair of cattle which she had to pawn to the money lender that she may find wherewithal to pay the tax. The only property left to her was the little house in which she lived. Still she was not left in peace. The authorities coveted this, her last possession. In her distress, she could only find refuge in the compassion of her bishop, Pisen-theos whose intercession she solicited. “... the letter bears edifying witness to the relations between Bishop and people in seventh century Egypt; and its human interest has lost nothing with the passing of time”.<sup>16</sup>

Having faithfully steered the Church during his appointed time the vigilant Abba Damianos reached his safe haven at a good old age.

C. 361. In the midst of this tumultuous age, there were men who still maintained their spiritual equanimity; they realised their responsibility and fulfilled their duties. One of these men was the monk Yulianos who deemed it of greater import to carry the message of the Christ to those who had not heard it, than busy himself with controversies and politics. He therefore went to evangelise the Nubians.

Nubia is a vast tract of country next to the southern border of Egypt. Its people had assimilated the Egyptian civilisation, when the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Pharaohs conquered them. Since then, many Egyptians settled among them in mutual friendliness, and when they were converted to Christianity, they carried it to their neighbours. During the persecutions, thousands of Egyptians settled there permanently. The Nubians were therefore as familiar with the cults of Pharaonic Egypt as with Christianity. But they needed to be confirmed in the Christian Faith, and to have an established Church. This sublime task was undertaken by Yulianos about A.D. 551, and some eighteen years later the Torch was picked up by another monk called Longinus. The latter's work was speeded by the wise guidance of Theodorus Bishop of Philae.

The Nubians had learned from the Egyptians the habit of using the hieroglyphs for writing their own language on the walls of their temples. When they were converted to Christianity, they followed the same pattern, adopting Coptic for writing their language. It is feasible to conclude that, since the Copts were the bearers of the Christ's message to the Nubians, they were, also, the translators of the Holy Scriptures into Nubian, even though many Nubians had learned the Coptic language as evidenced by the discovery of Coptic texts in the Saidic dialect, written on the walls of excavated tombs.<sup>17</sup>

In A.D. 563, the Emperor of Constantinople, acting in accord with Silko, King of Nubia, decreed that the pagan temples be transformed into Christian churches. The Nubian Church was entrusted to the spiritual guidance of the Bishop of Aswan. Since then, it became Suffragan the Chair of St. Mark.<sup>18</sup>

The churches of Nubia were singularly small with the exception of the transformed temples. Howbeit, the more pretentious churches were built with carved stone columns and lintels.<sup>19</sup>

*D. Daniel, the Priest of Scete (or Shiheat)*<sup>20</sup>

362. The outstanding Bishops of this age, only a few of whom were mentioned by name in the above section were but stars of the first magnitude in a sky crowded with myriads of other stars. In the monasteries, an intensive life of worship was carried on, and the hymns of praise echoed and re-echoed across the land. The fervour of the monks was so great that the reputation thereof filled the country, like a sweet smelling incense; the years of spiritual abundance were succeeded by more such years without interruption.<sup>21</sup>

The Pakhomian monks regulated their lives and services most carefully, and thus supplied their compatriots with teams of workers. The care for the sick, the administration of the apostolate charity, the direction and maintenance of hospitals which had become numerous and already specialised; the most affable and considerate hospitality; these and other services proved to what extent the monks exerted themselves to practice Christianity. The monasteries were successfully evolving into “the repositories of knowledge, whether religious or profane”, and so played a great part in the history of the Coptic community and Church, as well as in this history of Egypt.<sup>22</sup>

The influence of the monasteries was largely due to the fact that the monks not only acquired learning for themselves, but that whoever of them advanced sufficiently, was entrusted with educating other young

monks as well as the children residing in the surrounding villages.<sup>23</sup>

The responsibility of guiding the monks and organising their mode of life was allotted to those of them most noted for their sanctity and learning. One of these holy sages was Daniel the priest of Shiheat who was Father to the monks of the western desert, and to a number of nuns, both Egyptian and foreign.

An interesting story told about him is that one day he went into the city to sell the baskets which he had woven. There, he met a stone-cutter named Eulogius whose pay was an ounce of gold per day. On receiving it, Eulogius would buy the food he needed, and then distribute the rest among the poor. If anything remained of his food, he would give it to the stray dogs. Neither did he keep anything for himself nor did he throw away a morsel which might feed so much as a hungry dog. When Daniel saw this wholehearted charity, he implored God to grant Eulogius great wealth.

It so happened that after a lapse of several weeks, Eulogius chanced upon a pot full of gold. Delirious with his luck, he immediately left his hometown and went to Constantinople. There he succeeded in becoming a minister of state. In the pride of elation, he forgot the poor.

While Eulogius was enjoying luxury and grandeur, Daniel had a dream. He saw the Christ sitting on His Throne of a Judgment, and asking him to account for the soul of Eulogius. Waking up, Daniel implored the Lord to restore Eulogius to his former state, confessing that he had erred in praying for the stone-cutter's increased wealth.

After a short while, the Emperor died, and the new Emperor chased away Eulogius. In fear for his life, he

returned to his hometown, destitute of all his fortune, and resumed his former labour and his charity. When Daniel heard that, he praised God for his loving kindness.<sup>24</sup>

Daniel's life was one of continuous watching, praying and guiding his monks and his nuns in the paths of righteousness. When he was about to depart unto his Lord, he was forewarned. Consequently, he counselled his monks to remain steadfast in their Orthodox Faith, even unto the end. Commanding his spirit unto the Father, he passed away in peace.<sup>25</sup>



## XX. NOTES

1. Manassa 'l Qommos. – pp. 361-2.
2. Marvin Chauncey-Ross. “Paganism & Christianity in Egypt”, pub. In *Le Bulletin d'Archaeologie Copte*. T. VII, 1941. P. 48.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
5. A.J. Butler, Introduction. See also note 7 of chapt. IX.
6. J. Foster. *Beginning from Jerusalem*. P. 23.
7. Manassa 'l Qommos. pp. 360-1.
8. G.H. Costigan. “Sculpture & Painting in Coptic Art. Pub. In *Le Bulletin d'Archaeologie Copte*. T. III, 1937, p. 37.
9. Guettee. V, p. 189.
10. W. Budge. *Book of the Saints*. III, pp. 627-8.
11. Severus of Ashmunein. *Op. cit.* Part II, pp. 468-9. It should be noted here that on January 20, 1959 H.B. Mar Ignatius Ya'Kub III, Patriarch of Antioch for the Syrian Orthodox, visited the Higher Institute for Coptic Studies, Cairo. He gave a most informative speech on the relations

between the Antiochene and the Alexandrian churches, in which he mentioned that the devout monk Ya'Kub'l Barade'i was panic-stricken at the vacancy of several episcopal churches due to the death of their occupants and the absence of Abba Theodosius who is empowered to consecrate them. He appealed to the Empress Theodora who interceded on behalf of the Orthodox. As a result, Justinian permitted the elect monks to come to Constantinople, where he allowed Abba Theodosius to consecrate them. One of those consecrated was Paul II, an Egyptian by birth who was ordained Patriarch of Antioch. It should be noted, too, that there were four Antiochenes who became Patriarchs of Alexandria at different times, having been raised in the Egyptian schools and monasteries.

12. Severus of Ashmunein, II, pp. 468-9.
13. One of thirty monasteries which were in the vicinity of Alexandria, and were destroyed by the Persians at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.
14. Amelineau, p. 28.
15. Documents discovered by French archeologists in Medinet Habu, one of the ancient Egyptian towns on the west bank of the Nile facing Luxor.
16. Drescher. "A Widow's Petition" in *Le Bulletin d'Archeologie Copte*, Tome X (1941) pp. 91-6.

17. It should be noted here that three archeologists, in their efforts to save Abu Simbel from the High Dam inundation, have inadvertently unearthed a good number of Churches. In some of them, they found the names of bishops engraved on stelae after the fashion of the Pharaohs.

Professor Plumley of Cambridge University declared that the history of Christian Nubia will have to be re-written when the newly-found records are read and translated.

18. *Ency. Brit.*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. XVI, pp. 584-6; Marcus Simaika, *Guide to the Coptic Museum*, vol. II, pp. 140-141.
19. Amelineau. *Etude ...* pp. 19-21.
20. Coptic word meaning “scales of the heart”.
21. Amelineau. Pp. 20-21.
22. Palladius. *Historia Lausiaca*, trans. into French by A. Lucot. Introduction XI-XIII.
23. Sobhi, G. “Education in Egypt during the Christian period” in *Le Bulletin ...* Tome XIII (1943) pp. 113-15.
24. ‘Eulogius the stone-cutter’, copied from a ms. kept at the Suriani monastery, pub. In 1956 by their press.

25. Frs. Philotheos and Mikhail (of St. Macari's monastery), *As-Sadek ul-Amin*. Vol. II, pp. 124-5.

**XXI. THE LAST DECADES OF THE EASTERN  
EMPIRE'S RULE OVER EGYPT, INTERRUPTED BY  
THE SHORT PERSIAN CONQUEST.**

**A. Abba Anastasius**

**B. Abba Andronicus**

- 363. The Copts elect their 36<sup>th</sup> Pope.
- 364. Emperor Phocas overthrown by Heraclius.
- 365. The Persians invade Palestine and Syria, and many of their inhabitants flee to Egypt; they are given help by the Copts.
- 366. Abba Anastasius attends to his own pastoral duties.
- 367. Abundance of saints.
- 368. The Persian advance into Egypt.
- 369. Andronicus is elected 37<sup>th</sup> Coptic Pope.
- 370. Treachery of the Persians.
- 371. Death of Abba Andronicus.

A. 363. When the Coptic Church and people were orphaned<sup>1</sup> by the death of Abba Damianos, the sixth century, so full of hardships for them, had also expired. But they were still destined to suffer more hardships under the two last Emperors as well as under the baleful Persian conquest.

Although an "official" bishop who had been appointed by the Emperor was seated in Alexandria, the Copts, true to their traditions and to themselves, ignored him completely, and went ahead with the election of their own Coptic Pope.

At the time there was in Alexandria a priest of the Church of the Four Evangelists who had distinguished himself by many years of devoted service. A strong bond

of love had developed between him and his people, and so when they came together to elect St. Mark's thirty-sixth successor, he won the election. His name was Abba Anastasius, and he was duly consecrated the Head of the Church. This took place while Phocas, known for his excessive tyranny, was the ruler of the Empire.

Although it had become customary for the governors of Alexandria to track the legal Pope of the Copts and drive him out of his metropolis for the sake of the intruding, imperially-appointed Patriarch, Abba Anastasius decided at the beginning that he was going to remain at Alexandria regardless of the threats and attempts at coercion brought against him. Not only that but he also went on various visits to other towns in his See, returning after each visit in confidence. Because of his courage, none dared close the gates of Alexandria in his face. Despite tension, he also consecrated many priests, won many schismatics to Orthodoxy, and succeeded in re-taking a number of churches which had been appropriated by the tyrants. This success of Abba Anastasius roused the intruder, and he wrote to the Emperor accusing the Alexandrian Pope of renewing the excommunication pronounced by his predecessors against Chalcedon. Upon hearing this, Emperor Phocas ordered the Prefect of Alexandria to usurp the church of Damianos and Cosmos, deliver it to the intruder, and confiscate its revenues. This order roused a riot in Alexandria wherein many of the faithful Copts were martyred. In anguish of soul, Abba Anastasius left for the monasteries in the desert of Scete, hoping thereby to safeguard his people against the recurrence of such riots.

364. Meanwhile the Eastern Empire was having plenty of troubles of its own, both internally and externally. Internally, there were continuous intrigues, plots,

dissensions. Externally, the Persians posed considerable threats of war, and fought the Byzantines in small skirmishes and in full-fledged battles.

Emperor Phocas however was overthrown – and eventually beheaded – by a general of his army called Heraclius, who declared himself Emperor in his place. Heraclius ruled for over twenty years, and it was during his reign that first the Persians and then the Arabs conquered the Middle Eastern countries of Palestine, Syria and Egypt.

The Persian conquest of the Middle East started with Palestine and Syria. The Persians were excessively brutal, and when they invaded these two countries, which were then Roman provinces, many of their inhabitants fled in terror to Egypt.

365. The arrival of these hordes of refugees was a great challenge to the people of Egypt. In pity of them and in a surge of the spirit of Christian charity, Abba Anastasius and his Bishops, together with the faithful, did all that was humanly possible to help them and alleviate their plight. But with all their good will and their charity, the services they could render were limited due to their own circumstances. The struggle with Constantinople had already taken a big toll of their property. Amidst the gloom of the situation, however, a silver lining shone through the dark clouds. God, in his infinite mercy, softened the heart of John, the intruding Patriarch and made him see the necessity of his co-operation with the Copts and their Pope to offer relief and hospitality to the refugees. Thus the legal successor of St. Mark found an ally in the man intruding upon his chair. Christian charity prevailed then.

366. While Abba Anastasius attended to those who sought Egypt's bounty he remained vigilant towards his own people. He wrote twelve books on doctrinal subjects. For twelve years he guided his church: each year he distributed, among his people, one of his books. Then, he was called by his Lord to join the Saints living in the Mansions of Light.<sup>2</sup>

367. While kingdoms swayed, and thrones tottered, the Orient could still boast of a great number of saints whose main concern was sanctity. Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor were covered with monasteries whose inmates endeavoured to imitate the old Church Fathers, the reputation of whose virtues reverberated across the world.<sup>3</sup> These saints devoted their lives to spiritual and mystical problems. Subsequently serenity and order prevailed within the monasteries, in contrast to the fierce conflicts raging in the world. And though these saints could neither stem the tide nor make it swerve, they stood firm, nobly holding the Torch aloft, keeping It aflame in spite of tempests and torrents.

B. 368. In Egypt, the grip of foreign rule was well nigh throttling. It tightened as the Persian army advanced triumphantly, and the yoke grew heavier day by day. Despite this yoke, clergy and laymen of the Coptic Church assembled to deliberate on the election of a new Patriarch. They could never forego their right of election. Sufficient unto them the submission to the foreign temporal rulers, but in the realm of the Spirit, they guarded their independence jealously. They therefore elected Andronicus to be their thirty-seventh Pope.



369. Andronicus was both learned and a deacon: a veritable scribe. He descended from a rich family of great influence; their prestige was such that one of his cousins had been appointed chief of the imperial court at Alexandria. Besides, he was very charitable. These assets were enough to make the civil authorities decide to leave him unmolested. And so he lived quietly in Alexandria, in a cell he had built for himself over the Church of the Angelion.

Shortly after the consecration of Abba Andronicus, Chosroes, King of Persia, triumphed over Egypt. He entered it, treading on everyone and everything heedlessly. And such was his cruelty and lust for gold that he would kill a man for one dinar (or the equivalent of half an Egyptian pound in present day currency), and that he destroyed all the monasteries to the west of Alexandria, confiscating whatever he found there after massacring most of the monks.

370. In addition, King Chosroes issued a proclamation one day inviting all men between the ages of eighteen and fifty, to meet him in a certain square in Alexandria, on the pretence of appointing them in Government positions. A few thousand of them assembled. Suddenly, the Persian troops surrounded them, and killed them to the last man.

371. The papacy of Abba Andronicus endured only through the dark and terrible years of the Persian conquest. With a heart full of sadness over the atrocities committed against his people, he kept prayerful watch over them. Then he rested in the Lord.

## ***XXI. NOTES***

1. A term often used at the death of a Pope (or any Bishop) denoting the father-children relationship between the Copts and their spiritual leader.
2. “History of the Patriarchs” hand-copied from an original ms. by Father Shenouda ‘I Baramusi, a monk from al-Baramus Monastery, vol. 1, pp. 86-8.
3. Guette, *op. cit.* vol. V, p. 418.
4. Guette, *op. cit.* vol. V, p. 419.

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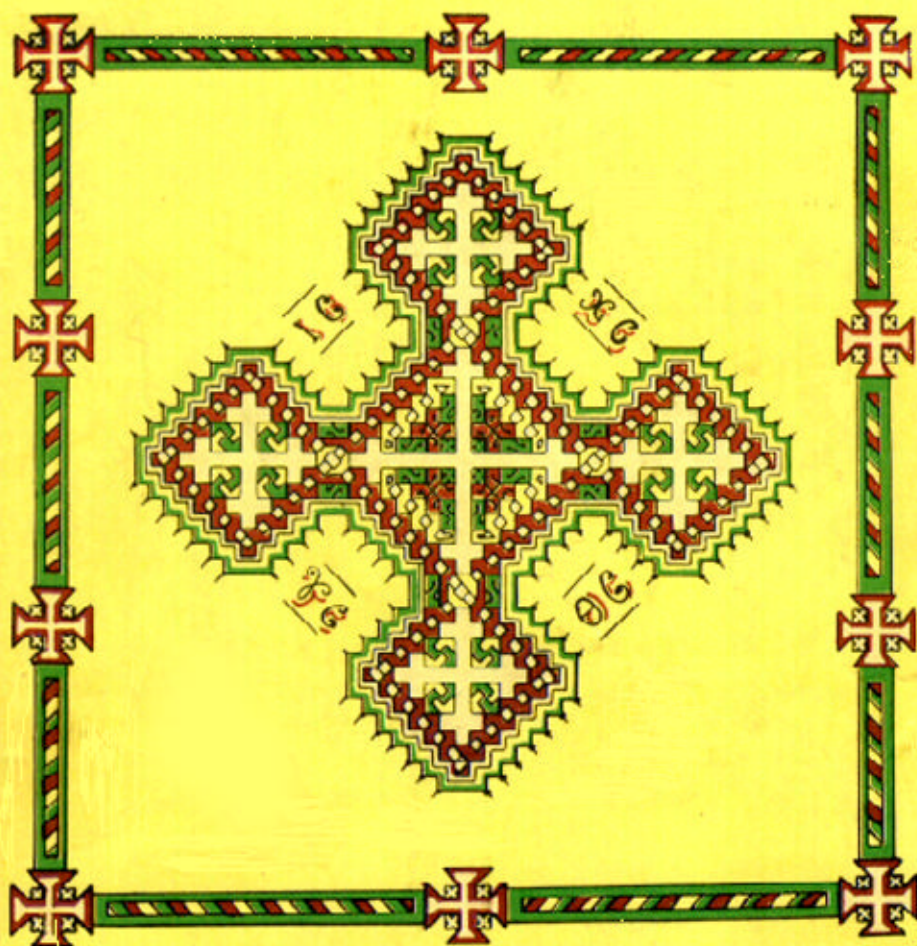
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# THE STORY OF THE COPTS

THE TRUE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN EGYPT

by  
Iris Habib el Masri



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