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- *THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS*
- *ST. ATHANASIUS AND MONASTICISM*
- *ARABIC CHRISTIAN HERITAGE*



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## ***ABOUT THIS ISSUE***

Meditating upon the phrase '*The Desire of All Nations*' as a title of Christ Father Matta El-Meskeen digs deeply in Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, as well as into the Church Sacraments in order to describe the mutual love and union between Christ and those who believe in him. Father Matta, the spiritual father of St. Macarius' Monastery in the ancient desert of *Scete*, is one of the distinguished Orthodox theologians and spiritual writers of this century. The present article is taken from *St. Mark Monthly Review*, the magazine of the Monastery, where it was published in Arabic (October 1995) and in English (March 1996).

'*Saint Athanasius of Alexandria and Early Monasticism*' examines the vital roles the great Archbishop and the rising monastic movement had for the survival of each other and the interrelationship between them. This paper was presented at the last International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford (August 21-26, 1995).

Thanks to *Dr. Säid Rizkaslla*, we have for the first time in this journal an article about the Arabic Christian Heritage in the Middle Ages. He introduces in this issue the family of *Awlād Al-Assāl* who were among the leaders of the Coptic renaissance in the 13th century and who left for the Church a treasury of Christian literature in Arabic. Dr. Rizkalla has his Ph.D. from the Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo and his fields of research are Coptic Art and Coptic History.

*Editor*

### ***Special Issue of Coptic Church Review***

## ***ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA***

### ***(His Life, Works, Liturgy and Theology)***

- Scheduled for Spring 1997.
- New and previously published articles and reviews (Scholarly or General are appreciated).
- Deadline for the receipt of articles is February 15, 1997.

Titles of Christ:

## ***THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS***

*Father Matta El-Meskeen*

***“And I will shake all nations,  
and the desire of all nations shall come”***  
(Haggai 2:7 KJV)

The entire verse as it appears in the prophet Haggai is as follows:

- 6 For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it [is] a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry [land];
- 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.
- 8 The silver [is] mine, and the gold [is] mine, saith the Lord of hosts.
- 9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:6-9 KJV)

The Greek translation known as the Septuagint does not use the expression “the desire of all nations” as a title for Christ. Rather it opts for a more ambiguous expression. However, if we refer to the Latin Vulgate, which is closer to the Hebrew, we find that “the desire of all nations” is the expression of choice.

***“I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And... all nations”:***

This earthquake which occurs in the heavens and earth and all the nations they contain is a prophetic allusion to a radical change in the way God deals with man. Nature will participate in this change as it is liberated from its state of slavery to corruption as a result of Adam’s sin. As it is written: “Cursed is the ground because of you...” (Genesis 3:17). This change will come about when mankind’s salvation is completed and he enters into his heavenly dwelling.

This took place for the first time in history when God descended to speak with Moses from the peak of Mt. Sinai. “And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the

smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. . . . Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off..." (Exodus 19:18, 20:18). In this way the Old Testament inaugurates nature's celebration of God's descent to speak to his people. This is the beginning of God's old covenant with his people.

In the same fashion, we see nature celebrating the advent of the "desire of all nations." The heavens are also involved in the celebration because He comes from above—from the heavens. Also, "all the nations" participate in the festivity by virtue of the earthquake that shakes the nations. However, this event is not viewed in human, visible terms, but in spiritual terms. The "desire of all nations" is none other than the Son of God who came in secrecy and peace without public recognition: "Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (Is 45:15).

Indeed, we observe that the signs of the end time are displayed in much the same fashion (Mk 13:8, 24-26). These signs accompany the Son of Man's completion of the work of salvation. At his final appearing, he will be revealed as God, coming in glory with the saints. All creation will be shaken including the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. This is the final celebration of man. Nature will participate in this emancipation as the curse is lifted from it.

### ***"The Desire of All Nations":***

This particular title of Christ is unique in that it describes Christ's role in regard to the nations in our day. The word "desire" suggests an intense love—an intimate relationship of heart, soul and spirit with this one who is Savior and Redeemer. The prophet Isaiah foretells something of the ardor and passion which possesses those who love Christ. Listen to his words: "Thy memorial name is the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee" (Is 26:8-9). Isaiah is not speaking of himself but prophetically. He is speaking of a future reality when Christ will be the desire of the nations. If this prophecy was for Haggai and Isaiah, it is also for us. Indeed, it speaks for us if we are only willing to speak the mystery of Christ in truth.

### ***Christ's Position as the Desire of All Nations:***

Christ himself sanctifies this title and encourages its use. Listen as he says, "The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man..." (Lk 17:22). While the verse refers specifically to the desire for his "days", the clear meaning of the passage is a desire for him. He is directing our hearts and minds to consider the depth of relationship which is to bind us to him. It is difficult to find him if we wade in waters outside the sea of desire for his love. In order to find him, we must be motivated by a passionate desire to see him. He will not be found apart from the deep recesses of a desiring heart. He who grasps this mystery

has learned the best of man's secrets and more. Listen as he speaks about his gospel and his words: "Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (Mt 13:17; 16).

What the prophets and righteous men longed for—to see Christ and hear his words—they did not receive. We who believe in Christ have received the Word made both visible and audible. This vision and hearing is the meaning of the word "desire." Seeing and hearing this "Christ who is desired" have become our right. It is also clear that the vision of Christ has become a vision of faith which is a higher level than the physical sense of sight. Concerning his words, his gospel has been granted to us. Therefore, Christ has fulfilled the title assigned to him by Haggai centuries ago (520 BC). Indeed, he is the desire of all nations by faith and the gospel. Faith makes his person present. The gospel reveals to us his word.

Concerning the prophets who desired but neither saw nor heard, perhaps the clearest example is Daniel. We read in his prophecy that when he desired to know the mystery of Christ and the end, he was told:

"Go your way Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" [in other words "until the coming of Christ"] (Daniel 12:9-12).

After Christ declares: "many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it," he applies this word to us when he says: "But blessed are your eyes because they see." This is the same blessing pronounced in the book of Daniel on those who are to be present at the coming of Christ.

After this the book of Daniel describes Christ in the following terms: "to bring in everlasting righteousness...to anoint the most holy,...an anointed one, a prince" (Dan 9:24-25). This is one of the most beautiful and most powerful revelatory titles of Christ. He alone is righteous. He is the seal of all visions and the end of all prophecies. He alone is holy, Christ the prince of peace.

Not only did Daniel prophesy about the coming of Christ. Other prophets and righteous ones spoke these inspired words:

We hear Jacob the Righteous, the father of Patriarchs declare: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah (the tribe of Judah), nor a lawgiver from between his feet (a king who orders and establishes), until Shiloh comes; and unto him [shall] the gathering of the people [be]" (Gen 49:10 KJV).

Notice that a prophecy given as early as the book of Genesis clearly relates

Christ's rule to the nations. Jacob's soul also desired to see this "Shiloh" of whom Scripture spoke. But he did not see or hear.

Consider also the prophet Balaam "who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but having his eyes uncovered" (Numbers 24:16). He says: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh; a star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17). Balaam also had an intense desire to see this one whom he beheld as a star that lit up the sky. Still, he neither saw nor heard.

Isaiah also says: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us)" (Is 7:14 KJV). Through this astounding mystery, Isaiah reveals certain facets of Christ's advent. How could his soul not long to see and hear Immanuel? He cries out, "Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Is 45:15). His eyes grew dull before the vision was fulfilled. His ears were not allowed to hear it.

Isaiah himself speaks of this one who is coming: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'" (Is 9:6). Isaiah, as well, longed to see and hear that divine Son. However, he neither heard nor saw him.

The Inspired word also speaks of Christ as a vineyard through Isaiah: "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the Lord, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest any one harm it, I guard it night and day" (Is 27:2,3). Imagine how great was Isaiah's desire to see that vineyard and know who it was. Still, he did not see or hear.

Isaiah speaks again. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert" (Is 35:5-6). Isaiah longed to see that one who would cause rivers to spring forth in the desert, but he did not see or hear.

Isaiah calls out yet again, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law" (Is 42:1-4).

Isaiah's words are for the comfort of coming generations, yet he himself does not grasp the depth of the words he speaks.

Daniel the prophet also says, "Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand... Blessed is he who waits..." (Dan 12:10,12). Shiloh is hated at his coming, thus fulfilling the prophetic word that the wicked shall not understand. The star of Jacob appeared but they despised him and even produced a counterfeit of him (i.e., Bar-Cochba, d.

AD 135). The son of the virgin came. They merely said “we know his father and mother” and they began to look for an occasion to stone him. A son was born to Judah who did the works of God. They said, “he does these things by the prince of the demons.” He came who causes waters to break forth in the desert. He opened blind eyes and deaf ears. The lame and paralyzed carried their beds and walked. They asked, “are you he who is to come, or do we wait for another?” He came who did works of truth. They wore him down, judged him and killed him. However the wise ones were purified. Their clothes were made white in the blood of the lamb. They were cleansed by the Spirit. These received the blessing from the mouth of Christ because they saw and heard in truth. Their desire was fulfilled. These are the ones of whom the prophets and seers spoke: “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things...things into which angels long to look” (1 Pet. 1:12).

It is truly amazing that the “desire of all nations” is also the one desired by the angels. Is it not because he is Lord of heaven and earth whose “speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable” (Song of Solomon 5:16), indeed, the desire of the saints and angels!

“Blessed are your ears because they hear...”, hear what they desire—the word of Christ.

### ***The Desire of the Gospel:***

The gospel is the incarnate voice of God. It is hearing and seeing, by faith, at the same time. The desired one is found in the gospel by faith (seeing) and by the Spirit (hearing). One might well ask: “How can I long for the gospel?” The apostle Peter responds: “Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation? (1 Pet. 2:2).

This longing for the gospel is portrayed by a most creative means. The apostle Peter represents this desire through a suckling, laid upon his mother’s breast, urged by an instinctive longing to obtain his mother’s pure milk. It is as though he is calling us to be animated by a similar instinctive, unquenchable desire to obtain the gospel. The suckling is moved to satisfy his natural hunger. He must have this milk for the sake of his growth and health. If the infant is deprived of his longing for food, he will refuse to nurse. He will even vomit his food if forced to nurse without this desire. The gospel is viewed in the same light by the apostle Peter. If one reads without a believing spirit, the desired result will not be forthcoming. If the gospel is read by force, the words will simply exit as easily as they enter accruing no benefit for life and spiritual development. So, the desire for the gospel is an essential element of the gospel. Indeed, he who gave the gospel, the “desire of the nations,” also insisted on a desire for it. The purpose and origin of this analogy is Christ himself as he declares: “Many prophets and righteous ones desired to see and hear what you see and hear.” What we see and hear through our earnest desire is Christ himself.

Dear reader, please pay attention. This is no exaggeration. It is established

truth. In this truth lies the mystery of life, the gospel and growth in Christ: "Long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2).

The question is, "how can I long for the gospel?" The answer is at the heart of the meaning of "gospel." The gospel is the voice and image of Christ. If your love relationship with Christ has come to the point of longing, then your desire for the gospel will take on the same quality. Listen as Saint Peter speaks of vision, love and longing for Christ: "Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy" (1 Peter 1:8). In the gospel you meet with Christ by the vision of faith. This vision creates an inexpressible joy in your heart in anticipation of the future glory. In this way, the saying is fulfilled in us: "Blessed are you for you see and hear 'the desired one'."

This fact is not some hidden mystery. It is open to all as we have often proclaimed that the reading of the gospel is an encounter with Christ. This is why it produces inexpressible joy which gives witness to the fact that a true encounter has taken place, leading to growth and life. This title of Christ, "the desire of all nations," is a mystery of mysteries.

### ***The Utmost Examples of Mutual Desire:***

Christ said: "I am the true vine...and you are the branches" (John 15:1,5). What is this union of the branches and the vine, this passionate, longing love? Is not this union the utmost example of mutual desire? "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4). This is a love which never ceases day or night until the branch brings forth fruit. Is not this a case of passionate mutual love which refuses any separation?

Furthermore, what is the origin of these unique qualities? Do they not spring from the identity of the vine as it is he who is "the desire of all nations?" Here is he who revealed the secret: "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the Lord, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest any one harm it, I guard it night and day" (Is 27:2-3).

"And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15).

He grasped the cup of his slain love on behalf of his beloved ones in this world. He breathed his love into it. He poured out the passion of his soul and said to them: "Drink of it, all of you" (Mt 26:27). It was said about Christ that "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). It was also said about the cup that he took: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15). Can we not discern here, dear reader, that a story is unfolding? It is a story taken from the mystery of the Eucharist. The sayings of Christ are part of this mystery. They live in the heart of him who eats of Christ. When we partake of the bread corporately, we partake of his love to the uttermost and the passion of his soul in its completion.

The gospel and the Eucharist are one mystery, revealing Christ as "the desire of the nations." "[They] have tasted the goodness of the word of God" (Heb 6:5).

“...for you have tasted of the kindness of the Lord...” (1 Pet. 2:3). This is the taste of love and passion, Christ says: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (John 6:56). Is this not the result of mutual love which has reached its highest degree? He also says: “You in me and I in you...” (Jn 14:20). Is not this liaison of communion the completion of all that the soul desires in Christ? Is it not the completion of all that Christ desires from those who love him and believe in him? It is also an enlarged picture of the word of the gospel when it takes up residence in the desiring heart.

Paul elucidates the highest degree of practical application of this name “the desire of the nations.” He describes Christ’s union with those who believe in him—his beloved church—as a model relationship of love between a bride and groom. “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Let the reader observe that Paul depicts believers in the feminine form. Christ’s love is like the love of a man for his bride—the very essence of passion in its holiest sense. He further elevates his description of this holy state of love: “...that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle” (Eph 5:26-27). Saint Paul carefully places believers on the level of a bride who deserves the love of her husband—the level of a holy passion. By means of sanctification by baptism and the blood, believers attain to the state of holiness and thus become the bride of “the desire of all nations.”

It may seem to the reader that this description of a passionate mutual love between Christ and redeemed mankind is a temporal expression. The truth is that God designed this plan, preparing it for implementation before the foundation of the world. It was a matter of his choice concerning those who were to be united to Christ. “...who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:3-4). Then he further clarified the ultimate objective of this unique condition of communion with Christ: “He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph 1:5-6). We are to become a new creation capable of standing before him in heaven to proclaim praise and glory to Jesus Christ the beloved.

This is the “desire of all nations.” This is how the nations receive this “desired one.” This is how they become one with him and he with them in the ultimate attainment of glory.

Now that we know the position of “the desired one” in regard to ourselves and our place in regard to him, the path we must follow to arrive at this passionate love for him has become well-marked. We join Isaiah, making his words our life’s song:

“Thy memorial name is the desire of our soul.

My soul yearns for thee in the night,

my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee” (Isa 26:8-9).

# ***SAINT ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA AND EARLY MONASTICISM: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP***

*Rodolph Yanney, M.D.*

In the first pages of *The Life of Antony*, the young Athanasius appears as a follower of the future Father of Monasticism<sup>1</sup>. Both come again in the final pages, some thirty years later, at a time when they were physically separated. Antony was on his deathbed and he had nothing to leave to Athanasius except his cloak and his sheepskin, a symbol and testimony of his veneration of the Archbishop and his union with him in the faith for which he was suffering exile<sup>2</sup>.

## ***Monasticism: A New Spiritual Movement***

In AD 305, St. Antony started his first monastery in Mount Pispir, on the east bank of the Nile. This proved to be the beginning of the greatest spiritual movement in the Christian history after the Apostolic age. By the middle of the century, there were at least twenty monastic settlements scattered all over the Egyptian deserts, each having hundreds of monks, with the numbers multiplying fast<sup>3</sup>. But how did the Egyptian Church leadership, while still waging a fierce struggle for survival against the Meletian schismatics and the Arian heretics, react to such a new lay movement? From the beginning monasticism considered itself an autonomous establishment inside the Church, with its own teachers, leadership, administration and rule that affected all aspects of the daily life of the monks, with intense repercussion on the Church at large. On the other hand, with the christianization of the Empire, the bishops acquired more power and their authority became established. Christians began to regard them as princes of the Church, they were even commissioned by the rulers to act as judges for their people<sup>4</sup>. With rare exceptions, Church teaching and interpretation of Scripture became restricted to the bishops and presbyters by the end of the third century<sup>5</sup>. When monasticism

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1. Athanasius: *Life of Antony*, Prologue, Tr. Vivian T. *Coptic Church Review* 1994;15:8.

2. *Ibid.*, 91. p. 57.

3. Yanney R: *Monastic Settlements in Fourth Century Egypt*. *Coptic Church Review*; 1985: 6:2:39.

4. Faivre A: *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990: 148.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

started there were reasons, on theological and disciplinary ground, to suspect the new movement. Monasticism, as seen by the outside observer, shared some of the basic features and practices of heretics. The Encratite Gnostics reprobated marriage<sup>6</sup>. Some historians believe that the Manichaean ascetic movement in Egypt that preceded the Pachomian cenobitic monasticism by about half a century not only influenced it, but also later infiltrated into it, especially after the former was banned by Theodosius in 382<sup>7</sup>. Christian monasticism could have been easily accused of Manichaean tendency in its practices of celibacy and asceticism. This may be the reason why the early monks were always sensitive to the charge of heresy. In *The Life of Antony* Athanasius stressed the fact that the great anchorite avoided the fellowship of Meletians, Manichaeans and Arians<sup>8</sup>. Early in his life as a Christian, Pachomius was troubled and confused by the different heresies, each claiming to possess the truth. He was even urged to join the Meletians and the Marcionites. He knew the truth by a vision in which he saw a shining lamp amidst the darkness of the world. He heard a voice that told him that the lamp was the Gospel of Christ preached in the Church of Alexandria with Alexander its bishop<sup>9</sup>. The *Apophthegmata Patrum* gives the story of Abba Agathon (fifth century) who accepted to be called a fornicator, a proud man and insane but never a heretic<sup>10</sup>. The *Apophthegmata* also has Amma Theodora refuting the Manichaean teaching on the body<sup>11</sup>. The association with any heretic was extremely prohibited in the desert<sup>12</sup>.

### *Athanasius Advocate of Monasticism*

The defensive language of these early monastic writings reveals the fact that collision between the Church leadership and the rising monasticism could and did happen. Actually the reaction of the clergy was mixed. While some bishops welcomed the new movement as a spiritual revival that would benefit the whole Church, others did every possible endeavor to kill it in its infancy. It was here that the historic role of Athanasius for the survival and prosperity of monasticism comes. He was the Archbishop of Alexandria for nearly fifty years and he lived to become the unchallenged Christian leader in Egypt. He believed in monasticism and throughout his life he was always in close contact with the monks. He admit-

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6. Cross: *The Oxford Dict. of the Christian Church*. OUP, 1983:457.

7. Stroumsa GG: *The Manichaean Challenge to Egyptian Christianity*. In: *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986: 308,309.

8. *Life of Antony*, op. cit., 68-70 (p. 45-47).

9. *Letter of Bishop Ammon*, 12. In: *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. II (Tr. Veilleux A, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Pub., 1981). p. 79,80.

10. Ward B: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Pub., 1975: 18.

11. *Ibid.*, 71,72.

12. *Ibid.*, 182,185,189,204.

ted that he was a disciple of Antony and saw him often<sup>13</sup>. He heard about Pachomius in his early youth, before his consecration<sup>14</sup>. About AD 329, soon after his ordination, he visited the monasteries in the Thebaid. He was the first Christian leader to choose monks for the important positions in the Church. Among these was St. Serapion of Thmuis who led the Church during the third exile of Athanasius (356-62). In his letter to Abbot Dracontius who fled from the episcopate preferring the monastic life, Athanasius gave the names of seven other abbots who, among many other monks, had become bishops by the year 354/355 when the letter was written<sup>15</sup>. To avoid ordination Pachomius had to hide from the Patriarch when he visited the *Koinonia*<sup>14</sup>. When Antony visited Alexandria (c. 338), Athanasius never left him<sup>16</sup>. He kept close contact with all the monastic centers by letters if not in person. His extant writings include several letters to the monks in general or to a particular monastic Father such as Amoun of Nitria and Horsiesios, the third Father of the Koinonia, who consulted him about difficult theological and pastoral problems<sup>17</sup>. These letters show the personal relations of Athanasius with the monks to whom he was writing, as well as his total awareness of the latest events in the monasteries.

Athanasius used to spread the knowledge of the new movement and the enthusiasm for it through his sermons. Bishop Ammon who was a Pachomian monk in the middle of the fourth century writes in his *Letter* how he chose the blessed life of the monks after hearing about them from Athanasius<sup>18</sup>.

Athanasius played a crucial role in the spread of monasticism outside Egypt. When he left it on his second exile (AD 339-346) he was accompanied by two saintly monks from Nitria - Amoun, one of the Tall Brothers and Isidore, whom Athanasius later assigned to direct the guest house of Alexandria. Their living example inspired others to start monasteries in Europe. It was to the brethren in these monasteries that Athanasius wrote the *Life* in 356, shortly after the death of Antony. This was probably the earliest book in the monastic literature. It was described as 'the most important document of early monasticism'<sup>19</sup>. 'No other book has done more to propagate the monastic life'<sup>20</sup>.

### ***Literary Interaction Between Athanasius and the Desert Fathers***

The teaching of Athanasius had direct impact on the Egyptian monks in both their monastic life and theological knowledge. We know from the *Apophthegmata*

13. *Life of Antony*, op. cit., Prologue: 8.

14. *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius*: 28. In *Pachomian Koinonia*, op. cit., vol. 1. p. 51.

15. *Letter to Dracontius*, (NPNF, 2nd series, vol. 4, p. 557-560).

16. *Life of Antony*, op. cit., 69-71 (p. 46, 47).

17. *Letters of Athanasius*: 48, 49, 52, 53, 57, 58. Tr. in NPNF, Second series Vol. 4.p. 556, 557, 563, 564, 569.

18. *Letter of Bishop Ammon*, Prologue, op. cit. p. 71.

19. Quasten J: *Patrology*: Vol. 3. Antwerp: Spectrum; 1960: 39.

20. Bouyer L: *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*. New York: Desclée; 1963: 307.

*Patrum* that during the second half of the fourth century Athanasius' books were kept and read by the monks in their cells; they occasionally used them in answering heretics<sup>21</sup>. Another example appears in the speeches of Pachomius quoted by his ancient biographers which echo the same ideas found in Athanasius' Festal Letters<sup>22</sup>.

Father Matta El-Meskeen comments on the relation of Athanasius to monasticism saying,

"Athanasius who had received the spirit of asceticism from Antony followed his master and inspired the same spirit in the young generation, with the result that multitudes of monks filled Nitria, Cellia, Scete and the Thebaid. As their head he took care of them and depended on them. They became an inseparable part of the Church and a strong weapon that he used against the Arians.

"Athanasius' friendship with the monastic leaders including Amoun of Nitria, Antony of Pispir and Pachomius of Tabennesi had its strong effects in directing the monastic life, preserving it in sound ascetic discipline, purging it of adverse teaching and supplying the monks with sound theological knowledge..."<sup>23</sup>

We should not expect that the theological and literary interaction between Athanasius and the early monks to be a one-way street. Comparing the soteriology of Origen, Antony and Athanasius, in a paper delivered at the North American Patristic Conference in 1994, Professor Charles Kannengiesser showed how Athanasius took from Antony his new way of reformulating Origen's doctrine of salvation. While Origen spoke in terms of cosmotheology, both Antony and Athanasius focused on the divine incarnation as the core of the salvation economy<sup>24</sup>.

### ***Attitude of Church Leaders Towards the Early Monasticism***

The complete support which Athanasius gave to the monks does not mean that his attitude toward the movement was unanimous in the whole Church. Some of the Church leaders were not happy with the rising monasticism that attracted thousands before the middle of the fourth century. They considered it a rival charismatic authority that challenged their own institutional power. People went to the monasteries to seek the cure of their illnesses. They asked the monks about their

21. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. op. cit., 182.

22. *Instructions Concerning a Spiteful Monk* (36, 41. In Pachomian Koinonia, op. cit. vol. 3. p. 29, 32, 33). See Rousseau: Pachomius (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage: 6): 124, 143 & 145.

23. El-Meskeen M: *Saint Athanasius the Apostolic* (Arabic). Scete, Egypt, 1981: 181.

24. Kannengiesser C: *Antony, Athanasius, Evagrius: The Egyptian Fate of Origenism*. Coptic Church Review, 1995: 16:1:3.

spiritual problems and confessed their sins to them<sup>25</sup>. They addressed the monks as *Abba* (father). Even visitors from overseas knew the way to the monasteries.

However, it seems that the physical presence of Athanasius was necessary to deter any frank antagonistic action against the monasteries. But when Athanasius left Egypt in his second exile (AD 339-346), the bishops of Upper Egypt found their chance to get rid of the Pachomian monasteries altogether. When Pachomius started to build his last monastery in Phnوم, near Isna (AD c. 340), the bishop of the area gathered a large crowd and tried to drive the monks away, but he failed. Other bishops began to expel the monks from their dioceses. Pachomius who was in his terminal illness was called to meet the bishops at Latopolis, the modern Isna. Since he was unable to walk he was carried on a donkey by the monks to the church where he was put on a stretcher. In the church Pachomius saw bishops, monks and armed guards, and he found himself under trial. The only charge we know about was his clairvoyance. Pachomius was silent. Among the bishops were two of his previous disciples who advised him to defend himself. Instead, he entreated them to recall their life in the monastery and witness to the work of God in it. At this the synod went into turmoil. Many of the monks were beaten with hammers. The bishops shouted, "Touch no one other than Pachomius". A man with a sword attacked Pachomius. Two of the monks then managed to snatch him and tried to escape. The doors had already been locked but they left through a side exit and carried him to the nearby monastery of Phnوم. Pachomius died a few months later<sup>26</sup>. Athanasius returned back the same year and in his later three exiles he never left Egypt and the monasteries encountered no trouble for the rest of his career.

### ***The Monks' Support for Athanasius***

Athanasius himself had to struggle for his existence from the first moment he was elected as bishop of Alexandria in 328. Arians, Meletians and Eusebians combined their forces to get Athanasius down at any price. They started by circulating a rumor that his ordination was noncanonical. In a speech to his monks at that time, Pachomius declared that Athanasius was chosen by God to become a pillar and a lamp for the Church. He frequently praised his orthodoxy and when Athanasius visited Upper Egypt, which was a stronghold for the Meletians, Pachomius organized the monks in a procession to escort him in his way to the main monastery at Tabennesi<sup>27</sup>.

Later when the Arians started to take the upper hand in Alexandria, supported by Emperor Constantius II, they spread the rumor that Antony supported their

25. *Paralipomena*: 27. In *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2. op. cit. p. 51.

26. *The Greek Life of Pachomius*: 112. In *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. I. op. cit. p. 375. Malaty T. *Pachomius Father of the Koinonia and Theodore his disciple*. Alexandria, 1967 (Arabic).

27. *The Bohairic Life*: 28. op. cit. p. 51.

belief. At that, Athanasius together with the other Egyptian clergy and people asked his help. Antony came down from the mountain and went to Alexandria (in c. 338) where he remained for several days witnessing to the Orthodox faith<sup>28</sup>. He wrote several times to the Emperors during the first and second exiles of Athanasius asking for the return of the Patriarch<sup>29</sup>. In his defense of Athanasius and the persecuted Orthodox during his second exile, Antony provoked the anger of the intruding bishop Gregory and the Roman general Duke Balacius<sup>30</sup>.

It was during Athanasius' third exile (AD 356-62) that the monks had to offer him more than words. Athanasius fled to the desert, hunted by the armies of Constantius, in a long ordeal vividly described by Gibbon,

"Counts, prefects, tribunes, whole armies, were successively employed to pursue a bishop and a fugitive; the vigilance of the civil and military powers was excited by the Imperial edicts; liberal rewards were promised to the man who should produce Athanasius either alive or dead; and the most severe penalties were denounced against those who should dare to protect the public enemy... The numerous disciples of Antony and Pachomius received the fugitive primate as their father... and persuaded themselves that their prayers, their fasts and their vigils, were less meritorious than the zeal which they expressed, and the dangers which they braved, in the defense of truth and innocence... When their dark retreats were invaded by a military force which it was impossible to resist, they silently stretched out their necks to the executioner... The archbishop of Alexandria, for whose safety they eagerly devoted their lives, was lost among a uniform and well-disciplined multitude; and on the nearer approach of danger he was swiftly removed, by their officious hands from one place of concealment to another... The retirement of Athanasius which ended only with the life of Constantius, was spent for the most part, in the society of the monks, who faithfully served him as guards, as secretaries, and as messengers."<sup>31</sup>.

During those long years, he occasionally visited Alexandria. His hiding place in Alexandria was the house of the young virgin Eudaemonis. Palladius who met this virgin fifty years later when she was seventy years old, wrote that the Archbishop 'trusted his person to no one, not to a relative, friend, cleric or any one.'<sup>32</sup>. It was dangerous for anybody to know where he was. The virgin washed his feet, carried his letters, and brought him food, books, and news. "Without imparting the secret to any one," Gibbon says, "...she watched over his safety with

28. *Life of Antony*, op. cit., 69,70. p. 46.

29. Sozomen: *Ecclesiastical History* 2:31 (NPNF Second Series, vol. II: 280). *Life of Antony*, 81. op. cit. p 51.

30. Athanasius: *History of the Arians*: 14 (NPNF, Second Series, Vol. 4 : 274)

31. Gibbon E: *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: 21. *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius*, op. cit. 185 (p. 220-24).

32. Palladius: *The Lausiac History*. Tr. by Meyer RT, Maryland: Newman Press, 1965:63.

the tenderness of a friend and the assiduity of a servant."<sup>31</sup> If we can accept the *Life of Saint Syncretica* as a genuine writing of Athanasius, then the added story of Eudaemonis may display him as having a strong role in the early monasticism of women in Alexandria. However we do not have any historical data to support this.<sup>33</sup>

But when it comes to monasticism among men this article has followed the historical data that shows how it could have been strangled in its cradle in Egypt or lost amidst heresies during the turbulent fourth century had Athanasius not been there. By the same token, without monasticism, Athanasius could have never survived to become the hero of faith. In either case, the story of Christianity would have been totally different.

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33. In his recently published book *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, (reviewed in this issue of CCR), Dr. David Brakke gives extensive evidence for the role of Athanasius in women monasticism including the translation, for the first time from Coptic and Syriac, of three letters Athanasius wrote to the virgins. This reference was not available at the time of the delivery of this paper.

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# ***FROM THE ARABIC CHRISTIAN HERITAGE: AWLĀD AL-ASSĀL***

*Saïd Rizkalla, Ph. D.*

It has become common practice among scholars to refer to the period from the the year 750 AD until about the year 1350 AD as the golden age for Arabic writers on humanities—with the 13th century as the most remarkable segment of this period. To be exact, Egypt was the center of this intellectual revival. In fact, this goes back to several factors which led to the emergence of a great number of distinguished Coptic scholars who played a big part in contributing to the intellectual thought of the period in general, and to the Christian thought in particular. When we study the writings of the scholars and intelligentsia of this period, and especially of this century, we immediately note their profound knowledge in all of the human sciences and the living languages of their times. They were not limited to the religious studies only, but they also included other subjects. As for the Arabic which they used, all the texts that we have from this period reflect the fact that they so mastered the language that the reader would marvel after reading the first few lines. This also reflects the great effort they put in molding this language to meet the needs of Christian theology and its special terms. Thus, the fathers and intelligentsia of the 13th century carried the intellectual torch of the early fathers, and their works resonated with the thoughts of the great scholars of the School of Alexandria. They did their utmost in presenting their children in future years with an intellectual and doctrinal supply in a language they could understand and that was suitable to the times. Among the most famous intellectuals of this century are Anba Būlus Al-Būshi, Bishop of Babylon (presently Old Cairo), Anba Yūsāb, Bishop of Fuwwah, Boutros of Sadamant the priest, Abu Shākar Ibn Al Raheb, Ibn Al-Makin, Ibn Kateb Qaysar, and Awlād Al-Assāl and others.

## ***Awlād Al-Assāl***

This title refers to four men—three brothers, sons of Fakhr al Dawla Abu Al-Mufaddal El Fadl Al Assāl. The fourth man is a son of one of the three brothers and grandson of the former. These four men together form a basic component of the intellectual revival that the Coptic Church experienced in the 13th century. All were scholars and church writers, and they have written on several topics while one

of them put together a Coptic lexicon, which was no doubt one of the elements Crum used in his dictionary. Their writings reflect that in addition to their mastery of Arabic and Coptic (both written and oral) they also mastered the Syriac and Greek languages. These two languages were considered to be the languages of culture and thought of the time. Their intellectual knowledge was not confined to the religious scope only, but we see from their writings their intense knowledge of astronomy, physics, chemistry, philosophy and history.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in their intellectual knowledge, they combined theology and secular sciences. They did not know the present phony separation between science and religion. Up to the present time the 'Mēsmrē' they have written, are still being read on the anniversaries commemorating the events they describe.<sup>2</sup>

From among the four Awlād Al-Assāl, this article will concentrate on the third son known as Al-Safī Abu Al-Fada'il Ibn Al-Assāl. It is worth mentioning that the titles which the members of this family bear were given to them by the Ayyubid Sultans as a token of appreciation for their significant services to the country.

### *Al-Safī Ibn Al-Assāl*

Al-Safī is one of the great intellectuals and scholars of the Coptic Church of the 13th century. He originally came from Cairo and his house was in Haret Zoweilla close to the Church of the Virgin Mary.<sup>3</sup> Later, he spent some time in Syria and his fame reached the heights as a canonist through his book, *The Safī Collection*, which is known in the West as *nomocanon*. Moreover, this extraordinary scholar was not only a canonist, but was also a theologian, knowledgeable in doctrine, and an intellectual of the first degree. His writings, which we still have, do reflect his extensive knowledge in these fields. As for what made him famous as a canonist, this goes back to the fact that he was secretary to the Holy Synod which convened in 1231 AD<sup>4</sup> to look into the practices of Anba Kyrillos III the Patriarch who was known as Ibn Laklak. The Coptic people together with their elders and bishops did not approve of those practices and the synod concluded with issuing specific decrees. Here we are concerned with the fact that Al Safī was assigned to collect the current Christian laws that governed both the ecclesiastical and secular behavior of the Copts at the time, especially in a community that was governed by

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- 1 Likewise, we find one scholar of the Coptic church during this century Ibn Al Makīn who has written a book about the history of Islam and which is still available to us today and is considered a reference on Islamic history.
  - 2 Mēmrē is a Syriac word meaning verse homily, but in the Coptic Church it is used to describe several writings such as biographies, history, praises, doxologies, sermons, teachings, etc. and it mostly contains an exposition on a specific portion of the Bible or a verse.
  - 3 See "*The Churches and Monasteries of Haret Zoweilla*,"—a doctorate dissertation by Father Bola El Baramoussy, submitted to the Institute of Coptic Studies, Anba Ruweis, Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt, 1993—an English summary is found in the Library of Congress, U.S.A. and some British libraries.
  - 4 See Iris El Masry, *Story of the Coptic Church*, Volume 3, p. 216 (in Arabic).

Moslem law. In a humble manner, without finding excuses for himself (such as stating that the matter was not his speciality), in biblical obedience to those who commissioned him to the task, and with an awareness of the importance of the intellectual responsibility that was given to him, Al-Safi devoted his time to this work and completed it in c.1238 AD.

This book which is simply known by the name of *The Safi Collection*, is in fact a canonical encyclopedia in which he gathered a great number of religious and secular laws, rules and ordinances from different sources such as the Apostolic Canons and those issued by the Ecumenical Councils (including even those that the Coptic Church does not acknowledge) and the regulations and teachings of the Coptic Patriarchs of the Church of Alexandria. Moreover, he obtained some of the rules from the canonical collections of other denominations. Amidst all this, however, he was never exclusively a collector of information without a specific intellectual stand. The student immediately realizes his amazing ability to select the material that serves the desired goal, without at the same time contradicting any of his Coptic Orthodox doctrinal and traditional beliefs. Therefore, Al-Safi did not find it inappropriate to cite straight from the Nestorians and the Melkites, that is, the Chalcedonians, and also from other secular canons. The study also reveals his great ability to arrange ideas which he drew from numerous sources, into a strong logical sequence and to present them in accordance with the principles of a genuine scientific research, similar to what we see in contemporary academic dissertations. In the introduction of his book he clearly states his sources as well as a list of abridgments he used in the text. However, what concerns us here is the methodical train of thoughts. This exceptional scholar teaches us how to avoid confusing the two fields of doctrine and pure scientific research. While the doctrinal study is no doubt related to the beliefs and traditions of the Church to whom the writings are addressed, the pure scientific research knows no denominational barriers. The book is a great human legacy and was later translated into Ethiopic in the 14th century and is still being used to this day by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. When the Maronite Catholic Church of Lebanon, wished to revise its internal structure in the 18th century, and harmonize the Christian canons with the Moslem law and after much research and study, it found nothing more appropriate than this work from which to select what was fitting to its circumstances and its own particular organization.

When we study closely the intellectual development of this Coptic thinker, we at once see the common rule that bound similar thinkers, that none of them dared to undertake writing on any topic before first reading most if not all the patristic legacy on those topics and familiarizing himself with the academic topics and sci-

ences of their time. They then would attempt to write after being commissioned by the authorities. This is what Al-Safi did. He had begun his intellectual career with the above mentioned collection, then at a later stage of his life he began a work of abridgements.<sup>5</sup> He completed abridgments for books of well known authors such as that of St. John Climacus, St. Isaac the Syrian and others. Father Samir Khalil, S.J., says that it is Al Safi Ibn Al-Assāl and his abridged works which were instrumental in preserving for us books which otherwise would never have reached us in their original long format—such as articles by Yahya Ibn Ady.

After many years of intense and diverse studies, he began with great caution to write books, which were basically apologetic in nature, i.e., they were in answer to writings that attacked the Christian faith or the Coptic Orthodox beliefs. Moreover, this was done after he was urged and commissioned by ‘those whose requests could not be disregarded,’ as he stated in the introduction to his books. As a Coptic thinker, living under the circumstances of his Church and people, it was necessary for him to support and strengthen his brethren in their faith and present them with a healing “reply” to the erroneous ideas. In spite of the relatively peaceful and stable period which the Christian Egyptian community enjoyed then under the rule of the just king Al-Kamel Al-Ayouby, the emergence of certain Islamic books that directly attacked the Christian beliefs was inevitable. These books were known as “Replies”. This word differed in meaning from our present day use of it. What was described as a “reply” historically meant a book that attacked the Christian beliefs. But what we now call a “Reply” or a “defense” was in the 13th century expressed by the word “Answer”. When we study the apologetic books written by Christians, we do not find among them and especially among Coptic writers any that initiated attacks on Islam; rather, they were all ‘answers’ (as per our usage) to attacks from Moslem writers directed towards Christian beliefs. Thus, all these writings reflect the genuine belief of the Fathers in dealing peacefully with everybody as much as is possible; but “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15) in accordance with the methods and literary styles of the period. We therefore have books by Al-Safi Ibn Al-Assāl such as *The Correct Way to Respond to Those Who Slander the Bible*; *The Right Way to Respond to ‘Advices*; *Diverse Conclusions on the Debates of El Sheikh Eissa Ibn El-Warak and El Sheikh Yahya Ibn Ady*; and *Decisive Answers to the Arguments of El-Sheikh Abdallah El Nashé and El-*

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5 An abridgement in the Christian Arabic culture was different from the word “summary” in our present day understanding. It was a summary of a book written by using the author’s original words and sentences, where the main job of the person writing the summary was just to join the different ideas with one or more words of his own such as “then” etc.

*Imam Fakhr El-Din Ibn El Khatteeb*. When we examine these books, we immediately observe a specific method worthy of imitation. Those intellectual Fathers were dealing with ideas and not with individuals; rather, they even found excuses for those individuals (as when Al-Safi tried to find an excuse for Al-Tabary who had been a Nestorian before becoming a Moslem at the age of 70, and who, at the command of the Sultan, wrote a book in which he attacked Christianity). They thus dealt with the ideas in a very calm way, analyzing them and refuting them using the Holy Bible and the Orthodox Tradition, and the “mind” (that is, logic and rhetoric) and this was done in a firm logical fashion, using words that were courteous and in a decent style without referring to anyone or mentioning any names.

In addition, Ibn Al-Assāl has other books such as *The Middle Book*, *Short Chapters on the Trinity*<sup>6</sup> and *Chapters on Baptism, Wills and Inheritance*.

This is a quick glance at one of our Coptic scholars who lived in the 13th century—which, according to the general historical divisions, is known as the “Middle Ages,” or “Dark Ages”. Is it true to consider all what is ancient as primitive and not contemporary, and all what is new as advanced and contemporary? This is a question I put before my beloved readers among the youth so they can calmly meditate on it with an academic, contemporary mind in order to know the tradition of their Orthodox Coptic Fathers and see for themselves whether they (the Fathers) have ranked top among the intellectual and academic trends of their times, or they were lagging behind the troops. Moreover, was their ideological contribution good only for their times or was it and still is a spring from which succeeding students up to our present day can drink and get nourished?

*(Translated from Arabic  
by Mrs. Lily Soliman, Metuchen, NJ)*

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6 Published by Father Samir Khalil, S.J., Lebanon, 1995.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*

By David Brakke. *Oxford Early Christian Studies*; Oxford: Clarendon, 1995. Pp. xviii + 356. \$65.00 (Hardcover), ISBN 0-19-826816-5

Athanasius was a control freak. At least that is what one must conclude if he or she accepts David Brakke's conclusions in this intriguing volume. Rarely are titles of books as accurate as this one: in Brakke's presentation of Athanasius, *everything* is political, and the author examines seemingly every political bone in Athanasius' ecclesiastical body. The bishop of Alexandria sought to control the virgins, monks, and schools of the Egyptian Church, all for the purpose of incorporating them into a "hierarchical, orthodox, parish-centered church"—with, of course, Athanasius as its head.

This agenda, as we would put it today, had mixed—and debatable—results: it attempted "to regulate and seclude active and independent women" (a conclusion that Susanna Elm has also recently reached in *Virgins of God*); it suppressed diverse groups in the Church, such as the Melitians and Arians; it restricted "teaching and learning to a carefully defined space in the public Church that was under [Athanasius'] control"; it redefined open-handed monastic hospitality to exclude those not deemed orthodox; it championed a "moderate asceticism" that was parish-based and focused on the laity, as opposed to acetic or intellectual elites: for Athanasius the "loci for piety" were not in the schoolroom or desert but in the assembly (*synaxis*) and the household.

There is plenty here, to say the least, for scholars and interested Church persons to chew on: What are the positive and negative values (and results) of orthodoxy? What are the benefits and losses of strong episcopal authority and control? What is the monastic witness when it is guarded—and guided—by bishops?

On the whole, Brakke does not offer judgements on these or other issues he raises; occasionally, though, a hint of opinion breaks through the disinterested scholarly surface: when Athanasius forced the monks to take sides against the Arians, he took the Egyptian Church "well along the path that will lead to Bishop Cyril's bringing gangs of monks to Church councils in support of Alexandrian orthodoxy."

Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism is a challenging, if single-minded,

book. In Chapter four, Brakke's close reading of the *Life of Antony*, almost every detail of the *Life* is read through the magnifying lens of Athanasius' ecclesiastical-political agenda. For example, Brakke interprets chapters 72-80—Antony's dispute with pagan philosophers—as a set-piece against “the *Christianity* of the school room” [emphasis added]. Some of Brakke's readings—such as this one, in my opinion—are forced, fitting the text into a preconceived thesis, but he does demonstrate that the *Life of Antony* is neither simply history nor hagiography; rather, one must read it like a White House memoir, asking often and carefully what the author's purpose and intentions are.

So we have Athanasius the ecclesiastic, the CEO, the manager, the manipulator—all of these savingly bound together with a forceful and commanding theology, spirituality, and vision. But something is missing. Not Athanasius the saint, but Athanasius the believer. Perhaps it's just my naiveté, but as I finished this book I was left wondering—what about Athanasius the man of prayer? Did he ever sit quietly in meditation (with the monks in the desert) without a political thought or scheme? Was he ever able to unpack those political bones, throw them on the night fire in the desert, and watch the flames and shooting sparks dance their way to heaven?

Tim Vivian

Bakersfield, CA

### ***Journeying into God: Seven Early Monastic Lives***

By Tim Vivian. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, x + 207 pp. \$16.00 (Paper), ISBN 0-8006-2885-1

Perhaps the most obvious point to make about Dr. Vivian's book is that it represents an important scholarly contribution in several ways. The seven lives newly translated from Greek and Coptic will help specialists in their study of these materials. More broadly, they will make available to scholars texts that are hard to find and little known. And in this way our understanding of Christian asceticism in late antiquity will be sharpened and clarified.

Much more, however, needs to be said. Dr. Vivian's introductions to the lives supply both scholars and general readers with an excellent account of the settings in which these saints lived and prayed. We gain a vivid understanding of what a monastery was like and how it worked. The central role of women in early Christian asceticism receives careful and balanced consideration. The miracles of these holy people and the function of their relics receive attention. Dr. Vivian's disciplined imagination opens to us a world that in the strict sense no longer exists.

At the same time, the purpose of the book is by no means antiquarian in character. Dr. Vivian encourages us to be more than “tourists” in following these saints on their journeys. He invites us to see in their lives perennial aspects of the Christian's spiritual journey, a journey that is finally an inward one that leads “into

God.” The book, then, serves as an excellent introduction not only to asceticism in early Christianity, but also to a spirituality capable of living in our own time.

Rowan A. Greer

Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT

### ***Augustine: His Thought in Context***

By T. Kermit Scott. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995. Pp. 253. \$14.95 (Paper), ISBN 0-8091-3566-3

The purpose of this book is reflected in the subtitle ‘His Thought in Context.’ It is not a biography of Augustine; nor is it a book that deals with his writings or spirituality. The author follows the development of Augustine’s thought, focussing on the core doctrines regarded as most distinctive of ‘Augustinianism’. In *Part I* of the book Scott discusses the historical background—the social, economic, political and forms of religion in the Western Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries. In *Part II* he follows Augustine’s search for God. When he moved to Carthage as a young student, he abandoned the primitive Christianity he had learned from his mother to Manichaeism. Later in Rome and Milan he shifted to Platonism, before his conversion back to Christianity. By the year 395 when he was ordained bishop, his theology was already well developed. *Part III* discusses the key doctrines of Augustine’s theology, a theology that dominated the West for centuries after him and is still a potent force. A separate chapter deals with each of those doctrines: free choice, divine foreknowledge, predestination, original sin and the fall. This book is a concise summary for the scholars and students of patristics, theology or church history. However, it is easily accessible to the nonspecialist.

### ***Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy***

By Rebecca Harden Weaver. Patristic Monograph Series, 15. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996. Pp. 264. \$30.00 (Hardcover). ISBN 0-86554-491-3

This is a comprehensive study of the writings of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy, a modern term for a theological debate that started in North Africa and quickly moved to South Gaul. It took from the fourth to the early sixth centuries, but it affected the teaching of Western Christianity since then. It was started by the last four treatises of St. Augustine, which he wrote before his death, dealing with the role of Grace and human agency for salvation. In these treatises, the traditional teaching by the Eastern Church Fathers, and which was carried by monasticism to the West, of co-operation (*Synergia*) between Grace and human free will that result in merit and reward at the last judgment was disrupted. According to Augustine, those who are predestined by God as ‘elect’ are given special grace that

helps them to turn their will toward him and persist with him till their entrance into beatitude. With the doctrine of predestination, free will and final judgment ceased to have any reality.

Weaver traces the course of the controversy by closely studying the writings of both camps through the century of debate that was concluded by the 529 Council of Orange. On the side of Augustine were Prosper of Aquitaine, Fulgentius of Ruspe and Caesarius of Arles. Augustine's main opponents were John Cassian, and Faustus of Riez. These tried persistently to offer an attractive alternative to the extreme Augustinian teachings without denying the role of grace which is equally offered to everyone. They insisted that human persons have a free will as well as a genuine role in shaping their lives and destiny. Although their teaching was condemned in the Council of Orange, yet in subsequent centuries most of it became the operative theology even in the West.

The author should be commended for offering a modern study of the historical and patristic material of a theological issue that is essential and alive till now. The book is useful for the scholar, churchmen as well as the general reader.

### ***Hypatia of Alexandria***

*By Maria Dzielska. Translated by F. Lyra. Cambridge, MA/London, England: Harvard University Press, 1995. Pp. 157. \$29.95 (Hardcover). ISBN 0-674-43775-6*

Hypatia, the leading Neoplatonist and brilliant mathematician of Alexandria was brutally murdered by the Christian mob in AD 415. Her unfortunate story and her untimely death made one of the dismal moments in the history of the Church in the fifth century. The story of Hypatia was exploited by the skeptical antichristian and anticlerical authors of the 18th and 19th centuries. In this book Maria Dzielska, who is an internationally recognized authority on the cultural life of the Roman empire tries to separate facts from fantasy and fiction in order to offer the reader a real scholarly study of Hypatia. In Chapter I, *The Literary Legend of Hypatia*, she gives an abstract of the historical essays, novels and poems about her that appeared in the last two centuries. She then tries to find from the historic sources the origin of this legendary material. In Chapter II, *Hypatia and her Circle*, she examines the extant writings of the disciples of Hypatia whom she taught in Alexandria between c. 380 and 415, in order to find the real character of Hypatia. The most notable of these students was Synesius bishop of Ptolemais, who was ordained by St. Theophilus of Alexandria. He describes her as a 'blessed lady' and 'genuine guide', and as 'the most holy and reverend philosopher.' She was leading her students to 'union with the divine' through cognitive effort and ethical perfection. She practiced asceticism in her daily life, was famous for her chastity and remained a virgin all her life. In addition to philosophy, Hypatia wrote mathematical works that remained popular for generations after her. In Chapter III, *The Life and Death of*

*Hypatia*, the author has put together the fragmented historical data in order to paint the whole picture and story without any bias. She concludes that Hypatia was an Egyptian who lived all her life in Alexandria. Her Father Theon was a mathematician whose works have survived till now. His daughter assisted him and continued his work after his death. Philosophy was her second interest. Her students were from the elite class; they came from Egypt and from other places as far as Constantinople. Her students included the Roman Prefect of Alexandria and many other Christians. Of her students, two became bishops. Her advice and support for the Prefect Orestes led to her death. The author describes it as a political murder provoked by long-standing conflicts in Alexandria.'

Historians and patristic scholars as well as general readers should be grateful to Dzielska for this book which clarifies a dark and interesting spot in Church history.

### ***Traditional Egyptian Christianity: A History of the Coptic Orthodox Church***

*By Theodore Hall Patrick. Greensboro, NC: Fisher Park Press, 1996. Pp. xiv + 226. \$14.95 (Paper), ISBN 0-9652-396-0-8. Order copies from: Education/Liturgy Resources, 140 College Street, Oxford, NC 27565; or from: St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, 1701 So. Wooster St., Los Angeles, CA 90035*

Since 1967, when Professor Aziz Ateya wrote a concise survey of Coptic Church history in his book *History of Eastern Christianity*, there has been no scholarly attempt to write a modern Coptic history that includes the material available in new articles and monographs in various languages. By this book, the author who is an episcopal priest and professor of early Church history tries to fill this gap. With hundreds of footnotes and a 25-page bibliography of primary and modern sources, he divides the book into 11 chapters, each covering a period in the life of the Church since its birth in the first century. In less than 150 pages, Patrick does the impossible task of covering the work of the School of Alexandria, the Church leadership in the ecumenical councils, the rise of monasticism, the suffering under different Muslim rulers after the Arab conquest, and finally the revival in the 20th century. The author should be commended for the massive information he has put in this small book. It deserves a place in every library and should be put in the hands of the Coptic youth.

### ***An Introduction to New Testament Christology***

*By Raymond E. Brown, S.S. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1994. Pp. 226 \$9.95 (Paper) ISBN 0-8091-3516-7*

The explosive amount of literature on biblical and theological studies pub-

lished during the last few decades has made many of the old manuals used at the pastoral level or in Bible study groups obsolete. This book, written by one of the leading Catholic authorities on the Bible, and who is well respected by other denominations as well, bridges the gap between the scholars and the average church teacher. The subject of Christology, the full divinity and full humanity of Christ, is here explained from various aspects: Jesus' deeds in different occasions, and his words especially concerning the Kingdom of God and his divine titles; and the testimony of the New Testament Christians. Important themes in Christology such as pre-existence, conception, boyhood, resurrection and second-coming are treated in separate chapters.

### ***The Jews in the Time of Jesus***

*By Stephen M. Wylen. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996. Pp. 215. \$14.95 (Paper), ISBN 0-8091-3610-4*

Historical studies always have their role in Bible study. In this book Rabbi Wylen reviews the political, social, religious and intellectual life of first century Judaism. This is the background against which Christianity arose, and its description will give us a more clear picture of the life and teaching of Christ and of the early Church. In four separate chapters, the author gives an account of second temple Judaism (the Jewish history during the five centuries before Christ): return from exile and building of the temple, Greek rule, independence under the Maccabees, and finally Roman rule. Several chapters describe the Jewish religion and belief in the first century, their festivals, sects and teachers. A separate chapter deals with the trial of Christ. Although the book reflects a great awareness of recent biblical scholarship, it is written in a straight non-technical language with the general reader in mind. It contains a wealth of information that cannot be found in any single source.

### ***Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader***

*By Mary R. Thompson, S.S.M.N. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995. Pp. 145 \$12.95 (Paper), ISBN 0-8091-3573-6*

The biblical image of St. Mary Magdalene has not changed much in the East along the years thanks to the influence of the early writings of Origen and St. Chrysostom. The Western Church Fathers, however, identified her with two other women—the sinner who anointed Christ's feet (Luke 7:37) and Mary of Bethany (John 12:3). This was the basis for a new image for Mary Magdalene, that of the penitent harlot, which became very popular in the Middle Ages. By the 12th century there was rapid multiplication of her relics and shrines in Europe. Legends, fan-

tasies and miracles surrounded the devotion to her. Modern biblical studies have helped to put an end to the confusion between the three biblical women, and the Roman Catholic Church corrected her teaching about her. In this book, Sister Mary Thompson closely examines the gospel texts, the early apocryphal writings and other historical material from the first Christian century in order to give a more accurate portrait of the Magdalene and describe her role in the early Church as 'disciple, leader and apostle'.

### ***Compendium of Spirituality, Volume I***

*Edited by Emeterio de Cea, O.P. Translated by Jordan Aumann, O.P., Staten Island, New York: Alba House. Pp. 194. \$12.95 (Paper). ISBN: 0-8189-0724-X.*

This is the first volume of a concise, comprehensive treatise on spirituality. Of the fourteen articles in this book four deal with the history of spirituality: Christian life in the New Testament, teaching of the Eastern Fathers and spirituality in the Western Church during medieval and modern times. Five articles discuss some aspects in spiritual theology including its nature, divine indwelling, action of the Holy Spirit and Mariology. Common questions in spiritual life are examined in the five remaining articles: universal call to holiness, purification (active and passive), prayer, mysticism and spiritual direction. The book is intended for the general reader who is interested in better understanding and deepening his prayer life.

## ***BOOK NOTICES***

### ***Faith to Creed***

*Edited by S. Mark Heim. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans, 1991. Pp. 206. \$12.99 (Paper). ISBN: 0-8028-0251-5*

Papers delivered in the consultation 'Faith to Creed: Toward a Common historical approach to the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century', which was organized by the National Council of Churches on October 25-27, 1989 at Waltham, MA. The different contributors concluded that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is an expression of the Christian Faith in the fourth century, as well as today.

### ***A Gallery of Reflections: The Nativity of Christ***

*By Richard Harries, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. Pp. 92, with 36 photos. \$20.00 (Hardcover).*

Full-color reproductions of Christian artwork depicting the nativity of Christ,

from the early centuries to the twentieth century; with description of the history and devotional intent of each by the bishop of Oxford.

***The Book of Acts in its First-Century Setting***

*Edited by Bruce W. Winter. Published by Paternoster Press, Cumbria, (UK) & Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI (USA), 1994/95; \$37.50 per volume (Hardcover).*

***Volume I: The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Settings***

*Edited by Bruce Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, Pp. 479. ISBN: 0-8028-2433-1.*

Among the topics included in the 14 chapters of this volume are: Acts in biblical history; Motif of fulfilment and purpose of Luke-Acts; Acts of Paul as a sequel of Acts; Acts and subsequent ecclesiastical histories; Acts and the Pauline Corpus; Acts and Classical rhetoric.

***Volume II: The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting***

*Edited by David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf. Pp. 627. ISBN: 0-8028-2434-X.*

Part I discusses cultural and social issues that include: travel and shipwreck, food shortage, Roman religion and the house-church. Part II has a separate chapter for each Province of the Roman Empire from Syria to Rome.

***Volume 3: Paul in Roman Custody***

*By Brian Rapske. Pp. 512. ISBN: 0-8028-2435-8.*

Themes in Part I include the legal system, citizenship and status in the Roman-World. Part II discusses Paul's trials in Philippi, Jerusalem, Caesaria and Rome. Part III discusses Paul's prisons in Acts.

***Volume 4: The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Settings***

*Edited by Richard Bauckham. Pp. 600. ISBN: 0-8028-2436-6.*

Topics covered include: Paul's pre-Christian career; Persecution by Jews, Early church; relation with the Essenes; and Palestinian politics.

# **COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW**

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# 1997 CALENDAR OF FASTS AND FEASTS

## *\*THE SEVEN MAJOR FEASTS OF OUR LORD*

### *\*\*The Seven Minor Feasts of Our Lord*

#### *\*\*\* Feasts of Virgin Mary*

#### *\*\*\*\*Fasts*

*\*January 7 - CHRISTMAS*

*\*\*January 14 - Circumcision of Our Lord*

*\*\*\*January 17 - Paramoni (2)*

*\*January 19 - EPIPHANY*

*\*\*January 21 - First Miracle of Our Lord at Cana*

*\*\*\*January 29 - Dormition of Virgin Mary*

*\*\*February 16 - Entrance of Our Lord into the Temple*

*\*\*\*February 17 - Fast of Nineveh (3)*

*\*\*\*\*March 3 - Great Lent (55)*

*March 19 - Feast of the Cross*

*\*\*\*April 2 - Apparition of the Virgin at Zeitoun in 1968*

*\*April 7 - ANNUNCIATION*

*\*April 20 - ENTRANCE OF OUR LORD INTO  
JERUSALEM (PALM SUNDAY)*

*\*\*April 24 - Holy Thursday*

*\*April 27 - EASTER*

*\*\*May 4 - St. Thomas' Sunday*

*\*\*\*May 9 - Birth of Virgin Mary*

*\*\*June 1 - Entrance of Our Lord into Egypt*

*\*June 5 - ASCENSION*

*\*June 15 - PENTECOST*

*\*\*\*\*June 16 - Apostles' Fast (26)*

*July 12 - Martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul*

*\*\*\*\*August 7 - Fast of the Virgin (15)*

*\*\*August 19 - Transfiguration of Our Lord*

*\*\*\*August 22 - Assumption of the Body of Virgin Mary*

*September 11 - New Year's Day (Feast of the Martyrs)*

*September 27 - Feast of the Cross*

*\*\*\*November 25 - Christmas Fast (43)*

*\*\*\*December 12 - Presentation of Virgin Mary into the Temple*