

Sir Herbert Thompson, one of the professors at Oxford University, wrote the following on September 5, 1936, in the Introduction of the book authored by Professor Mattha ("The Demotic Ostraka"):

Mattha produced a work on the Demotic ostraka relating to taxation in Egypt marked by a high degree of originality and complete commend of the history of the subject, and also showing a remarkable skill in the difficult palaeography of the period dealt with by him. It is a work of high and permanent value; and I shall hope to hear before very long that it is printed, so that all, who will, may learn from it. (*Publications de la Societe Française d'Égyptologie Textes et Documents VI*, Cairo, Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1945, p.viii.)

Professor George R. Hughes of the Oriental Institute of Chicago, wrote the following in the Introduction of Professor Mattha's book, *The Demotic legal Code of Hermopolis West*, published in Cairo by the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale in 1973:

It was also with a growing appreciation of the abilities of Girgis Mattha as a Demoticist who pioneered in assembling the mangled papyrus and in deciphering the unique text that I followed his reading of it. His work will long endure as a great contribution to Demotic studies and to the study of ancient law – the greatest contribution thus far made to the study of ancient Egyptian law – and I offer my addenda to his work in tribute to him as a colleague and friend as well as to his scholarship.

Professor Girgis Mattha was one of the pioneers in his specialization, especially in Demotic. He stood on the same level as Thompson, Spiegelberg, Brugsch, Guathier, Erickson, Mustafa al-Amir, Hegues, and many others.

Dr. Mattha was born in May 1905 and passed away in February 1967.

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Volume 27, Number 1 Spring 2006

- 2 ***In Memoriam - Otto Meinardus***
Saad Michael Saad
- 4 ***About the Laity in the Coptic Church***
Otto F.A. Meinardus
- 15 ***Coptic Piety and Parable of Jonah***
Otto F.A. Meinardus
- 21 ***Dr. Otto F.A. Meinardus***
John H. Watson
- 25 ***Professor Otto Meinardus (1925-2005)***
Writing about the Copts
Cornelis Hulsman
- 29 ***A Tribute to Dr. Otto F.A. Meinardus (1925-2005)***
Rev. Lyle H. Rasch
- 30 ***The Late Professor Girgis Mattha***
Chairman of the Department of
Archaeology University of Cairo
Boulos Ayad, Ph.D

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IN MEMORIAM

Otto Meinardus (1925-2005) ***A Distinguished Scholar Who Richly Contributed to*** ***Coptology and Coptic Church Review***

With deep respect and sincere gratitude, *Coptic Church Review* dedicates this issue (Volume 27, Number 1) in memory of one of its most respected and most prolific authors, The Reverend Dr. Otto Friedrich August Meinardus, who died at Ellerau, Germany on 18 September 2005.

Shortly before his departure, Professor Meinardus sent two papers to *Coptic Church Review*, both of which are published in this special issue: “About the Laity in the Coptic Church,” and “Coptic Piety and Parable of Jonah.”

Including these two articles, Dr. Meinardus wrote 24 articles for *Coptic Church Review*; the first one, “Consecration of the Holy Myron,” was published in Volume 12, No. 3, 1991.

In addition to papers written by Dr. Meinardus, this memorial issue also includes three articles in tribute of the great Coptologist. Together they tell the story of Meinardus, his personality, his love of all things Coptic, the many volumes and hundreds of articles he authored, and the exemplary life he led. The three articles about Dr. Meinardus are written by authors who knew him as both scholar and friend; the authors themselves are great witnesses to Coptic life and have written important texts in Coptology. They describe Otto Meinardus the passionate scholar, the good pastor, the provocative teacher, and the true human being.

The first article, “Dr. Otto F. A. Meinardus,” is by The Reverend Dr. John H. Watson, who is also a frequent contributor to *Coptic Church Review*.

The second article, “Professor Otto Meinardus (1925-2005) Writing about the Copts,” is by Dr. Cornelis Hulsmann, who has made many significant contributions in informing the world about the social and political life of the Copts.

The third article, “A Tribute to Dr. Otto F. A. Meinardus (1925-2005),” is by The Reverend Lyle H. Rasch, who has published on Meinardus and his books before.

Dr. Girgis returned to Egypt after receiving his doctoral degree; his dissertation title was “The Demotic Ostraka (from the Collections at Oxford, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Cairo—Introduction, Texts and Indexes with 27 Plates.” He was appointed as Assistant Professor in the Institute of Archaeology, College of Fine Arts, of the University of Fouad I (which later became Cairo University). He obtained the rank of associate professor and was promoted to full professor, later becoming Head of the Institute of Archaeology.

In 1956, the Institute was closed and the Department of Archaeology was established. Professor Mattha continued as the Chair of this department with its two Egyptian and Islamic branches until his retirement in 1965.

Dr. Mattha was an excellent teacher, noted for the careful explanations in his lectures and attention to details that enriched his students. He was precise in citing the sources and scholars he used in discussions of various topics. His lectures were very interesting and he was willing to answer the questions of any student, something I experienced personally.

I remember that in one of his lectures, which lasted for two hours, he was reading for his students one of the stories that was written in Hieratic. He explained only a part of one line that included five words. His discussion came from his vast memory, without using any notes, with a comparison among the different readings of other scholars. At the same time, he discussed each word as it appears in the different Hieratic documents and its equivalent in the Coptic and Greek languages. He was generous in sharing his own opinions.

His academic publications have been widely read, used, and accepted by many scholars world-wide. Dr. Mattha published more than 60 papers, monographs, and books. All have been written in or translated into English and French. His publications covered the ancient Egyptian language with its various branches (Hieroglyphics, Hieratic, Demotic, and Coptic) but his greatest focus was on Demotic.

Professor F. Ll. Griffith of Oxford University, cites in his book, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus*, the following about the academic effort of his pupil, Girgis Mattha: “During the latter part of his work on the graffiti, Professor Griffith used them for the instruction of his pupil Mr. Girgis Mattha, and at various points in the manuscript had entered suggestions made by the latter.” Elsewhere in the same volume, Professor Griffith noted:

I may here record my obligations to a pupil of Coptic race, Mr. Girgis Mattha, who has made a palaeographical study of the plates of the graffiti, and a preliminary collection of the demotic forms of the words for the indexes of this volume, providing me also with not a few valuable readings.

***THE LATE PROFESSOR GIRGIS MATTHA
CHAIRMAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF CAIRO***

*By Boulos Ayad, Ph.D
Professor of Archaeology of Ancient Egypt and the Middle East
Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado at Boulder*

Professor Girgis Mattha was well known since he was a student at Oxford University where he studied with the great and eminent scholar L.I. Griffith.

After his graduation from high school, Mattha joined the School of Medicine of the University of Fouad I where he studied for two years. Thereafter, he left the field of medicine to join the Department of Archaeology in the School of Fine Arts, where he studied for four years. During that time, he studied with George Sobhy, Selim, Hassan, Sami Gabra, Newberry, Golenischeff, Junker and Vikentiev.

After graduation and based upon his academic performance, the University of Fouad I sent him to continue his studies in Paris. There, he joined the Catholic Institute, from which he graduated in 1931.

From 1931 until 1936, Girgis Mattha studied at Oxford University, obtaining a Ph.D. in Demotic, which is considered by many as one of the most difficult branches of Egyptology. During his doctoral studies, he was appointed to teach some courses in his specialization.

Mattha's academic fame spread among the scholars of various nationalities since he was writing his Ph.D. dissertation at Oxford University. He visited a number of different libraries over time, including some in Germany, to continue his reading in Demotic ostraka. The story is told that he noticed another scholar trying to read some Demotic texts, which were very difficult. Mattha volunteered his help and the other scholar agreed without realizing who was offering the assistance. Girgis read the text without difficulty, which astonished the other scholar, who implied that only someone like Mattha could be so accomplished. Mattha said nothing. However, later a mutual friend of the two introduced them; the other scholar said to Mattha, "I am very happy to meet you today, that I heard a lot about you, but what I heard was less than what I noticed."

By dedicating this issue to the great Coptophile Dr. Otto Meinardus, Coptic Church Review hopes readers will increase their knowledge of the German orientalist, who not only loved Coptic studies but also was passionate about the living Coptic experience and had many deep friendships with numerous Copts including Dr. Rodolph Yanney, Editor-in-Chief of *Coptic Church Review*.

Finally, this issue presents an article by Professor Boulos Ayad Ayad on another giant of Coptic studies, the late Professor Girgis Mattha, former Chairman of the Department of Archaeology at Cairo University, who was more famous for his outstanding contributions to Egyptology, especially Demotic language.

Saad Michael Saad

ABOUT THE LAITY IN THE COPTIC CHURCH

Otto F.A. Meinardus

Introduction

Ever since the 19th century socialists and communists have complained that history is thought of as the listing of political and military endeavors of kings, princes, aristocrats and the wealthy. In the same vein it has been said that the history of the Christian Church is the narrative of persons and events pertaining to the political and doctrinal decisions by bishops, metropolitans and popes. On the other hand, the story of the “*laos tou theou*” had been sadly neglected. In view of this deficiency this essay on the laity in the Coptic Church ought to be seen as a possible corrective.

Recent archeological discoveries of large numbers of relics in the necropolis east of al-Hawawish (Akhmim) in 1990 and outside the Monastery of St. Gabriel, Naqlun (Fayyum) in 1991 have focused again our attention on the role of the lay-martyrs of the Coptic Church. In the meantime, the diocesan bishops of Akhmim and the Fayyum have distributed large quantities of these relics among Coptic parishes throughout Egypt and in the diaspora. While on the one hand the bodily remains of innumerable laymen, women and children are highly venerated by the faithful and the roles of the laity are eulogized, the actual administration of the Church, on the other hand, appears to be increasingly regulated by an authoritarian host of clergy. Indeed, sympathetic observers of the Coptic scene have ascertained a widening rift between an awakened and intelligent Coptic laity and a new caste of increasingly powerful members of the clergy. One gains the impression that in many sections of church-life only “ordained persons” hold responsible posts. At the same time, there are many young skilled technocrats willing to serve the Lord, though without being ordained to the priesthood.

The Laity in the Pre-Nicene Coptic Church

During the pre-Nicene period, the Coptic Church had made three principal contributions to the universal Church. In each and every case, the Egyptian laity has played a central role. There were the scholars of the famous Catechetical School of Alexandria who engaged in the first serious philosophical and theological encounters with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Secondly, St. Antony and the early desert fathers interpreted the demands of the gospel in terms of an ascetic with-

A TRIBUTE TO DR. OTTO F. A. MEINARDUS (1925-2005)

He was a husband and father. He was a professor and teacher. He was a noted scholar and writer. He was an avid reader in a wide range of subjects. He was a specialist in the history of the Coptic Church of Egypt. He authored books on St. Paul's travels in Greece, Coptic saints and pilgrimages, Christian Egypt: Ancient and Modern and of course his very recent book that covers 2000 years of Coptic Christianity.

I carried on a regular and lively correspondence with Dr. Meinardus over the past several decades. I have read and collected his books and encouraged others to read them. I know I would have enjoyed being in his classes at the University of Hamburg as he lectured on eastern Christianity. He made a diligent effort to stay updated on all his areas of interest. While he held definite and informed opinions, he was careful to word his analysis of political and religious subjects with moderation. He could readily see the very human and the humorous side of subjects and would express it privately. He enjoyed life.

It was difficult to keep up with Dr. Meinardus and his travels. I have a range of cards and letters from him as he travelled from Sri Lanka to Kevelaer, from the Holy Land and Egypt to Mallorca, from Croatia to Bali, from Krakow to North Cyprus. He enjoyed travel and always gained so much experience and information from his travels.

A fine Coptologist and scholar from a previous era, Dr. O.H.S. KHS-Burmester of Cairo, spoke highly of Dr. Meinardus and aside from his scholarship always mentioned the detailed and accurate description of places, persons and objects that characterized the writing of Dr. Meinardus. Wherever possible he accompanied his articles with photographs (many taken by himself) as well as drawings and sketches. His aim was to make the subject clear on various levels. Whether writing on the Coptic Liturgy or “The Mystery of the Akhmim Martyrs” he wrote incisively and well.

We extend our sympathy to his dear wife, Eva, his children Evelyn, Ronald and Paul and to the extended family of Dr. Meinardus. He will be sorely missed by his immediate loved ones as well as by the scholarly world where he was so active. We give thanks for his love of life and great concern for others. His one purpose in it all was to glorify God. So we say Soli Deo Gloria?

Rev. Lyle H. Rasch, Lutheran Pastor
Cincinnati, Ohio USA

Cairo (AUC) and pastor of the Maadi Community Church (MCC) in Cairo. Many foreigners were expelled by the Egyptian authorities following the Suez crisis of 1956, so Dr. Meinardus had a light workload. He used his time to get to know the Coptic Orthodox Church, went to distant monasteries and was fascinated by the dedication and spirit of the desert fathers. His first book *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts* came out in 1961. Meinardus was however, with other non-Egyptian faculty at AUC, expelled shortly, before the Six-day War of 1967. He served as pastor in several other countries and returned to Germany in 1975 where he became pastor and later professor in Middle Eastern Religions at the University of Hamburg. He organised visits to Egypt for *Biblische Reisen* in Germany and in later years when he no longer had the physical strength to do so, he came yearly with his wife Eva to Egypt, last in April 2005. Dr. Meinardus was a prolific writer; his books and articles became a main source of reference on the Coptic Orthodox Church. He is generally recognised in the West as the most important contemporary Western authority on the Church in Egypt. He gave lectures and helped scholars with their studies on the Coptic Church. Dr. John Watson was the last to interview Dr. Meinardus, for his column in *Watani*. Dr. Meinardus had plans for more studies but on Friday 16 September he was taken to hospital with cardiac trouble. He underwent surgery but passed away on Sunday 18 September. The funeral was on Friday September 23 in Germany. Dr. Meinardus survived his first wife who passed away in 1984. He is survived by his wife Eva and two children.

Publications in Egypt

Dr. Meinardus was the author of the first book published by the AUC Press

- *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Desert*, in 1961. A revised edition of that book is still in print, 44 years later!

He was also the author of the following AUC Press books

- *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern* (1965)
- *Christian Egypt Faith and Life* (1970)
- *The Holy Family in Egypt* (1986, a reprint of a book he wrote around 1960)
- *Die Heilige Familie in Agypten* (1988)
- *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian deserts. Revised Edition* (1988)
- *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (2000)
- *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages* (2002)

He also wrote a chapter in: *Christian Egypt: Coptic Art through Two Millennia*, edited by Massimo Capuani (2002)

His last book: *Christian in Egypt: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Communities Past and Present* (forthcoming, spring 2006)

drawal from a sinful and demon-possessed world. They withdrew into the wilderness and established a movement which for many centuries to come provided both in the East and in the West the spiritual foundations for great cultural achievements. And lastly, no Christian community in the first three centuries has provided so many martyrs for the Kingdom of God as the Coptic Church. These martyrs are commemorated to this day by the Coptic calendar which commences on September 11th 284 A.D. corresponding to the 1st of Tut 1 A.M.

A. *The Lay-Martyrs*

Glancing through the literature of the martyrdoms of the pre-Nicene Church in Egypt, one reads in the Coptic Synaxar alone about 190 biographies describing the terrible tortures leading to death. Not mentioned are the unnamed multitudes of laymen and women who contributed by their witness as much to the spread of the Christian faith as the preaching and writing of the priests and bishops. At that time, all Christians were aware of having been called “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people . . . to show forth the praises of him who had called you out of darkness into the marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Therefore, the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” with its roots in the Holy Scriptures was a spiritual assurance for thousands of witnesses throughout the first three centuries. True enough, many of the Egyptian martyrologies include highly apocryphal and legendary material and many biographies are mere copies of other *vitae*, yet there remains the historic Christian martyr of the 2nd/4th cent. persecutions, be they those of Hadrian (117-135), Decius (250) and especially those of Diocletian and his colleague Maximian (296-303). In many cases bystanders were converted by the example and testimony of the martyrs. The vast majority of these martyrs were laymen and women who laid down their lives for their Lord.

B. *The Lay-Ordination by Baptism*

In the pre-Nicene Church the “*laos tou theou*”, the *plebs*, the laity received the “ordination” through the sacrament of baptism and the accompanying unction. Through the baptismal unction the catechumens were enrolled in “the royal priesthood”, as the Apostle Peter had referred to this calling in his *locus classicus* of the teaching of the “priesthood of all believers”. Especially the North African theologian Tertullian of Carthage (150-230) stressed the priestly character of the baptismal unction, “anointed with the holy unction just as in the days of the old Dispensation priests were anointed with oil from the horn of the altar”. For Tertullian the baptismal ordination also qualified the recipient to baptize in his turn, for what is equally received can be equally given (De bapt. VII, 14). At the same time, Tertullian stated that laymen should perform the sacrament only in the absence of a cleric. For the maintenance and support of the laity in critical situations, the absolute indelibility of baptism had to be assured. In the pre-Nicene church this issue was repeatedly disputed because of the acceptance of schismatics and heretics into the fellowship of the church. It is somehow noteworthy, that this issue is still under discussion in the 21st century, for there are some Copts who

demand “rebaptism” for non-Orthodox Christians if they desire the sacrament of holy matrimony in a Coptic Church.

C. The Layman as Theologian and Teacher

In addition to his ordination as “royal priest”, at least in Alexandria, the layman could aspire to the status of the ideal “Gnostic”. On account of his post-baptismal illumination he was enabled to pass through the spiritual grades of deacon, elder and even bishop, so the theologian Clement of Alexandria, the head of the Alexandrian *didascalia* (Stromata VI, 13). Therefore, the functional priesthood of the clergy was clearly derived from the “priestly laios”, the whole baptismal community of the reborn in Christ.

Especially in Egypt, the educated laity played a significant role in the teaching and preaching of the Gospel. The Catechetical School of Alexandria was undoubtedly the earliest important institution of theological learning and its famous teachers were exclusively laymen, often harassed by the clergy. The first head of the school was Pantaenus who is credited with the adoption of the Greek alphabet in the Coptic script. Pope Demetrius I (d. 230) sent him on a mission to India. His successor was Clement of Alexandria (150-215), the most illustrious pupil of Pantaenus. As a student of Christian gnosticism, he taught that religious knowledge was the essence of Christian perfection. Like Socrates, Clement considered ignorance as being worse than sin. His aim was to demonstrate the compatibility of Greek philosophy with Christian theology. In many ways he can be rightly regarded as one of the earliest apostles of Christian liberalism. He was followed by Origen, the most distinguished theologian of the pre-Nicene church and the most brilliant pupil of Clement. As a young man he was extremely ascetic and observed the most rigorous vigils, following even the advice of Christ of becoming a eunuch (Mt 19:12). He had studied under the Neoplatonist Ammonius Saccas (174-242); as a biblical scholar he published the Hexapla, placing the Hebrew side by side with Greek versions. In his *Contra Celsum* he defended Christianity against the attacks of the pagan philosopher Celsus. Origen’s problems with the hierarchy started on his visit to Palestine where he was invited by the bishops of Aelia (Jerusalem) and Caesarea to preach in their dioceses. For the authoritarian Pope Demetrius I it was unthinkable for a layman to preach in the presence of a bishop (Euseb. HE VI, 19). The pope recalled Origen to Alexandria where he remained 12 years studying and teaching. Finally he returned to Palestine where he was promptly ordained elder. As to be expected, the pope nullified the ordination, excommunicated and dismissed him from the Catechetical School. Origen returned to Palestine where he taught in Caesarea. He died in Tyre in 255.

The theology of the greatest Christian thinker of the pre-Nicene church divided the theologians from the 4th to the 21st century. There were his followers like Sts. Athanasius, Dionysius of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, Gregory Nazianzen and Basil the Great, but there were also his adversaries like Theophilus of Alexandria, Epiphanius of Salamis and Jerome. Eventually, the Council of Constantinople of 553 condemned Origen for heresies!

I once spoke with Otto about death. He said he wasn’t afraid to die because he knew for certain that God would take care of him. He knew, he said, that God would take him in His fatherly arms. Otto had his doubts about human traditions, [church] politics and other things human, but one thing he was certain of: God’s love for humankind.

It was always a great joy to receive Otto and his wife Eva during their yearly visits to Egypt. It was a joy to hear anecdotes of bygone days. It was a joy to listen to explanations of events in church history. It was a joy to see him with his friends. We will miss him dearly.

Drs. Cornelis Hulsman is editor-in-chief Arab-West Report, an electronic publication dedicated to understanding the place of Egypt’s contemporary church in an Islamic society.

Arab-West Report would like to collect as many personal experiences with Dr. Otto Meinardus as possible and present them later to his wife. Please write or call us with your experiences. Tel: 3598087.



From left: Dr. Cornelis Hulsman, Dr. Otto Meinardus, HH Pope Shenouda III, Mrs. Eva Meinardus. The photo was taken in spring 2002 by Girgis Mahboub.

DR. OTTO MEINARDUS

Dr. Otto Meinardus was born in 1925 in Hamburg, Germany, and studied theology and sociology in Hamburg, London, St. Louis, Chicago, and Boston. Dr. Meinardus was from 1956 till 1968 professor at the American University in

that this was a society where oral tradition was very strong. Egyptians were willing to share information with him orally, but putting it on paper was a different matter. So this was his role; the information they shared found a place in his studies and, through his writing, the West encountered a living church, not a monument of the past.

Last April we met a Protestant church leader to ask for information on the Protestant Maglis al-Milli. His secretary was asked to present the information and gave—to Otto’s great surprise—a photocopy of Otto’s book of the 1960s. It was not that there was no recent information; it was simply not documented. Again, this was Otto’s role.

I have heard Egyptians complain of Western ivory tower scholars who study manuscripts in Western libraries and come to Egypt for short visits and interviews. Otto was different. He did study the manuscripts, but he stayed long in Egypt and personally befriended many in the Church. For Otto, the Church in Egypt was not an interesting phenomenon, it was life!

Less pretty things

Even though Otto obviously loved Egypt’s Church, he sometimes wrote things Copts didn’t like. He told me about the problems his “yellow bad book” caused—this is how he called the yellow covered *Die Wuestenvaeter des 20 Jahrhunderts* published in Germany in 1983. Some Copts in Germany read the book and found it terrible that Meinardus dared write about his encounter with a young monk who smoked hashish. It was only a small paragraph in the entire book, but letters were sent to Pope Shenouda and Otto was asked to retract the book—which was never reprinted.

One can have open discussions with Egyptians. Otto knew, but not everything one sees or hears should go into print. It relates to the local concept of honour; less pretty things should be kept private; they should not be put on paper and made known to a large public. This seriously complicates a scholar’s work, but Otto was careful in his AUC books not to offend his Coptic readers. However, in *Kemet*, a German publication, he was more open and doubting.

When once we visited a Catholic bishop Otto immediately spotted a large icon of St Cyrill. He shook his head and softly said “mai, mai, Orthodox won’t like that.” Otto knew of the sensitivities between the different denominations and that St Cyrill is a most explicit exponent of Coptic Orthodoxy.

In the Father’s arms

During each visit to Egypt, Otto made an effort to meet His Holiness Pope Shenouda III whom he first met when yet the monk known as Father Antonius in an isolated desert cave. In their last meeting, Otto said he wasn’t certain he would see His Holiness again. His Holiness replied that they would surely meet in heaven.

Among the successors of Origen, Didymus the Blind was entrusted by St. Athanasius with the leadership of the school from 315-398. He had been blind since the age of four and was the first to promote a system of embossed writing for the blind. As scholars, laymen have left an incontestable mark in shaping theological scholarship and Christian doctrine.

D. The Layman in the service of the Church

One aspect of the role of the laity in the church is already clearly defined in the Acts of the Apostles. The selection of the successor of Judas (1:25) occurred in the presence of 120 of the multitude – the number necessary to elect members to the Sanhedrin – and also in the choosing of the deacons by the whole multitude (6:5). Throughout the pre-Nicene church, the laity played an important part both in the selection and elevation of the clergy. In the *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus clearly records that the bishop is “elected by all the laity” (II,1). Cyprian makes a similar point when he demands: “The bishop should be chosen in the presence of the laity who have most fully known the life of each one as respects his habitual conduct”. He also insists that just as the laity has the power of recognition, they have also the power of withdrawing from the jurisdiction of an unworthy cleric (Ep. 47, 3 & 5).

Even in the pre-Nicene church clerical power persistently increased over the communal voices; at least in North Africa there remained a separate authority known as the *seniores laici*, the most respected laymen who were clearly distinct from the *seniores ecclesiae*, the elders. It is significant to record that following the various regional persecutions the members of the laity appeared to be more severe in their judgments than the clergy in the readmission of penitent schismatics and lapsed, who had betrayed their faith in face of torture of martyrdom (Euseb. HE VI, 43).

St. Luke describes the communion of saints in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44; 4:32f) so as to tell the Jewish and the Gentile world that the dream of the “golden age” had been realized among the Christians. By the 4th century in Egypt as well as elsewhere in the Middle East the communistic motivations of the first generation were turned in the direction of monasticism. The *communio sanctorum*, once the community of the holy eucharist as well as the community of the departed saints became a community of monks and nuns competing with each other in their respective ascetic practices.

At the same time, the eleemosynary role of the laity remained an indissoluble part of the witness of the church. Thus, Dionysius of Alexandria (264) described in detail the compassion and care with which the presbyters, deacons and the laity served in the most terrible plague of the 3rd century. By helping the afflicted they transferred death to themselves, while the pagans left even their closest loved one for themselves (Euseb HE VII, 22). There used to be no area of public life in which Christians did not serve the needy. Charismatic healers, like lay-practitioners, responded to Christ’s call to cast out devils of insanity and sickness, as mentioned by Origen (185-255) who spoke of the expulsion of evil spirits and the per-

formances of many cures (*Contra Celsum* VII, 4). At the same time, the fact remains that in the first three centuries of our era the Church increasingly lost the gift of spiritual healing. Whereas Jesus discovered the nature of the patient's trouble and altered his methods accordingly, his followers became content with the formula "in the name of Jesus" which became a charm instead of a means conveying a divine power which the healer possessed.

E. Monasticism as a form of protest

In the pre-Nicene church Christians withdrew from a wicked world which they considered to be demon-and-from satan infested. Not only the secular world, also certain aspects of the church they considered as a damnable *locus peccatorum*. Dissatisfied with the institution, men and women selected the ascetic life as a spiritual protest against the increasing worldliness of the church. By the 6th/7th century, thousands of monks and nuns are reported to have withdrawn to the desert regions west of the Nile Valley from Arsinoe (Fayyum) to Syene (Aswan) and to the Wadi 'n-Natrun.

Even today, Coptic monks have decided to flee from the very thought of holding an ecclesiastical office, be that of a priest or bishop. Jesus had granted his disciples "power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Mt 10:1). These are gifts which are bestowed upon the meek, the patient, the long-suffering and the humble. Positions, offices and ranks, however, are a threat to humility and meekness and, therefore, a threat of losing the very power, the ability and also the authority over sickness and demons. Realizing the dilemma between the God-given biblical charismata and the "official charismata", namely those of carrying out the duties of a cleric, Abuna Antonius as-Suriani wrote to me on January 7th, 1963 from his cave a Bahr al-Faregh, Wadi 'n-Natrun, following his episcopal consecration:

"...I can never forget your friendship and love. As a matter of fact, a letter of consolation – not of congratulation – was fit for the matter. How may a monk be congratulated on leaving the calmness of the wilderness and abiding again amidst the disturbance of the city? How can anyone congratulate Mary if she leaves her place at the feet of Christ and goes to labour with Martha in the kitchen? For me, it is indeed a matter of shame. I remember that day of my consecration to the episcopacy in tears and lamentation. Indeed, the glory of solitude and contemplation is above measure. It may not be compared with that of the episcopacy and even that of the papacy. The true consecration, my dear friend, is the consecration of the heart as a holy temple for the Lord who on the last day will not ask us for our pastoral grade but for our purity of heart..."

I remember well the asceticism of Pope Kyrillus VI (1959-1971), who used to delegate the political and bureaucratic responsibilities to his secretaries, among them Abuna Makari and Abuna Mitias. By maintaining faithfully and diligently a

PROFESSOR OTTO MEINARDUS (1925-2005) WRITING ABOUT THE COPTS

Cornelis Hulsmann

Otto Meinardus' death came as a huge shock to all of us at Arab-West Report, where he had for years been a key member of the board of advisors. He had recently handed the American University Press in Cairo the manuscript of his last book, *Christians in Egypt: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Communities Past and Present* (forthcoming, spring 2006) and was full of ambitions for more studies.

No western scholar wrote about the Church in Egypt—especially the Coptic Orthodox Church—as Otto Meinardus did. His works brought Egypt's Church to the doorstep of a wider Western public which, more often than not, never knew in the first place that a church existed in Egypt.

A style of his own

Otto Meinardus had his own style of studying the Church. He not only looked into relevant manuscripts in Western libraries, but also met desert fathers, grasped their amazing spirituality, and documented this in academic style.

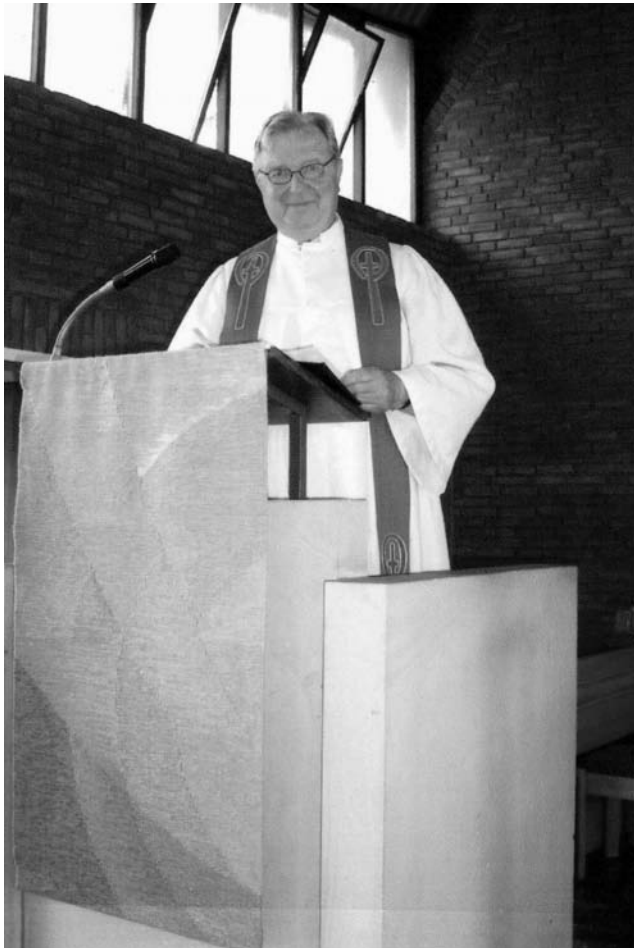
Otto never used a computer; he did not need one. His astounding memory and encyclopaedic knowledge served him well. He collected data for his research, and asked his friends—us included—to find responses to queries.

I went around Cairo with Otto and his wife, meeting bishops, clerics and laymen to collect data. It was obvious that, for Otto, meeting Egyptian Christians was not a mere academic exercise. They were friends, and this showed in the way they met, exchanged information and spoke about days long past. Otto often surprised clergy with his precise memory of things that happened in the 1950s and 60s, an interesting period for the Church in Egypt—a period of spiritual revival and great leaders. No wonder that this drew Otto, the then young scholar and pastor of Maadi Community Church, to the Orthodox Church.

No ivory tower scholar

Otto was always received by Coptic clergy with warmth, reverence and dignity. They responded to whatever questions he asked. But then, Otto would say on a soft tone, they never responded to questions he had written them. But he knew well

The Revd. Dr. John H. Watson is an Anglican priest who lives in Dorset, UK. He is the author of several books including *Among the Copts* (2000), *Christians Observed: Narratives for Today's Church* (2004), and *Listening to Islam* (2005).



Requiescat in pace

Otto Friedrich August Meinardus was born in Hamburg, Germany on 29 September 1925. He died at Ellerau, Germany early in the morning of Sunday 18 September 2005.

Professor Meinardus was by general consent one of the great Coptologists of the twentieth century. He was also a genuine and much-loved pastor. May he rest in peace and rise in the Glory of Our Lord.

Amen.

high degree of spiritual discipline, fasting and holding long periods of vigils as well as celebrating every night the Liturgy, he retained the power to heal, to prophecy and to cast out demons.

Every generation had its monks who protested against the various forms of clericalization. Some of them withdrew to the cave, others fled to the inner desert, others mutilated themselves so as to be ineligible for the priesthood. According to the Scriptures, strict laws regulated the eligibility for entering the priesthood (Lev 21: 17-20). An example was set by St. Mark, the founder of the Coptic Church. In order to avoid being enlisted for the Jewish priesthood, he cut off his thumb and became known as *kolobodaktylos* or as “flat-finger”, so the Greek presbyter and historian Hippolytus (3rd cent).

The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church records that from the 8th century onwards Coptic monks resisted with every possible means the nomination to an ecclesiastical office, aware that this would mean surrendering those cherished charismata which they had received from the Lord. Again and again monks mutilated themselves. One of those better known stories is that of Bessus, the saintly monk of the Monastery of the Syrians, whose virtues and miracles were well known. He was to be elected to be made patriarch as successor to Christodoulos in 1077. “When they started to take hold of him, he cried out against them, and he took stones with which he smote his breast so that he almost killed himself” (HPEC, II, iii, 322). From the beginning of the 12th century it was customary among the Copts to put the candidates for the papacy in fetters. These were only taken off from his feet at the beginning of the Service of Consecration of the Patriarch. The Dominican father J.M. Wansleben (1672) mentions that in his days monks went in hiding when they heard about a possible nomination to an ecclesiastical office. The sultan used to offer his janissaries to the electorate in order to search for the run-away-monks. The discrepancy between monastic spirituality and the clerical office has remained to this day. It really means that the monastic protest should be seen as being “part of the system”.

3. The Laity in the Middle Ages

Throughout the Middle Ages the Coptic laity played a significant role both in the life of their church as well as in the administration of their country. In purely ecclesiastical affairs the Coptic laity participated in the nomination and election of the patriarch. In several instances, laymen were nominated and elected to the highest office, occupying the throne of the Evangelist St. Mark. In the political life under the various Islamic dynasties Copts held important administrative positions. An almost natural aptitude for accounting and administration led them into high offices of the state.

A. The Laity and the Election of the Coptic Patriarch

In the history of the Coptic Church one can distinguish between four different election procedures. 1. Nomination and appointment of the candidate by the prede-

cessor. 2. Nomination by consultation and election by members of the clergy and the laity without and later in conjunction with the government. 3. Nomination and consultation and election by the casting of lots and 4. Nomination and election by means of a dream or a vision of a devout Christian, who can be a layman.

By far the majority of the Coptic patriarchs between the 1st and the 12th century were nominated in consultation and elected by “the Orthodox people”. In some instances, special mention is made “by the Orthodox Laity” and with the bishops. Until the 10th century, the nomination and election took place in Alexandria. From the 11th century onwards the privilege of electing the patriarch was shared between the Christians of Cairo and Alexandria, who met alternately in one or the other city. As early as the 7th century, the Islamic government exercised certain rights regarding the election of the candidate to the patriarchal office. By the 8th century the government granted permission to the clergy and the laity to proceed in the nomination and election of candidates for the office. Although there were many problems between the clergy, the laity and the government, the laity retained the rights and privileges to participate in the nomination and election of the patriarch.

B. Laymen as patriarchs

Whereas during the first few centuries it was customary for the patriarch to nominate and prepare his successor for the position, by the 9th century the process of nomination and election by members of the clergy and the laity was well established. Following the death of Cosmas II (851-858), the bishops proposed the names and “a number of priests, monks and laymen who were known for their purity of speech, chastity, learning and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures” (HPEC II, i, 19). The first layman to be elected to occupy the throne of St. Mark was in Misr (Cairo) a Syrian merchant, whose name was Abraham ibn Zar’ah (975-978). He used to give alms to the widows, the poor, the hidden (those who do not beg openly) and the feeble. His beard descended upon his breast and he was in great favour with the king al-Mu’izz” (HPEC II, ii 136).

In the case of the election of Gabriel II ibn Turaik (1131-1145), the assembly of the archons (laymen) went to the Monastery of the Syrians where they were told that the new patriarch should be a layman, a scribe in a government office in Cairo. “He was a man of middle age, wise, learned, experienced, of excellent manner of life, of much alms-giving to the poor and piety” (HPEC III, i, 39). Following the death of John V (1147-1166), the archons visited Abu’l-Farag ibn Abu As’ad known as ibn Zar’ah, who was related to his Syrian paternal great great grandfather Abraham ibn Zar’ah. He was layman and he was consecrated as 73rd successor to the Evangelist St. Mark and he received the name Mark III (1166-1189). One month after the decease of his predecessor, the archons elected to the throne of St. Mark John VI (1189-1216). He was a very wealthy layman possessing a sugar factory, mills and property. He was renowned for his excellent character, his charity and good works (HPEC III, ii, 167). Unfortunately, in the case of some 13th centu-

Marie Zimmermann and they now live together in Ellerau in Northern Germany. But Dr. Meinardus has travelled extensively in the Middle East and especially in Cairo, despite his age and inevitable health problems. He is a warm and sympathetic man.

Professor Meinardus visits Egypt almost every year. His 1999 publication *Two Thousand years of Coptic Christianity* (American University in Cairo Press) celebrated the history of the second Christian Millennium. It surveyed the twenty centuries of the Coptic Orthodox Church, one of the oldest churches in the world, and was a joy to read. He explains how the Egyptian Church passed through numerous trials, persecutions and afflictions:

“The vast numbers of their martyrs are a testimony to their unshaken faith. During the Middle Ages, the Coptic Church kept the lamp of their faith burning amid trials and tribulations of all kinds.”

No doubt it is impossible to acknowledge all the brilliant Coptic publications produced by Dr. Meinardus.

The Holy Family in Egypt (American University in Cairo, 1986, and originally published as *In the Steps of the Holy Family from Bethlehem to Upper Egypt*, Dar el-Maaref, Cairo, 1963) is immensely popular and accessible.

Patriarchen Unter Nasser und Sadat (Deutsches Orient-Institut, Hamburg, 1998) is admired as a powerful piece of political analysis. Certainly, *The Copts in Jerusalem* (Commission on Ecumenical Affairs, Cairo, 1960) is confidently accepted. In this book the author refers to Pope Kyrillos the Sixth and Emperor Haile Selassie believing that “both parties are imbued with the spirit of Christian charity, and eschewing all recourse to legal documents and actions, wherein worketh not the righteousness of God.”

Coptic Saints and Pilgrims (2002) carefully examines the popular traditions and beliefs of the Copts. It is clear that many of the normal Coptic public have their roots in the traditional religious heritage of pharaonic Egypt.

If there were one book that had to be identified as very special, by the British tourist in Athens referred to in the first paragraph, then that volume would most certainly be *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1961, revised edition 1989.) Meinardus is right when he tells us that “the virtues of desert monasticism can find a means to radiate into the world. For the desert spells quietness and peace, in which the presence of God can be felt more easily than in the noisy and turbulent world.”

Many students of Coptic Egypt, especially those whose first language is English, owe a great debt to Otto Meinardus, though his German contributions to *Kempt - Eine Zeitschrift f_r Ägyptenfreunde*, and no doubt to many other international publications are legion. All of his readers are looking forward to the publication of his latest book *Christians in Egypt*, due from the American University in Cairo Press in the Spring of 2006.

It is a privilege to wish The Reverend Professor Otto F.A. Meinardus a very happy eightieth birthday on 29 September 2005.

Seven Churches of the Apocalypse was of course The Reverend Professor Otto F.A., Meinardus, and his 80th birthday will be celebrated on 29 September 2005, the feast day of St. Michael and All Angels, known as Michaelmas in the West.

Otto Friedrich August Meinardus was born in Hamburg in 1925. He studied as a boy at the County High School in his home-city and moved on the metropolitan University, studying in the philosophy Department. He graduated in Theology at the universities of London, St. Louis, Missouri, Boston and Harvard. He holds doctorates in Religious Education, the Psychology of Religion, Social Ethics and Coptic Monasticism.

But Dr. Meinardus is not only a famous academic, and author of many works in the field of Coptic Studies, he has also been engaged in significant Pastoral work as a clergyman. He has served in churches in New Zealand, Australia, Massachusetts, Athens, and Koblenz, and from 1956 to 1968 ministered as a greatly valued pastor in the Maadi Community Church in Cairo. The Maadi Church is a dynamic institution, well known and much loved by the serving clergy and congregation. Maadi Community Church is not only international but also significantly compassionate and pastorally orientated.

Professor Meinardus loved the Church in Egypt. He has written so much about the Copts. It would not be easy to list all his works. But many are of central importance.

He served as a professor in the American University in Cairo for more than a decade. The publication of *Christian Egypt Faith and Life* (American University in Cairo Press, 1970) outlined certain basic theological issues concerning the institutional and the folk religion of the Copts.

Many Christians in Egypt share the international interest in mystical religious experiences and this led Meinardus to include phenomenological and historical studies of the best known spiritual phenomena in Coptic Egypt: "The phenomenon of light emanating from the icon is very frequent throughout Egypt and many priests and desert monks can relate innumerable examples of this manifestation."

Western students of Coptic Orthodoxy were powerfully assisted by the magnificent book *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern* (American University in Cairo Press, 1977): "We have seen how the Divine Child and His Mother blessed the Land of Egypt and wrought miracles in it, and, if the night still seems dark, yet may we comfort ourselves with the assurance that it is ever darkest before the dawn."

Otto Meinardus has also been a professor in Athens and Hamburg. His contributions to Coptic studies is enormously significant. Any survey of his sixteen books, six hundred articles and exceptional revisions would take more than a newspaper article to survey. He has produced several hundred supplementary academic articles on Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Byzantine and Russian Orthodox studies.

Dr. Otto Meinardus is first and foremost a family man. He married Elschen Doescher in 1951, but sadly she passed away in 1984. His daughter Evelyn was born in 1953 and his son Ronald in 1955. In October 1996, Otto married Eva Ann

ry patriarchs the records do not show whether they were members of the clergy or laymen. At any rate, it is important to state that in the Coptic Church laymen could be advanced to the highest position, that of the patriarch.

C. Laymen as Custodians of the Head of St. Mark

The History of the Patriarchs records the following miracle of the head of St. Mark. At the time of the capture of Alexandria by the Muslims in 646 the captain of the ship of the duke Sanutius saved the head of St. Mark from destruction and hid the head in the hold among his baggage. However, the ship was prevented from leaving the harbor until the duke returned the head of the Evangelist to the Coptic Patriarch Benjamin I (623-662). As soon as the patriarch received the precious relic, the ship got under sail. Benjamin made a chest of plain wood with a padlock on it and placed the head therein (HPCC, PO I, 494-500).

From the 11th to the 14th century the head of St. Mark played an increasingly important part in the history and the tradition of the Coptic Church. It is in this period, therefore, that we should place the emergence of the tradition of the above mentioned miracle of the manifestation of the head. – During the 11th century, the head of the Evangelist reposed in the Monastery of St. Macarius in the Wadi 'n-Natrun. Shortly after the death of Patriarch Zacharias (1004-1032), a Turkish amir obtained the head of St. Mark who took it to Misr (Cairo). When Bukairah al-Rashidi, the Crossbearer, was informed of this, he took the head from the Turk for 300 dinars and he carried it to the Monastery of St. Macarius. In the middle of the 11th century, the head of the Evangelist was taken from the desert to Alexandria, where it reposed in the house of Abu Yahya Zakariya, who was a favorite of the sultan and his wazir, Ali ibn Ahmad al-Girgani. After the death of Abu Yahya, they took the box in which was the head and they carried it to the house of Mansur ibn Mufarrag. But when they arrived with the box Mansur stood in the corridor and swore that the head should not enter his house for fear of the sultan, because he had already experienced such difficulties as confiscations and fines. Then Surur ibn Matruh took the head and went with it to his house. Later, the head of the Evangelist reposed in the house of Mawhub ibn Mansur. Abu'l-'Ala, the brother of Mawhub ibn Mansur, entertained doubts about the authenticity of the relics. One night, St. Mark appeared to Mawhub and informed him that his brother had doubts about him. When Mawhub mentioned this to his brother, he marveled and went to the head of St. Mark and besought pardon from him (HPEC II, iii, 275).

In the latter part of the 12th century, references to the most important Coptic relic disappear, though the head of the Evangelist was used "according to the custom" in the Rite of Consecration of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church. In the 14th century, Abu'l-Barakat ibn Kabar, the most distinguished of the medieval Coptic theologians, wrote an account pertaining to the head of the Evangelist, which was to become the standard version for the Coptic Church. The body was taken by craft by some Franks, those of Venice. They stole the body and left the head. And they went with the body to Venice, where it is now. The head was trans-

ferred to the house of the sons of Shukri in Alexandria, where it is till now! It is noteworthy that for several centuries laymen served as custodians for the most important Coptic treasure.

D. The Copts as Servants of the Islamic State

During the various Islamic dynasties Copts have served in different functions as administrators, secretaries or superintendents. Since it is impossible to list all Coptic civil servants, mention shall be made of a few persons to illustrate the realm in which Christians demonstrated their skills and ability. During the days of al-Mutawakkil (847-861), Macarius ibn Yusuf was secretary of the head of the diwan and occupied a position among all those who governed Fustat of Misr (Cairo), while Abraham ibn Sawirus served as superintendent of the treasury and was charged with collecting all the taxes (HPEC II, i, 4). During the oppression, both laymen intervened with al-Musta'in (862-866) and succeeded in easing the situation for the Christians. Tadrus was the scribe in the service of a bad Copt, known as al-Ghair Abd al-Masih. He had the gift of a beautiful handwriting and the choice of his words was praised by all who read them. In the days of Anba Shenuda I (859-880), Stephen the son of Severus "whose work was good with the Lord" was willing to deliver himself to save the patriarch and the Christians until the threats of the Arabs had been withdrawn.

Ahmad ibn Tulun (870-881) is well known for his numerous building projects, including the famous mosque built by a Copt who received 100.000 dinars for the work. Another great work by the same Coptic architect was the construction of an aqueduct connecting the palace with a spring in the southern desert. Ibn Tulun had two Coptic secretaries who were brothers, Bessus and Abraham. He loved them both and they frequently besought him to help the imprisoned Patriarch Khail III (880-907) (HPEC II, ii, 105). The Shi'a caliph al-Mu'izz, founder of Cairo, was not ill-disposed to the Copts. Abu'l Yumn Kuzman was appointed to the head of the customs (*mutawalli*) first in Egypt and afterwards in Palestine. He was held in high favour by al-Mu'izz. He was a pious man and a virgin and acted well towards all men. The caliph used to accept his words and counsel (HPEC II, ii, 139, 147).

Abraham ibn Za'rah, the Syrian merchant who followed Menas II on the throne of St. Mark abolished the ill-practice of simony (*cheirotomia*) and demanded also from the Coptic laity a life-style according to the established Christian values. He saw a number of the archons taking concubines and begetting children with them. Those who confessed their sins, he pardoned, except one high archon from among the chiefs of the diwans. He persisted in his sin and the patriarch excommunicated him and he perished with all he possessed.

In the days of al-Mustansir (1036-1094) a Christian notable Alwan ibn Zacharias was appointed administrator (*nazir*) of the Rif of Egypt (Nile Delta). Another important layman was Abu Yahya Zacharias, who use to accompany al-Mustansir being a favourite of the sultan. Repeatedly certain notables tried to obtain privileges from the patriarch and even used extortion. Christodoulus (1047-



REVEREND DR. OTTO MEINARDUS (1925-2005)

by John H. Watson

A British tourist combing the bookshops of downtown Athens in the 1980s came across a vast library of English language publications, but the one that really caught his eye was entitled *St. John of Patmos and the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse* (Lycabettus Press, Athens 1979). The seven churches mentioned in this book, and also addressed by the apostle in the earliest chapters of The Revelation to St. John the Theologian, are now tourist centers in western Turkey; their Christian experience being intimately linked to the early Church in what was then known as Asia Minor.

The *Biblical Message to Laodicea* somehow leapt into the tourist's mind: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot....Because you are lukewarm I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3.15).

The author of *St. John of Patmos and the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse* made the somewhat startling but pertinent observation: "Are we like the Laodiceans? I regret to say that we are lukewarm. We have not rejected the Message outright, but we do not fully accept it either. We claim wealth and prosperity which has led to false pride and arrogance.

The Seven Letters are a suitable mirror of our personal and collective predicaments, and their lessons are as pertinent to our days as to the first century church of Asia Minor. "he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Revelation 3.22).

The sound of the author's voice was the same sound which the bibliophile tourist associated with the great mountain of Coptic studies published by the American University in Cairo Press. The author of *St. John of Patmos and the*



*Jonah and the Penitents of Niniveh, Isaac Fanus (20th cent.)
Keraza Magazine, February 1995, 4, 2.*



The Swallowing down, Ethiopian popular art, (20th cent.)

1077) could not be compelled by high ranking laymen to grant certain favours to people he had interdicted. Thus, he refused to absolve the son of a sister of the Shaikh Abu Zikri Yahya ibn Macarius, a man of high rank in the government, who was in charge of the diwan of public expenses.

Especially during the Manluk period (1249-1517) numerous Christian notables embraced Islam for various non-theological reasons. Because of their aptitude for accounting and bookkeeping they advanced to the highest executive positions of the state, often administering the fiscal affairs for the government and for the offices of the amirs. At the same time, these “Muslim Copts” were rarely fully accepted (Copt. Enc. II, 618 f).

Nevertheless, the Coptic hierarchs could rely in general upon the laity that remained trustworthy and dependable even in the most critical situations during the Abbasid, Mamluk and Ottoman rule.

E. The Story of the Maglis Al-Milli

Following the death of Patriarch Demetrius II in 1870, Archbishop Marcus of Beheira was appointed *locum tenens* until the election of a successor. The archbishop selected some Coptic notables to assist him fulfilling his task, especially with the problems of the financial affairs of the Church. The Coptic community finding this system to be effective decided to obtain permission from the government to organize a general community council, a *maglis al-milli*. On February 2, 1874, Butrus Pasha Ghali sent an application to the Khedive Ismail in which he projected structure and purpose of this council. The council was to consist of twelve members and twelve sub-members to be elected by general suffrage and its purpose included the supervision of the Coptic *auqaf* (religious endowments), the schools, the press and the benevolent associations.

In November 1874, the first *maglis al-milli* was elected. Because of disputes with the clergy, it was decomposed and subsequently reorganized on March 23, 1883 with a constitution that was passed by order of the Khedive on May 14, 1883. This document defined the purpose of the council to oversee all matters pertaining to the “personal status”, such as marriages, divorces, adoptions and also the supervision of the *auqaf*. Moreover, the *maglis al-milli* was to be in charge of all fiscal matters, to be responsible for the Coptic schools and seminaries and to direct the Coptic benevolent associations and to be in charge for the care and welfare of the poor and underprivileged. It was also to look after the maintenance of the churches and monasteries and to take care of the spiritual and educational improvement of the Coptic clergy. These new responsibilities of the *maglis al-milli* restricted the rights of the patriarch and the clergy by adding further responsibilities to the laity. Protests were to be expected and disputes continued over the years until 1912 a new constitution was drafted. Four of the twelve members were to be assigned by the patriarch and the supervision of the *auqaf*, schools, churches and monasteries reverted to the patriarch, who was to be assisted by four bishops. However, these

changes were not accepted by the Coptic community and by order of the government, the former rights of 1883 were returned to the laity.

The relations between the *maglis al-milli* and the various patriarchs, Kyrillus V (1875-1927), John XIX (1928-1942), Macarius III (1942-1945), Yusab II (1946-1956) and Kyrillus VI (1959-1971) remained estranged. The hierarchs always regarded the *maglis al-milli* as an organization which limited and restrained their authority. The disputes continued and following the constitution of 1912 another one was drafted in 1927, still under the administration of Kyrillus V.

Finally, in the sixties, in the days of Kyrillus VI, President Gamal Abd al-Nasser's revolutionary regime seriously weakened the functions of the *maglis al-milli*. The jurisdiction over matters pertaining to the "personal status" were transferred to the state courts and the Ministry of Social Affairs cared for the Coptic benevolent societies. Only the administration of the *auqaf* remained for the community council.

Following his consecration to the throne of St. Mark in November 1971, Shenuda III began to reorganize the structure and administration of the Coptic Church. In 1973 he resolved the old conflicts between the *maglis al-milli* and the patriarchate. He ordered that monthly meetings of the *maglis al-milli* be held and be chaired by the patriarch. To encourage efficient operation of the council, he instituted six subcommittees for public relations, construction, legal affairs, financial affairs, rural development and education. The functions of the *maglis al-milli* were to be clearly separated from the responsibilities of the Holy Synod, the *magma al-muqadis*, which was held responsible for ecclesiastical affairs, ecumenical relations, parochial, diocesan and monastic affairs as well as liturgical and doctrinal issues, etc.

Regarding the voice of the laity in the Coptic Church, Pope Shenuda III has clearly stated that the laity should be actively involved in the administration of every parish. Yet, "The laity has the right to air its views, but not to govern the Church"! Indeed, the polarization of the laity and the clergy has reached new dimensions. For the Copts of the 21st century, the Church appears to be as those who are ordained or consecrated, preferably as monks, priests or bishops!

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The Vomiting out Coptic textile, Louvre, Paris, (7th cent.)



The Vomiting out, Lectionary for the Jonah-Fasting, Dair Abu Saifain, Old Cairo, 18th/19th cent.)

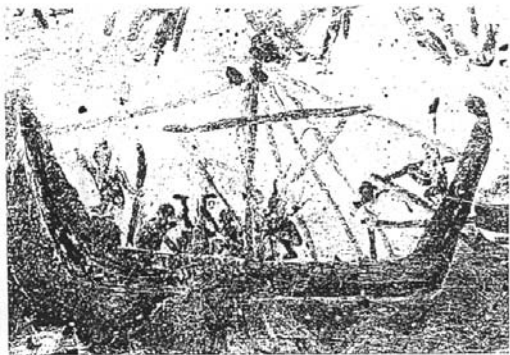
upon the dry land (2:10). According to the Jewish tradition, Jonah appears beardless and naked. The fish is a kind of hybrid, part being a fish, part being a donkey (?)⁵ The picture of Jonah in the lectionary for the Fasting of Niniveh (18th/19th cent.) of the Dair Abu Saifain in Old Cairo shows a naked Jonah being vomited up by a kind of sea-monster. The 20th century picture by the famous Coptic iconographer Issac Fanus or one of his disciples shows the principle subject of the prophecy. The penitent citizens of Niniveh! The ship and the fish are unimportant. There is the king who has taken off his crown and the royal purple (3:6). In the upper corner there is shown the hot sirocco that causes life to be unbearable.⁶

The two contemporary Ethiopian paintings show the swallowing up of the prophet.⁷

5 Illustrations from Coptic Manuscripts. Cairo 2000, 178.

6 Al-Keraza, Feb. 1995, 4, 2.

7 Hasselblatt, G., Radius-Almanach 1978, 81.



The Casting into the sea, Chapel of the Exodus, Kharga Oasis, 4th cent.

COPTIC PIETY AND THE PARABLE OF JONAH

Otto F.A. Meinardus

The Person of the Prophecy

Who was the author of the Biblical Book of Jonah? The Old Testament calls him Jonah, the son of Amittai. He was born in Gat Helder in Galilee during the reign of Jeroboam II, King of Israel (787-747 B.C.) (2 Kings 14:25). This would mean that the Book of Jonah would have been written in the early years of the 8th century. However, there are numerous signs for a much later date. In 3:3 Niniveh is referred to as a city of the distant past. It is unlikely, that a contemporary of the king of Assyria would call him “the king of Niniveh” (3:6) without giving him his proper name and title. Moreover, the practice of calling Yahweh the “God of heavens” clearly belongs to the post-exilic period. This means, that the book was written after the Exile, perhaps sometimes between 400 and 200 B.C.

Much has been written about three of the 48 verses of the book that relate to the great fish, about a man being swallowed by a great fish and coming forth alive after three days! The prophet Jeremiah (51:34) refers to “Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, hath devoured me, he hath crushed me . . . he hath swallowed me up like a dragon”. Is it possible that the author of the book of Jonah was familiar with the passages of Jeremiah? Did the author see in the prophet the whole nation of Israel, the Exile and the subsequent return?

The message of the book is clearly the judgment upon the Ninivites unless they repent, and this occurred! Every citizen, even the animals shared in the penitential fasting. Niniveh’s repentance is a clear contrast, the antitype to the obstinacy, stubbornness of the people of Israel, who claimed God’s election only for them. Even the Assyrians and Babylonians are saved by the limitless compassion of God.

The Cult of Jonah

In the Jewish tradition, the Psalm of Thanksgiving for Deliverance in the belly of Sheol (Pss.120:1, 18:6, 24:2, 69:2) is being read on the Day of Yom Kippur on the 10th of Tishri. According to a Jewish *midrash*, Jonah’s body as

well as his clothes were burnt while being in the fish. He was vomited up the dry land utterly naked. Fourteenth cent. *Biblia Paupera* and the *Mirror of Salvation* (1360) show the naked Jonah being vomited of the sea-monster upon the dry land¹

In the Quran Jonah is the one and only of the Minor Prophets who is repeatedly mentioned as being guided by God and as a “fellow of the fish” (4:161, 6:86, 10:98, 68:46). Moreover, a well-known *hadith* of the Prophet states that nobody should claim to be greater than Jonah! It is this veneration that has led to the conversion of numerous former Christian Jonah sanctuaries into mosques in the 10th and 11th century. The most popular tomb of Jonah is the mosque of Nebi Yunis on Tell Kujundshuk, the ruins of Niniveh, opposite Mosul. Originally an Assyrian-nesorian church and monastery founded by St. Amonius, a disciple of St. Anthony the Great. In the 7th century it was occupied by the Syrian Jacobites to be taken over by the Muslims in the 10th century. About 30 km. north-west of Falludja is the town of Ambar with the former Syrian Jacobite Dair Yunis that was usurped by the Muslims in the 11th century. Also the two famous Jonah-sanctuaries in the Holy Land use to be Christian churches. This pertains to the tomb of Jonah at Meshed, the Biblical Gat Helfer, near Kafr Kenna between Nazareth and Tiberias and his tomb at Halhul north of Hebron, where Jonah is said to have lived following his return from Niniveh.

In the Roman Catholic Church, relics of the Prophet repose in the Benedictine Abbey of Montecassino, in the Venetian Church of St. Apollinaris and in the Church of Nocere in Campania.

Jonah in the Coptic Liturgy

On Tut 25 (October 5), Copts remember the deeds of the great and just Prophet Jonah. He was the son of the widow of Zarephath near Sidon who had died and was raised to life by the Prophet Elijah the Tishbite (1 Kings 17:1-24). Thereupon, Jonah followed and served the Prophet Elijah, receiving from him also the divine grace of prophecy.

“God gave him the order to proceed to Niniveh to warn the inhabitants of their ruin and destruction. So Jonah thought by himself: If God intends to destroy them, why should I go and tell them these news? I fear that if I proceed and inform them and God is not going to ruin them, I’ll appear to them as a liar and they’ll never listen to me. They may even kill me since I used the name of God as a lie. Rather, I am going to flee . . .”

The casting into the sea, the swallowing down by the fish and the vomiting out are seen as a parable of the resurrection of the Lord. According to the Coptic version, the “swallowing down” and the “vomiting out” occurred twice before Jonah preached to the Ninivites. God had mercy with the citizens of

Niniveh and Jonah returned to Israel where he died. This occurred 900 years prior to the arrival of Christ. Jonah lived for 100 years, 70 of which he prophesied.

Ever since the 10th century, the Copts fast three days from Monday to Wednesday prior to the Sunday of Septuagesima, remembering the repentance of the Ninivites (3:1-10). This fasting was initiated by the Assyrian-Nestorian Bishop Sabarishu’ of Beth Garmai because of the epidemy of the plague. Catholicos Timothy (780-823) ordered this fasting to be observed on a permanent basis. According to another tradition, the Syrian Bishop Marutha of Tekrit (649) instituted the Niniveh-Jonah fasting. The Syrian Patriarch Abraham ibn Zar’ah of Alexandria (975-978) introduced this practice for the Copts.²

Among the readings of the Old Testament lessons during the Eve of Easter Service, also the famous prayer of Jonah in the belly of the fish (2:3-10) is being included.

“Out of the belly of Sheol I cried and thou didst hear my voice. For thou didst cast me into the deep — all the waves and thy billows passed over me . . .”

The swallowing down, the presence in the belly of the fish and the vomiting up represent the kind of archetypical initiation rite which Christians experience in baptism. In the abyss man dies to be saved out of the depth, to be reborn to a life of obedience to the will of God. Thus, Jonah is not only the prototype of the crucified and risen Christ, but also of the immersed, the baptized. It is no coincidence, that the Jonah story has often appeared in the decorations of early and medieval baptisteries.

Jonah in Coptic Art

The story of Jonah in the fish used to be one of the most frequently designed subjects in the art of the early church. The best known example being the Jonah representation in the Roman Callistus-Catacomb (3rd cent.) beginning with his casting into the sea and ending with the prophet resting under the castor-oil (ricinus) plant supplying the needful shade. We are able to present five Coptic illustrations of Jonah belonging to the 4th, 6th, 7th, 18th/19th and 20th century. The two Ethiopian paintings belong to the popular art of the 20th century.

One of the earliest paintings of the Jonah story appears in the Chapel of the Exodus in the Oasis of Kharga (4th cent.), showing the casting of the prophet into the sea. The shape of the ship betrays a certain local design. Actually, only this particular scene is well preserved.³ In the Monastery of St. Apollo, Bawit (6th/7th cent.) is a badly damaged fragment of Jonah being vomited up.⁴ The Coptic textile of the Louvre, Paris (7th cent.) shows the vomiting up of Jonah

1 Steffen, U., “Die Jona Geschichte, Darstellungen aus 18 Jahrhunderten”, Das Muenster, 1/2000, 2-16.

2 Meinardus, O., “Feste und Fasten bei den Kopten” Kemet 3, 2003.

3 Zibawi, M. Koptische Kunst. Regensburg 2004, 29.

4 Walters, C.G., Monastic Archeology in Egypt. Warminster 1974, 191.