

The Coptic Church

By Rev. J. Murtagh, S.M.A.

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Ad Majorem Dei gloriam, [To the Greater Glory of God,]
Pro Corpore Ejus, [For His Body,]
Quod est Ecclesia [Which is the Church]
Per Mariam, [Through Mary,]
Quae est Mater Ejus. [Who is His Mother.]

The Cover Picture (not reproduced) shows MONSIGNOR Scandar - Coptic Catholic Bishop of Assiut - Upper Egypt

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The Coptic Church

Before the Schism

The Christian origins of Egypt go back to Gospel times and are contemporary with those of the Holy Land, that is, they start with the Incarnation itself. When Herod sought the Divine Infant to destroy Him, the Holy Family fled to Egypt for safety. In modern Egypt there are two local traditions concerning this visit. Near Heliopolis, a large suburb of Cairo, is the village of Matarieh. In a garden in this village is a very ancient tree and Egyptians say that the Holy Family rested under it while on the way from Palestine to the present Old Cairo, then known as Babylon.

OLD CAIRO.

The second tradition is associated with Babylon or Old Cairo for there the Copts point out the actual house in which Jesus, Mary and Joseph passed their sojourn in Egypt.

ST. MARK.

Though the Holy Family passed some time in Egypt, the Church was not then founded, and it was not until some time after the dispersal of the Apostles throughout the world that the Church in Alexandria was established. [Egyptians were present on the day of Pentecost and at the debates with St. Stephen.] When St. Peter changed his See from Antioch to Rome in 44 A.D. he took with him St. Mark, the Evangelist. According to an oral tradition, in 48 A.D. the Chief of the Apostles sent St. Mark to Alexandria to convert its inhabitants and to found a bishopric there. The Evangelist's efforts were successful and he laboured among the Egyptians, Romans, Jews and others there until his martyrdom in the year 68 A.D.

The fact that Alexandria received the founder of its Christianity through St. Peter is of enormous importance in the history of the city, for thereby St. Peter is considered the indirect founder. That the Chief of the Apostles should have established the See of Alexandria, even indirectly, was sufficient to place it among the greatest Churches of the world, in fact, next to Rome itself in dignity. St. Peter had relations with three great Churches, Rome, Alexandria and Antioch, and so great was his dignity and so clear the perception of his Primacy among the other Apostles and disciples that these three Churches were ranked the three outstanding congregations in the Christian world until the rise of Constantinople. In the

early days, if a Christian Church wished to insist upon its dignity, it pointed out that its founder was an Apostle. Add to Alexandria's indirect Petrine establishment the fact that it was the second largest city in the world after Rome and one easily understands Egypt's pre-eminence in the Christian East.

180 A. D.

For more than a century after the death of St. Mark, the history of the Church in Alexandria is shrouded in the deepest obscurity, and almost the only information historians have of this second of all Christian Churches is a list of Bishops in chronological order. All this makes uninteresting reading. However, when the light of history does make that Church known it is an almost fully developed community that appears. The Church of Christ has not conquered Her rivals, but She is a strong community living side by side with Egyptian gods, Greek gods and Judaism as modified by Philo. This manifestation took place about the year 180 A.D.

SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA.

The first thing to be noticed about the Christian community of the late second century at Alexandria is that it possessed a Christian school which soon became the intellectual centre of the Christian world. At this time Rome and the West were intellectually inferior to the East. >From this school of Alexandria arose Saints and scholars of the highest spiritual and mental attainments whose outstanding characteristics were their attachment to the true faith and their struggle for orthodoxy. This does not mean that the Alexandrian Fathers did not err. When they did, they were either unaware of error or showed submissiveness when corrected.

That Alexandria was a centre where attachment to the Catholic Faith was strong is seen in the fight for Orthodoxy of the teachers and Bishops of the See of St. Mark throughout three centuries.

CLEMENT, Died 215 A.D., AND ORIGEN, Died 254. A.D.

Two of the early Heads of the Alexandrian School - Clement, and the greatest early Christian thinker, Origen, - were accused of heresy. While it is true that the works of both contain errors, it is also true that neither could abide heresy or heretics, that both opposed unceasingly the heresy of Gnosticism, and that later outstanding Alexandrian scholars considered Clement and Origen as their masters. The scope of a pamphlet is insufficient to vindicate either of them.

ST. ATHANASIUS, THE GREAT, Died 373.

Another of the great Christian stalwarts of all time is an Alexandrian scholar and bishop of that city, St. Athanasius who spent the greater part of the fourth century and of his life in defending the Catholic doctrine of the Blessed Trinity against the Arians who wished to disfigure our teaching by asserting that the Son of God was a created Person.

>From some time before the Council of Nice (or Nicea) in 325 A.D. till his death in 373 A.D., the life of St. Athanasius of Alexandria was one of struggle in the interest of the orthodox faith.

ST. CYRIL, Died 444. A.D.

Again in the fifth century another heresy presented itself to the Christian world and again heresy found itself opposed by an Alexandrian bishop. This time the heresy was Nestorianism, and its opponent, St. Cyril of Alexandria. At the Council of Ephesus, which condemned the errors of *Nestorius* in 431 A.D., St. Cyril represented the Pope and presided, therefore, over the assembly. Cyril had been chosen by the Pope on account of his well-known zeal against Nestorianism which he had manifested by his teaching and his writings.

However, with the death of St. Cyril in year 444 A.D. a new page and a sad one opened in the history of

Christian Egypt. Whereas Egypt had been the centre of Orthodoxy, a few years after the death of St. Cyril it cut itself off from the Universal Church, and has remained separated ever since, if two short periods of reunion be overlooked.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE.

It is catholic doctrine that in Jesus Christ the God-Man, there are two natures, one divine, the other human. These two natures are each complete; nothing is wanting to make each of them a true nature. The divine nature in Christ is exactly the divine nature of the Father and his human nature is made up of a perfect body with a perfect soul, having all its faculties, intellectual memory, a perfect human intellect, and a perfect human will. The Church teaches that these two perfect and complete natures are united in the Person of the Son of God. Thus it is a doctrine of two natures in one Person.

NESTORIANISM.

Nestorianism had been an attempt to spread a different doctrine. According to the Nestorians the Catholic doctrine is correct to a certain point. They will agree that in Christ there are two perfect and complete natures, one human, the other divine. Yet they will disagree as to the manner of the union of these two natures. Whereas we claim it is a personal or hypostatic union, that it takes place in the person of the Son of God, Nestorians will say that the union is only moral, that is, that the two natures are united by love. Certain conclusions follow this claim of the Nestorians; that in Christ there are two persons, human and divine, as well as two natures, human and and divine, that Mary was not t the Mother of the Divine Person, but of a human nature and a human person. Thus in the ages when this heresy was fought the word 'Theotokos' (She who bears God) was the password of orthodoxy. In those days of the fifth century if one said that one believed in the Theotokos, one was accepted into the orthodox camp of Pope St. Leo the Great and St. Cyril of Alexandria.

MONOPHYSITISM

The heresy into which Egypt fell was a reaction against the error just described. The new party maintained that the union of natures in Christ was so close that the divine nature had absorbed the human nature. They used the comparison of putting a drop of wine into a vessel of water. As the wine is absorbed by the greater quantity of water so, they said, the finite human nature of Christ was absorbed by His infinite divine nature. That Christ is exclusively divine and has no human nature, and that Mary is the Mother of God are inevitable conclusions from this reasoning. With the first, that Christ is only divine and has no human nature, Catholics disagree 'in toto' because it is at variance with the Gospels where Christ is shown as being also human since he ate, drank, slept, suffered and rejoiced and performed the actions proper to humanity. As to the second, that Mary is the Mother of God, the Catholic Church is of the same opinion, but she disagrees with the reasoning on which the conclusion is based and with the implication which such a conclusion entails. The oneness of nature in Christ is the foundation of Mary's Divine Motherhood according to this opinion, and it would follow from such reasoning that the Blessed Virgin gave birth to the divine nature ; which is absurd. Because its adherents insisted on the oneness of nature in Christ, this theory is called Monophysitism. (Greek: *Monos* - one, *Fusis* - nature).

DIOSCORUS.

The successor of St. Cyril in the See of Alexandria was a certain Dioscorus, who was given over to the new heresy, (under the influence of his theologian, Eutyches.) He had influence with the East Roman Emperor of the time at Constantinople of whose Empire Egypt formed a part.

Dioscorus prevailed upon this Emperor, Theodosius II, to call a Council to be held at Ephesus in 449 A.D. at which by unscrupulous methods and violence the Bishop of Alexandria succeeded in having Monophysitism accepted as the true doctrine.

ROBBER SYNOD OF EPHESUS, 449 A.D.

Among other irregularities, the three legates, sent by the Pope to represent him and to preside at the Council were set aside and treated as mere members of the Synod, having no right to assume leadership of the Council; the Imperial army was used to force the bishops to sign the decrees; the Patriarch of Constantinople subsequently died as a result of the ill-treatment received at the hands of the soldiers and Dioscorus himself. The papal legates, having escaped by flight, made known to the Pope the manner in which the Synod had been held. The Robber Synod of Ephesus of 449 A.D. was thereupon condemned by Rome and its acts and decisions declared invalid. Theodosius II, being a partisan of Dioscorus, refused the Pope's demand for another Council to rectify the errors of the "Brigandage d'Ephese" ("Robber-Council of Ephesus").

However this Emperor died in the following, year 450 A.D.

COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON, 451 A.D.

His successor, Marcian, of strong Catholic leanings, called a Council at Chalcedon in the year 451 A.D. At this Council what had been done at Ephesus was undone. The papal legates presided and the doctrine, already explained, was declared to be the true teaching of the Church.

THE BREAK WITH THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

>From this date, 451 A.D. the Egyptians are considered to have separated themselves from the Universal Church, for, instead of submitting to the teaching of Chalcedon, they preferred to take a course of action which led to the establishment of a national Church at loggerheads with both Rome and Constantinople. Not all Christians in Egypt adhered to the new national Church, for it must be remembered that in the cities of Egypt and particularly in Alexandria there were large numbers of Greeks, as the country was being administered by a Byzantine Emperor and Alexandria was notably a Greek city both in foundation and culture. After 451 A.D. Egypt split into two groups, based upon religion and nationality.

ORIGIN OF "MELKITES".

The Greeks stood out for the teachings of Chalcedon and as these were favoured by the Emperor its adherents were branded with the name of "the King's men." When translated into a semitic tongue, this phrase becomes "Melkites" from the word "malik" meaning a king in most Semitic languages.

ORIGIN OF "COPTS".

On the other hand the native Egyptians were called by the Greeks "aigyptoi" i.e. Egyptians. This later became corrupted into "gypti" and finally in non-literary Arabic "ipti". This last is the word by which a contemporary Egyptian Christian will refer to himself though, if he wishes to be more classical, he will go back to "gypti". This is the origin of the European word "Copt" to designate an Egyptian Christian.

REASON FOR SEPARATION.

If the study of the two terms by which the opposing parties designated each other, leads to any conclusion, it is this, that the struggle for religious independence in Egypt was *basically nationalistic*. Egypt did not feel itself strong enough, nor had it the inclination, to overthrow Byzantine overlordship, and in the past found little difficulty in accepting foreign political domination, provided that sufficient liberty and economic security were assured. While not aspiring to political independence, the national soul expressed itself in the acquisition of religious autonomy. Monophysitism was used as a support for nationalism and an excuse for separation.

The validity of this explanation of the break of Coptic Egypt with the Universal Church is supported by the opinions of modern writers who hold that the Monophysite statement of its position can be reconciled with the teaching of Chalcedon. Certainly, today Monophysitism means nothing to the Copts, most of

whom seem never to have heard of it, and their chief reason for remaining apart from the Universal Church is entirely different from that on which the original break was based.

Today the main reason for staying separated is the claim of the Pope that he has a Primacy, not simply of honour but also of jurisdiction over all baptized Christians.

TIMOTHY THE CAT.

For the next few years Egypt was quiet outwardly. However, the death of the pro-Chalcedon Emperor Marcian in 457 A.D. was the signal for a rising of the Copts in the city of Alexandria itself under the leadership of a priest called Timothy the Cat. During the years between Chalcedon and Marcian's death Timothy the Cat had been the soul of the Copt resistance to the decrees of the Council and his methods of stealth in organizing resistance and assuring for himself the leadership of the future independent Egyptian Church earned for him the epithet " The Cat ".

The rising took place on Good Friday 457 A.D. The Egyptian mob marched through the streets of Alexandria, took the Cathedral by storm and murdered the Patriarch Proterius during the celebration of the Holy Week services. Proterius, of course, was a Catholic or Melkite as Catholics of the Greek rite were known in Alexandria after Chalcedon. At Chalcedon the Monophysite Patriarch, Dioscorus, who had been responsible for the infamous Synod at Ephesus in 449 A.D. was deposed from the Patriarchate and banished.

457 A.D. DEATH OF MARCIAN.

In 457 A.D. then, the schism was renewed with the murder of Proterius and the accession of Timothy as Patriarch. The independent Coptic Church lived side by side with the Melkite or Catholic Church of Greek rite which also had its patriarchs. Thus as a result of the schism a duplication of Patriarchs ensued.

After the separation

457-640 A.D.

Thus was achieved the break of Egypt with the Universal Church. With the break from the true Mystical Body of Christ came a withering of life, natural and divine. St. Cyril, the Catholic, was the last of the great learned Bishops and Saints of Alexandria. While it must be admitted that political circumstances seriously contributed to the intellectual and spiritual decadence of Christian Egypt, that strong attraction to intellectual culture and high spiritual development which all Catholic communities experience, even if they do not realize it, is absent from many periods of the history of Egypt. As Fortescue said, the trouble with all separated churches is one of arrested development. They all advanced to a certain point and then, when the breach with Rome came, they remained stationary. Union with Rome is obviously an essential condition for Christian progress. St. Cyril, whose death occurred seven years before Chalcedon is significant as being the culmination of development in Christian Egypt.

PERSIAN OCCUPATION OF EGYPT (617-627)

The two centuries which followed Chalcedon were not important except in so far as they prepared the way for the Persian occupation of Egypt, to be followed closely by the invasion of the Arabs. There were two centuries of strife, religious strife, which brought about national weakness. Before Chalcedon the country was divided from the point of view of racial feeling, but the Greeks and Egyptians could have united in the face of an invader. The religious idea of one or two natures having been thrown into the conflict, the two racial parties were irrevocably opposed. At the end of these two centuries the struggle took the form of a determined persecution of Copts at the hands of the Greeks. The occasion was the attempt to spread a new heresy, a compromise between Catholic teaching and Monophysitism.

THE BREACH WIDENS.

No one realized more clearly than the Eastern Roman Emperor, Heraclius, the weakness resulting to the Empire from the spread of the teachings of Nestorius and Eutyches in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. He knew that unity among the different peoples of his great Empire could be obtained only by agreement in faith. This Heraclius determined to achieve, but unfortunately went about it in the wrong manner. The occasion for this attempt at religious union was the presence of the external danger of the pagan Persian army in the early part of the seventh century. The Patriarch of Constantinople presented the Emperor with a new heresy, thinking that all parties would accept this compromise, and that religious unity would ensue. Severus, the Patriarch, advised the Emperor to proclaim that in Christ there was only one will and that all discussion of a twofold operation should be set aside.

MONOTHELITISM.

While retaining one person and two natures, Severus did not retain the doctrine of two wills and thus laid himself open to the charge of being illogical since a complete nature includes a will. However, the upshot was that no one was prepared to accept the compromise. The Copts pointed to the admission of only one will and said that Chalcedon had yielded to them and not they to Chalcedon.

This proposal of Monothelitism, (*Monos* - one, *TheLOS* - will), as the new doctrine was called, was brought to the Egyptians by the arrival of a new Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, specially chosen for his willingness to co-operate with the Emperor in his plan for unification through compromise. Cyrus was the new Patriarch's name. Cyrus arrived in Egypt in the year 631 A.D. about four years after the withdrawal from that country of the Persians, who had seized it from the Emperor Heraclius.

PERSECUTION OF COPTS.

When Cyrus, who combined in his own person the twofold power of Patriarch and civil governor, found that the Copts were not prepared to compromise he resolved to resort to force and introduced a period of violent open persecution which lasted till the conquest of Alexandria by the Moslem Arabs in 641 A.D.

Heraclius had hoped that the plan he had imposed would succeed in presenting a united front to all invaders. In reality it had the directly opposite result in alienating the sympathies of the Egyptians.

641 A.D. FALL OF ALEXANDRIA.

The fall of Alexandria to the followers of the Prophet Mohammed opened a new era for Christian Egypt. The effects of the conquest of 641 A.D. are still obvious to the most uninquisitive. The country is still Moslem in religion, culture and government.

With the advent of Islam, a new religion was thrown into the already disturbed religious condition of Egypt. Whereas there were two warring Christian communities with a rather strong Jewish body, now the new religion of the recent conquerors of the country was added. This did not lead to the immediate suppression of the three other Communities, as the Moslems professed a doctrine of religious toleration. This doctrine was applied though with great imperfection at times. Yet such liberty of cult was allowed as to preserve the Christian Churches in existence.

MELKITES AFTER 641 A.D.

Now one of the results of the Arabs investiture of Alexandria was the withdrawal of the Imperial armies and the majority of the non-Egyptian civilians resident in Alexandria and other Egyptian towns. The Melkite Church, was therefore, severely weakened. After 641 A.D. the Melkite Patriarch felt so insecure that he withdrew to Constantinople and for centuries the Melkite Patriarchate of Alexandria was governed from that distant city.

THE COPTS AFTER 641 A.D.

The Copts had to live side by side with the conquerors; after an initial period in which they were favoured more or less, they had to fight for their faith against terrific difficulties, and it is not surprising that, faced with periodic outbursts of anti-Christian violence, with a special poll tax as a penalty for his Christianity, large numbers of native Christians felt that life was intolerable and threw up the struggle by the acceptance of the religion of the conqueror. Large numbers of Copts apostatized from time to time. In fact, most of them did so for the present Christian minority is many times smaller than the Moslem Egyptian majority.

1054 A.D. MELKITES SEPARATE FROM ROME.

Thus two dwindling Christian Communities continued a difficult existence until a new event modified the situation some-what. It has been shown that of the two communities one was Monophysite the other Catholic. It is clear that the Melkites, had looked more towards Constantinople than Rome for guidance since they were Byzantine in rite. (I hesitate to use the word " Greek " with reference to Constantinople since the proper word to designate its inhabitants and the subjects of the Empire at this period is, strangely enough, "Romans." They were Romans because they came under the East Roman Empire, whose seat was Constantinople or Byzantium. In Arabic, today Greeks are referred to as "Rumi" i.e. "Romans." "Rumi" is a word with a long history.) Then again the Melkite Patriarch was in residence at Constantinople and certainly underwent the anti-Roman influence of that Patriarchate.

Thus when Constantinople fell into schism under Cerularius in 1054, it is not surprising that the weaker Melkites took the lead of the stronger religious centre and followed her into schism. Thus from 1054 and for some time, there were no Catholics in Egypt. (except captured slaves, pilgrims, and traders.)

Links with Rome

The history of the Copts hereafter is simple enough. The visits of the Franciscans from Palestine during the Crusades and the establishment of Franciscan houses in Alexandria and Old Cairo in the thirteenth century were new occasions of contact with the Catholic Church. The visit of St. Francis, the arrival of the Crusaders at Damietta and Mansoura, where St. Louis King of France was taken prisoner and later ransomed, were all reminders to the Copts of the existence of the See of Peter, with which they had so little contact in those days of difficult travel. Whatever the reason, the Copts followed the other Eastern Churches in uniting again with and acknowledging the primacy of Rome at the Council of Florence, later changed to Ferrara during the years 1438-1445.

REUNION AT FLORENCE- FERRARA, 1438-1445.

The union, however, was ephemeral and cannot have lasted more than a few years as happened in the case of most of the Churches signing the decree of union at Florence- Ferrara. The Copts never got to understand the meaning of union and were soon again estranged from Rome.

REUNION AT ROME, 1597.

The Copts cannot have felt quite at ease in their estrangement from Rome, for again, we find them drawing closer to Christendom by a new Act of Union signed in Rome in 1597. The conditions of 1597 resemble the circumstances of 1439-45, and on the death of the pro-Union Patriarch, a few years after the union had been signed, the separatist opposition party saw to it that the breach was renewed. The whole affair left so little impression on the Coptic Church that certain writers have presumed to deny that the union took place.

Copts in Modern Times

As elsewhere already mentioned, there is now in existence a Coptic Uniate or Catholic Church, united with Rome in faith and acknowledging the Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope, but following the customs and ritual of the Coptic Monophysite Church. The origin of this Catholic body is obscure. It seems certain that after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 no Egyptians remained Catholics while following the Coptic liturgy. Those who remained Catholics had to turn Melkite and the number who did so must have been infinitesimal. Yet in the nineteenth century, we find a small but organized body looking to Rome for guidance in faith.

ORIGIN OF COPT UNIATE CHURCH.

When did it begin? Most probably not during the Crusades when the Franciscans established themselves in Egypt in a small way. Nor are the Copt Catholics the descendants of those who remained faithful after the schism was renewed subsequent to the Reunions of 1438-45 and 1597. The beginnings seem to go back no further than the seventeenth century and are the results of the efforts of the Franciscans and the Jesuits who had arrived to help in the christianisation of the country.

MOALLEM GHALI.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the first important Copt Catholic appeared. His name was George Ghali. Under Mohammad Ali, the Great, the founder of the Egyptian dynasty which ruled until Nasser's time, he became the head of the Coptic book-keepers in the employment of the State. His position would correspond roughly with the present office of Under-Secretary to the Minister of Finance. In 1816 he followed this up with an attempt to effect a reunion between the Monophysite Copts and Rome. Ghali had the support of Mohammad Ali in his scheme for reunion for the latter, though unlettered, had liberal ideas and realized that to progress the Copts would have to get the impulse from Europe and Rome. He desired reunion for cultural reasons

ATTEMPT AT REUNION, 1816.

The scheme made headway and the Monophysite Bishops assembled to sign the prepared Act of Reunion. At last a fanatical Bishop asked to be shown the Act for perusal and when he had it in his hands he tore it to shreds. This ended the attempt.

STATISTICS. COPT MONOPHYSITES.

It is difficult to state with accuracy the exact number of Copt Monophysites. Regular censuses are taken by the Egyptian Government and in these the people are asked to state their religion. However, the proportion of Copts in the nation is not made public and this has encouraged them to give their exaggerated estimates of their numbers. The total population of Egypt in 1962 amounted to 28 millions. The traditional proportion of Copts to Moslems is one in twelve and on this basis there should be about two and a half million Copts. Estimates by Copts themselves seldom fall lower than four millions and even reach the impossible figure of six millions.

COPT CATHOLICS.

At the end of the 19th century the statistics of the Copt Catholics were given as being 12,000. The present [1964] numbers are about 100,000. These figures show progress and are in some measure due to the efforts of the Jesuits who have under their care more than 110 village schools for the education of Copts. Recently the Copt Catholic Hierarchy was reorganized by Pius XII. There is now a Patriarchal diocese at Alexandria, of which the occupant is normally resident in Cairo, with episcopal sees at Minia, Tahta and Assiut.

The Copt Catholic Community is on the whole exceedingly poor. The standard of livelihood of a priest who would carry out his ministry in an Egyptian village, is so low that only one reared there will subject himself to it. Most of their churches are exceedingly primitive. Yet it is through Copt Catholics that the

return of the Copt Monophysites to the Catholic Church will take place.

Copt Catholics are therefore to be encouraged in their work since they are the point of contact with the mass of Egyptian Christians.

The Coptic Language

The Coptic Language is as dead as Latin and is used only for liturgical purposes. It is the direct descendant of the ancient Egyptian language known under its written form as hieroglyphics. This original script underwent a twofold change before transforming itself into Coptic. First it became hieratic in script, which means that a form of writing peculiar to the Egyptian pagan priesthood developed out of hieroglyphics. Hieratic is from *Hiereus*, the Greek for priest. This form of writing went through a further stage called the demotic script. Demotic was so called because it was the manner employed by the people, or 'Demos' in Greek. The last stage was Coptic.

Coptic is the Egyptian language, written in Greek characters. There are seven sounds in Egyptian which could not be represented by the Greek letters, so the deficiency of this adapted alphabet was supplied by seven characters taken from the demotic script.

There are many Greek words in Coptic. This is easily understood when one learns that the Mass and liturgical services in Egypt were originally, as in Rome for the first two centuries, in the Greek language. When the services were rendered into Coptic several Greek expressions were retained unchanged. This also happened in the West in the retention of the "Kyrie Eleison." Then when Egyptians wished to express something connected with Christian worship which had no counterpart in pagan Egyptian service, they had recourse to the Greek - which they knew - for the word. Thus the word in Coptic for bishop, confession, devil, apostle, disciple, soul, excommunicate, saviour, and many other words are borrowings from Greek.

The Coptic Language has a threefold use. It has liturgical and biblical utility, for much Coptic literature is religious. It is useful and even necessary for students of hieroglyphics who wish to arrive at the pronunciation of old Egyptian. It is a help in the study of magic, for many ancient Coptic documents treat of magic.

COPT MONOPHYSITE PROBLEMS.

Recently two problems have arisen within the Coptic Monophysite Church. The first is entirely connected with the Egyptian part of the Patriarchate, an internal squabble. A recent Patriarch, dissatisfied with the customs by which the economic side of the monasteries is conducted, was anxious for financial reform. It seems that bishops and abbots are accustomed to consider funds accumulated during their period of headship as their personal property and in fact do bequeath large sums to their relatives at death. The Patriarch would like to take the control of finance out of the hands of bishops and abbots and place it under the control of a lay council. Naturally there has been a split, the Patriarch and laity being opposed by bishops and heads of monasteries. Incidentally, we should not imagine that Coptic monasteries are the eastern counterparts of efficient, clean, well-run western monasteries, though they ought to be respected as being the undoubted source, whence Europe drew her inspiration. Italian, French and Celtic monasticism are clearly the development of Egyptian monasticism of the fourth and fifth centuries, adapted to the peoples of the western world. Yet at present and for centuries past, Copt monasteries are and have been in a bad way. Learning and the desire thereof are in abeyance. Even manual work is not practised assiduously though there is fidelity to the recitation of the divine office.

The second problem is the desire of the Abyssinians (or Ethiopians, as they are now known) to establish an independent Church. This desire has grown through the efforts of Mussolini to establish an autonomous Abyssinian Church independent of Egypt after the Italian occupation of 1935. In the spring of 1944 a Coptic delegation of a bishop and laymen went to Addis Ababa concerning the matter. One result has

been concessions on the part of the Copt Monophysite Patriarch to the Abyssinians of greater power in the nomination of bishops.

COPTIC PRIESTHOOD.

A sharp distinction must be made between Copt Catholic priests and Copt Monophysite priests. As priests in Egypt must for the most part work in surroundings of direst poverty and distress it is inevitable that most Egyptian priests are drawn from the lowest classes of Society. This is unfortunate for the Church, since, as a consequence, the priesthood has little influence socially. The situation is tragic among Monophysite Copts, where, added to their lowliness of birth, the clerics as a body are almost without education. In most cases they are unlettered laymen raised to the dignity of the priesthood at the call of a Bishop.

The position among the Catholic Copts is better. While often of lowly birth the Copt Catholic priest had received in the past an excellent secondary education imparted by the Jesuits who were appointed by Pope Leo XIII especially for this task. This was followed by a course of Philosophy and Theology at the Seminary in Tahta, a Catholic town in Upper Egypt. When His Holiness Pius XII reorganized the Copt Catholic Hierarchy in 1947, he also transferred both departments of education to Tanta, a large town in the Nile Delta. More recently a new Seminary was built at Maadi near Cairo.

Monophysite Coptic priests may marry but their Catholic counterparts observe celibacy. However a Coptic bishop must be unmarried. He is chosen from the monks and usually has been a superior in a monastery.

COPTIC LITURGY.

Coptic services are usually very lengthy affairs. Whereas in the Latin rite we have several Masses on a Sunday or Holiday (Holy Day) of Obligation, in the Monophysite Coptic rite there is only one which is always sung and which lasts about three and a half hours. It is not considered necessary for the faithful to remain for the whole Mass, but while the more fervent and leisured classes do so, many are content with assisting at a part of a Mass.

The language of the Mass and other liturgical services may be either Arabic, which the people speak, or Coptic which is to Egyptians what Latin is to European Catholics. However the words of Consecration must always be pronounced in Coptic. A Latin Catholic who assists at a Coptic Mass for the first time feels that he has not been to Mass, but a little experience will enable him to find out that the ancient rite of the Egyptians contains, as does the Latin rite, an Epistle, Gospel, Offertory, Sanctus, Consecration, Pater Noster, and Communion. The actions are somewhat different. The Host and Chalice are not elevated, the words of Consecration are recited aloud and not said silently as in the Latin Mass. No bell is rung. Catholic Copts have introduced Benediction and other Latin ceremonies, such as the Way of the Cross. This latinising impulse has come from the Copts themselves, and not always from the European missionaries working in Egypt. It has led many Monophysites to feel that union with Rome means loss or mutilation of rite; and the Copt Monophysite loves his rite. The strains of *Veni Creator*, *Te Deum* and *Tantum Ergo* set to Arabic words in a Coptic Church do sound rather absurd.

DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES OF TO-DAY

The Coptic Church is exceedingly conservative in teaching as in ritual. While it can be said that the Egyptian Church of 1964 is almost identical with that of 451 doctrinally, yet there has been a shifting of emphasis on distinctive Coptic teaching. The question on which Egypt broke with the Universal Church is no longer the burning issue it was, though one frequently does hear the question of one or two natures discussed by the educated laity, rarely by the clergy, for whom such abstract subjects are too difficult. The obstacle to union with the Universal Church is no longer Monophysitism, but the claim of Papal Supremacy.

The Coptic Church has a wholesome respect for the See of Rome provided its occupant restricts his claims. The Patriarchs of the Great Patriarchal Sees of Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem, say the Copts, are the rulers of the Church, but the respective Patriarchs are independent in their own Patriarchates; the Pope is master in the west and the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria is independent ruler of the Egyptian Christians. The Pope may preside at Church Councils but as 'Primus inter pares'. The Copts are willing to unite with Rome but only on these conditions.

Obviously what the Copts are fighting for is not a doctrine, but spiritual independence.

Another important matter on which difference exists between Latins and Copts is the question of divorce, which the latter, in accordance with the custom among separated Oriental Churches, admit for a grave reason.

It is commonly said that the Coptic Church does not admit the existence of Purgatory. However, Mgr. Girard, a French Bishop who has spent more than fifty years as a missionary in Egypt, and has written an excellent work on the Eastern Churches, believes that the Copts do accept the Latin teaching on this matter but that they have disfigured it with fables taken, it would seem, from the religion of the ancient Egyptians. One of these fables is that for forty days after death, departed souls wander about before presenting themselves at the seat of God for judgement, that during this time they undergo different sorts of trials even at the hands of the devil. Some even go so far as to say that full bliss for the saved will not begin until the lapse of one year after death. However the Copts pray for the dead - inexplicable if they do not believe in Purgatory.

Rise of Christian Monasticism

Our Debt to the Egyptians of the Church

Alexandria was undoubtedly the leader in theological and philosophical matters in early Christian times. While this pre-eminence sheds glory on Egypt, Egyptians had really little to do with it. This glory was a borrowed glory. The rise of Alexandria to such an eminent position was due to the transference to that city of the Schools of Athens when decadence began to appear in Greece. The Greek philosophers became Christian, making Alexandria what it was.

However, Egypt had another glory which was all her own and in which the Greeks had little part. The monastic movement which was to influence the Church in all lands and which had its rise in Egypt, was the work of men who were Egyptian in birth and blood.

The great names in the foundation of the monastic life are those of St. Anthony, St. Paul and St. Pachomius who all died about the year 350 A.D. The movement is generally supposed to have begun about the year 260 A.D. when thousands of fervent Christians fled from the Egyptian cities to the desert under the persecution of Decius, the Roman Emperor. Many found unexpected sweetness in solitude and remained freely in the desert when the necessity had passed.

The earlier solitaries lived without a rule but soon the necessity for discipline became apparent and a planner appeared in the person of St. Pachomius who was the first to draw up a rule and establish monastic life on the lines that we know to-day.

The spread and influence of Egyptian monasticism was phenomenal. Within a couple of hundred years all Christendom had adopted the system. St. Hilarion brought it to Syria and Palestine. St. Basil the Great was responsible for its introduction into Pontus and Cappadocia, while Cassian is acknowledged as the founder of monasticism in the west. It was Cassian who founded the monastery of Lerins in 410 A.D. There St. Patrick learned the system and brought it with him to Ireland.

All these offshoots bore clearly the marks of their origin. Like Egyptian monasticism, the Palestinian, Syrian, Greek, Gallic and Celtic forms were all more or less individualistic in character, fiercely rigorous

and making no concessions to climatic conditions. The result was that in Europe, though not in Ireland, monastic life seemed destined to decline, when a great figure appeared on the scene. This was St. Benedict, whose task was to adapt the monastic ideal to the European mind and climatic conditions. He toned down the primitive Egyptian rigorism and removed its individualism, thus rendering monasticism suitable for the Teutons who were then coming into the Church. St. Benedict's foundation of Monte Cassino in 529 A.D. (destroyed in 1943 but since restored) was of immense importance in the history of Europe, for to the monasteries which sprang from it the conversion of Europe is - under God - largely due. Celtic monasticism also figured prominently in this conversion but the modified form introduced by St. Benedict gradually superseded the unmitigated Irish system. The work of both these currents is clearly seen in the second conversion of England in the seventh century.

The Celtic influence came from the North, especially from the Holy Isles of Iona and Lindisfarne, the most important homes in Britain of Irish monasticism. The landing in England of St. Augustine in 596 with 36 monks marks the beginning of the Benedictine influence, which worked from south to north, and the superseding of the Irish system by that of Saint Benedict. The point is that all this fervent and civilizing monastic life had its origin in Egypt while that country still formed part of the Catholic Church.

NUBIA AND ABYSSINIA.

Nubia is the district lying to the south of the southern border of Egypt, the region south of Wadi Halfa and north of Khartoum. It is now entirely Moslem in religion, though for centuries its inhabitants were Christians. Very little was known about its history or the nature of its Christian life until recently and what is coming to light today is the result of on site archaeological investigations being carried on at the present time. These diggings have been undertaken to discover the Christian past of Nubia before part of it disappears for ever beneath the waters of the proposed man-made lake which will result from the building of the High Dam at Aswan, which is now being executed. [1964] The remains of sixty Christian Churches are now known and from these it appears that the Church was introduced into this area some time between the fourth and sixth centuries, and that the main influence was Byzantine and not Coptic, as is revealed by the decoration of the Churches. The Christian civilization of Nubia came to an end when it was conquered by Moslems from the north under Saladin in the 12th century.

Christianity came to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in a different manner. [The Ethiopian Baptized by St. Philip in the Book of Acts Chapter 8 may have been from a district further North along the Nile, or he may not have successfully established a viable long-lasting branch of the Church.] While travelling in the East two young men, one of whom was called Frumentius, arrived as prisoners in Ethiopia as a result of ill fortune frequently suffered by voyagers in those days of the fourth century at the hands of sea pirates. Frumentius and his companion later became men of influence in the land and rose to the rank of governors. They were Christians and preached the Christian faith while in Abyssinia. Later Frumentius came to Alexandria where he found the great St. Athanasius in the Patriarchal Chair of St. Mark. Having been raised to the dignity and power of Bishop by St. Athanasius, Frumentius returned to Abyssinia and converted its people to the Christian faith.

In the early Church, consecration by a bishop gave the bishop a superiority of jurisdiction over the prelate consecrated by him. Thus when new territory was acquired by the growing Church it was added to the district of the Patriarch who had consecrated its bishop. Thus Abyssinia naturally fell under the influence of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and followed the great See in the lead it gave. The secession of the Copts in 451 A.D. entailed that of the Abyssinians, though this primitive people cannot be considered to be guilty of serious fault on account of their inability to understand what the schism was all about. The country had scarcely been converted when the breach came. It can scarcely be said that the Abyssinians sinned against the light.

Let us pray that the Good Shepherd will hear the intercessions of St Mark and St Frumentius and all the Egyptian, Nubian and Ethiopian Saints as we join them in praying for the swift re-union of these ancient churches - the Coptic and the Ethiopian.

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