

**LEAVING THE WORLD FOR THE SAKE OF
THE WORLD - COPTIC MONASTIC MISSION IN THE
FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES**

by

SAMEEH HELMY YOUSEM

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SUPERVISOR: PROF. J N J KRITZINGER

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Summary

Christian monasticism originated in Egypt and then spread to the rest of the Christian church. Coptic monks made a significant contribution to Christian theology and spirituality through their distinctive approach to the life of faith. This study by a Coptic monk analysis Coptic missionary spirituality as it flowered in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Chapter 2 introduces the three main types of Coptic monasticism and the key figures in each of the three types. Chapter 3 describes the centripetal dimension of their mission, indicating how they attracted a wide variety of people to a committed Christian life through their holiness, simplicity and humility.

Chapter 4 discusses their “outreaching” mission of love: their preaching in harmony with the culture of people, their concern for the poor and oppressed, their healing miracles and exorcisms, their defense of the Orthodox faith against heresy. Chapter 5 summaries the findings of the study and identifies priorities for further research.

Key terms:

Monasticism; Mission; Coptic Orthodox Church; Monk; Monastery; Desert Fathers; Spirituality; St. Antony; St. Pachomius; St. Macarius; St. Shenoute.

IN GRATITUDE

I feel that I am greatly indebted to my holy Fathers, the Coptic monks,
who wrote the brightest pages in Christian history

I also dedicate these pages to my holy Father

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

The modern-day Saint Antony, who has taught me
the true meaning of monasticism
through his excellent teaching, spirituality, love and fatherhood,
and above all through his shining example

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Relevance

When I decided to write this dissertation about the mission of the Coptic monks, many asked me, (and I asked myself): were the holy fathers truly concerned about mission? When I was young I was fascinated with the stories and sayings of my fathers, the monks. I felt all the time that mission was something deeply buried in their hearts; that if they were genuine in their spirituality as it was, their love for the Lord should be connected with their love for people.

As I began to dig deep into their stories, I discovered that St. Antony, the founder of Coptic monasticism and monasticism as a whole, said "My life is with my brother" (Ward 1975:xv). He was a genuine missionary. But maybe his definition and methods of mission were different from ours. If we examine his Christian ministry (*khedma*), as we call mission in our Coptic Orthodox Church, we find it was very successful. Jean Leclercq (1974:125) was a faithful witness:

St. Antony remained truly the Father of all monks; and so in all milieus and in every period of the Western Middle Ages they considered themselves as truly his sons. Everywhere they claimed his support. During each monastic revival, they hark back to ancient Egypt; they want, they say, to revive Egypt, to inaugurate a new Egypt and they call upon St. Antony, his example and his writings.

The second question I asked myself at the onset of my study was, "Does the mission work of the fathers help in our mission today or can their way of mission be relevant to us today? Can the great revival which they initiated be an inspiration for us in our context?"

Leclercq (1974:125) continues his words about St. Antony "St. Antony's life is not simply an historical text, a source of information about a definitely dead past. It is a living text, a means of information of a monastic life."

Therefore, the father's mission is not dead history. It is a living way for spreading of the good news. This is my belief. If we can return to their thinking about Christianity and their holy lives, it will be possible for us to enjoy their successful methods in mission. This will

be the hope of the Church: to carry the good news to thousands of millions in a unique way.

We speak now about exhaustion of the different methods of evangelism, and complain about the poor results, in the presence of pressing needs and big numbers. Why should we not then try the methods of the Coptic monks which were of such great effect? I pray this research will help us to widen our scope in mission and convince us to accept the mission of the Coptic monks as something relevant for us today.

I shall cite one witness from inside the Coptic Church, and another from outside it about the unique and long-lasting action of the mission work of Coptic monks. The *Coptic Church Review* (1980:161f) said,

The rise of monasticism in Egypt has been the most profound spiritual revival that ever happened in all the history of the church. People from all the world and from different cultures, races and ranks had been attracted to the Egyptian deserts to practice virtue and live the holy life under the guidance of the Egyptian monastic fathers.

So it was not uncommon to find the monasteries filled with monks from everywhere in the world: Romans, Greeks, Cappadocians, Libyans, Syrians, Ethiopians and others.

Louis Bouyer (1960:368) said: "There was nothing more purely Christian than the antecedents of monasticism, and nothing more purely evangelical than its primary motivations."

Maybe the *Coptic Church Review* is a bit one sided in its assessment of Coptic monasticism, but this is the belief of most Copts. It is a view of honour and admiration for our Fathers.

1.2 Method

In this study I employ primarily a descriptive and narrative method in order to systematise the diversity of material on the lives of Coptic monks in terms of missiological questions. Since I am myself a Coptic monk, this study is an "emic" (or insider's) view and, as Schreiter (1985:57) has pointed out, insider's perspectives often tend to be predominantly narrative in character. This is also the reason why I often use rather lengthy quotes from the stories of the monks, in order to allow the voice of the monastic tradition to be heard. This does not mean that I follow an uncritical approach, but my study does proceed from a

prior commitment of loyalty to the monastic tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Since, to my knowledge, very little has been done in missiological circles to systematise the contribution of the Coptic monks to mission (see 1.5), I first give a historical survey of the development of Coptic monasticism, highlighting the role of the key figures. This is done in chapter 2, after which I make a systematic analysis of the mission of the Coptic monks, under the following three headings:

1.2.1 The witness of their ideas or sayings. I shall explain that the fathers did not use the classical way of preaching, but that their mission was always relevant to their context. This description is found in chapter 3.

1.2.2 The witness of their lives or deeds. I shall speak about how their lives and witnessing were so brilliant that they attracted different nationalities and people from the whole world. Actually their method was primarily centripetal rather than centrifugal. Monasteries became universities for teaching deep Christian spirituality. This is also contained in chapter 3.

1.2.3 Their witness through direct mission work which is very near to the concept of mission as it is known today (see 1.6). Under this heading I shall discuss the role of Coptic monks in the different aspects of mission, and also I shall explain their work to defend the Orthodox faith against different heresies. This is found in chapter 4.

1.3 Period

In this brief study I limit myself to the Coptic monks of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. because that was the “golden age” of monasticism and its peak. The love of God in the fathers’ hearts was so profuse that it overflowed and shone through to others. This is not to say that the mission of Coptic monasticism was limited to that initial period, but since it was the formative period it is the logical place to start in a limited study of this kind.

1.4 Sources

There are eight recognised original sources on Coptic monasticism which I have consulted in this study. They are the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* by Rufinus, translated into English by Russell (1980), the *Lausiac History* by Palladius, translated by Meyer (1964), the *Conferences of John Cassian*, translated by Luibheid (1985), the *Life of St. Antony* by St. Athanasius, translated by Gregg (1964), the *Life of Shenoute* by Besa, translated by Bell (1983), the *Pachomian Koinonia*, translated by Veilleux (1980), the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, translated by Ward (1975) and the *Vitae Patrum*, edited by Rosweyde and translated by Waddell (1957). Some other books which speak about mission in the Coptic Church in general helped in compiling my research.

The writers of the stories of the fathers had their own hagiographic style. I shortened some of the stories, but tried to retain the unique style of the literature, in order to reflect the nature of missionary spirituality in the Coptic tradition.

Unfortunately, many of the stories of the Coptic fathers are difficult to digest for the modern mind. Some seem exaggerated and not a little ridiculous (Pearce 1994:396), for many reasons. Firstly, the modern mind is sceptical concerning any reports of miracles. Secondly, the modern mind does not trust in the promise of the Lord that there are supernatural signs which will follow the believers (Mark 16:17) and the believers will do miracles greater than what He did (John 14:12). Thirdly, we, as Egyptians see these miracles happening every day, therefore people who are in difficulty or need go spontaneously to the monasteries to ask for the advice and prayers of the monks and through these prayers the Lord does His miracles among His people. In other words, these stories of the Coptic monks are not used for imparting information about ancient history, but for evoking trust in the healing power of God today. I have tried to do justice to the stories of the Fathers as a living reality in the life of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Fourth, the certainty of these miracles is an integral part of the Coptic tradition, continually confirmed by ongoing experience.

Fifth, the fathers performed these miracles not to show that they were miracle workers or for the show, but to help others believe in their Almighty God and also to relieve the sufferings of the people. Sixth, the miracles played a great role in the centripetal mission of

the Coptic monks because they formed a great factor of attraction for people. Some came out of curiosity but in many cases the spirituality of the fathers changed their lives to become true believers.

Seventh, the important question in this study is not the reliability of the stories concerning the monks, but to inquire how these stories could help us discover the unique contribution of Coptic spirituality to the understanding of Christian mission and to appropriate it for our selves. Since these stories are the only sources that give us access to the missionary spirituality of the Coptic monks, they are adequate to help us achieve this goal of recovering the heart of Coptic spirituality for mission today. The question of the historical accuracy of these stories are therefore not the concern of this study. This study is not an historical-critical one, discussing the reliability of the Fathers' stories, but a missiological one, concerned primarily with the missiological meaning of the centripetal mission of the Fathers for us today.

Russell was faced with the same problem when he began to translate the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, so he stated in the introduction,

"These anthologies of sayings attributed to the first monks of Egypt have a kind of authenticity which is unique. They are neither accounts of the way of life of the monks nor records of their teaching, but glimpses of them as they were known to their disciples; there is little literary artifice about such material: it is as rough and craggy as the landscape of Antinoe, 'that rugged desert in mountain'.... despite the doubts of some modern scholars, I am confident that the *Historia Monachorum* describes a real journey" (Russell 1980:3f).

On the basis of this, Russell then defends the historical reality of this book with many evidences (:4).

1.5 Review of Literature

In the beginning of my research, when looking for sources, I was constantly faced with the question, Did Coptic monks have any mission at all? I felt that it might be difficult for me to find references about the issue. However, some authors wrote about the mission work of Coptic monks. It is interesting that these writers mentioned mission in short, and in the same line of mission as it is understood now.

I would like to refer to H.H. Pope Shenouda who spoke excellently on the topic. His Holiness also wrote an excellent book about Coptic monasticism entitled "Contemplation on the Life of St. Antony the Great". Pope Shenouda spoke in details about the story St. Antony, explaining some points in his mission work.

Father Malaty has also written many helpful books about different aspects of the lives of Coptic monks. In his book, *The Coptic Orthodox Church as an Ascetic Church*, Father Malaty (1986) spoke, under the heading, "Egyptian monasticism and the Christian world", about the mission of the Fathers in the aspect of the visitors to Egypt and the role of the Fathers in teaching them. The book also helped me in the historical background of the Coptic monasticism.

Professor Atiya, in his *History of Eastern Christianity* (Atiya 1968), spoke, under the title of "The Copts and the World", about two main ideas. First, he spoke shortly about the visitors to Egypt and their influence in the Christian history. Second, about the mission of the Copts generally including the mission work of the Coptic monks.

Farag (1964) in his research entitled the *Sociological and Moral studies in the Field of Coptic Monasticism* spoke shortly about the various aspects of the mission of Coptic monks. He explained the sympathy of the Fathers with the creation and their dealing with money, the poor and the pagans. He mentioned few stories to cover his ideas. Farag's discussion of the relationship between the Fathers and the poor was excellent.

H.G. Bishop Pachomius (1979) in *Coptic Monasticism*, spoke mainly about the Fathers' direct outer mission work.

Dr. Maurice Assad wrote some articles about the Coptic monk's mission. In the article entitled "Coptic Christianity - the Process of Inculturation and Shaping the Coptic Identity", (Assad 1994) he spoke about the effect of the Fathers' spirituality upon the

world. He affirms the idea that the Fathers' lives were good witness for Christ. Others came to the monasteries to discover their deep spirituality. Assad repeated the same idea in another article, "Mission in the Coptic Orthodox Church - Perspective, Doctrine and Practice", (Assad 1990) and he added that the Fathers' sayings played an important part in their mission.

Arabic Books:

The Coptic Synaxarium (Two volumes). This is a church daily reading about the life of saints. It gave a historical idea about the Father's mission.

The Paradise of the Monks. This is the Arabic edition of the sayings and stories of Coptic monks which are concerned with the witness of the fathers' holy life.

There are other Arabic books which speak about Coptic monasticism and refer in short to the Fathers' mission work.

Many other books which generally discuss monasticism, in Arabic and English, helped me to compile the material of my dissertation.

My study draws on all these sources and yet differs from them in a number of ways. Mine is a consciously missiological study, which systematises the stories about the lives of the monks in terms of questions relating to the mission of the church.

1. 6 Mission in the View of the Coptic Monks

Professor Atiya (1968:68) said, "The enduring impact of the Coptic Fathers of the Desert on world history is a living reality." Russell (1980:12) saw Coptic monks as "Those by whom the world is kept in being."

In the *Historia Monachorum* there is a unique witness about the monks. "The monk in general terms, is the champion of the society in spiritual warfare" (Russell 1980:13).

If all these witnesses testified about Coptic Monks, were the monks at that time burdened to share in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God? Or were they orientated to spread the good news?

The problem lies in the difference between our and their definition of "mission". Our contemporary definition of mission is the conversion of the "gentiles", the planting of the

church and the glory and manifestation of God's divine grace (Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman 1994:1).

For Bosch (1992:518f), the Christian mission is

To proclaim the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended Christ, present among us in Spirit and taking us into His future as "captives in His triumphal procession" and it is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.

The Fathers believed mission was more related to their context. In that age, Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire, therefore people began to enter Christianity either out of fear of the rulers or in search of reward. It was easy at that time to see Christianity mingled with paganism in practice or in belief.

The pressing need, at that time, was demonstrating Christianity in its pure form. Christianity needed to be manifested or incarnated in a pure heart who loves God and others... a life wholly consecrated to the Lord. It was not enough to hear sermons or preaching about the Lord because that was common at the time, even by heretics. It was the time of much speech¹ and little harvest. Lives that burned with love and lives that witnessed to that love were few.

Bishop Yannoulatos of Androussa (1980:27) explains the mission work of the monks as follows:

In the history of Orthodoxy, the greatest missionaries were the monks who lived the Gospel uncompromisingly, their hearts vibrating with the cry of the revelation "Come Lord Jesus". The consistency of the lives of the monks with the evangelical precepts of poverty, chastity and love made their mission persuasive.

When Palladius visited the Coptic Monks he spoke about "What he had seen and experienced"(Meyer 1964:4). Rufinus also went to Egypt to learn about monastic life from its sources. He learned partly by conversation but mostly by observation. Rufinus said to Abba John of Lycopolis:

We have come to you from Jerusalem for the good of our souls, so that what we have heard with our ears we may perceive with our eyes.. for the ears are naturally less reliable than the eyes.. and because very often forgetfulness follows what we hear, whereas the memory of what

¹ It was the age of philosophy and debate between the scholars.

we have seen is not easily erased but remains imprinted on our minds like a picture (Russell 1980:8).

Maybe Bria (1980:4) was in harmony with the Coptic concept about "mission" when he said:

In the East, "Mission" is identified with tradition and appeals to history, the continuity of the Church in time, the transmission of the faith from age to age and from one generation to the next. The aim of Orthodox mission has been not so much to conquer new geographical frontiers at all costs, but rather to hold the people to the faith in a permanent historic continuity.

Therefore, the mission of the Coptic monks was not mainly in word but also in deeds which witnessed to the word, and its method was centripetal which means that others came from the whole world to know more about spirituality of the Coptic monks.

The question arises again. Were they oriented to witness or not?

Is it true, as Atiya (1968:60) said: "The first definable stage in the genesis of Coptic monasticism may be described as "Antonian monachism", whereby a pious recluse or anchorite took to a solitary life of asceticism and austerity, torturing his body in order to save his soul"?

I think this is a distorted idea about Coptic monasticism. I do not blame Professor Atiya for this view because some monks said that about themselves and their calling. Abba Aio questioned Abba Macarius, 'Give me a word.' Abba Macarius said to him, 'Flee from men, stay in your cell, weep for your sins, do not take pleasure in the conversation of men, and you will be saved (Ward 1975:116).

But why did they say that? We must remember that it was the age of much speech, so the Coptic monks refused to speak about themselves and left that to the practical and actual witness of their works. This is clearly seen when Abba John of Lycopolis met Rufinus and his company.

And what remarkable thing did you expect to find, my dearest children, that you have undertaken such a long journey with so much labour in your desire to visit some poor simple

men who possess nothing worth seeing or admiring? I marvel at your zeal, how taking no account of so many dangers you have come to us to be edified, while we from laziness do not even wish to come out of our cave (Russell 1980:8).

The same father who said that, sat with them for a long time and taught them. He gave them the chance to see spirituality with their own eyes. He said something even more interesting before they left "Well now, even though your undertaking deserves praise, do not imagine that you have done enough, that you have achieved something good, but imitate the virtues which our fathers are practising" (:55). The theology of Coptic mission was to live a very holy life, pray to be used by the Lord, wait in faith and deliver it to anyone who comes along. This idea is confirmed by much evidence.

First, when St. Athanasius wrote the life of St. Antony, he gave his readers an image of the Christian life, and how our response to the divine calling will change our lives to be saintly.

St. Antony was a model for every Christian. He obeyed the scriptural injunction to sell all and follow the Lord. He learned from a master-hermit how to practice the discipline. He invoked the name of Christ.

He recited Scripture. He repelled Satan by making the sign of the cross. He prayed and groaned mightily. He helped, taught and cured others. In all this, he was ready to be a recipient of resources and powers available to him only from or through Christ. After depicting this image, St. Athanasius said:

That you also might lead yourselves in imitation of him... I know that even in hearing, along with marvelling at the man, you will want also to emulate his purpose, for Antony's way of life provides monks with a sufficient picture for ascetic practice (Gregg 1980:29).

Gregg says in the introduction of the *Life of Antony*:

St. Athanasius' reason for writing the Life of Antony bears close scrutiny. He sends a double message, suggesting at the work's beginning that Antony's story is meant to provide an example for other monks, but adding at the end of the treatise that the Vita might profitably be read to pagans as well (:5)

Second: Palladius' aim for his writing about the Coptic monks was:

This was at time when the Church, newly liberated from the catacombs, was in period of lithomania, a madness as it were for great ecclesiastical edifices, so Palladius wished to

teach Lausus lessons of true edification, the building and formation of character modelled on the lives of the desert saints (Meyer 1964:4). The lives of Fathers were for edification of the Church.

Third: Because the Fathers of the desert knew that they had a mission towards the world, they received guests as Christ would receive them. They might live austere themselves, but when visitors came they hid their austerity and welcomed them. A brother said, "Forgive me father, for I have made you break your rule". But the old man said, "My rule is to receive you with hospitality and send you on your way in peace" (Ward 1975:xvi).

Fourth: St. Antony the Great said, "My life is with my brother" (Ward 1975:xv). He returned to the city twice, once to relieve those dying of plague, and once to defend the faith against heresy.

Fifth: Although they lived a life of solitude, their aim was not asceticism, but God, and the way to God was charity. The gentle charity of the desert was the pivot of all their work and the test of their way of life (Ward 1975:xv).

Charity was to be total and complete. Let us consider this from a life, rather than a saying. Abba Abraham had a niece, Mary, who became a harlot in Alexandria:

....and he dressed himself as a soldier and went to find her...they feasted together at the inn and he took her to his room to lie with her. "Come close to me, Mary, he said and took her in his arms to kiss her... but she recognised him and wept. She said, "Go before me and I will follow... for you have so loved me and grieved for me that you have come even into this cess-pit to find me"; and so they went home (Ward 1975: xv).

Sixth: Moreover, the monks' poverty provided a means of communication, making them accessible to their neighbours. The contrast of rags and riches made its own impact. There is a story in the *Historia Monachorum* of the two old men called Macarius who went one day to cross the Nile. They boarded a ferry on which there were two tribunes:

They had a chariot covered entirely in bronze, and horses with gold bridles.... When the tribunes saw the monks sitting in the corner dressed in old rags, they blessed their simplicity of life. One of the tribunes said to them, blessed (Macarioi) are you who have mocked the world".

St. Macarius of Alexandria said to him, "We have mocked the world but the world mocks you. You should know that you have said this not of your own accord but by prophetic inspiration. For we are both called Macarius". The tribune, moved to compunction by this remark, went home and took off his uniform, and after a generous distribution of alms chose to live as a monk (Russell 1980:14).

Seven: The history of Coptic monks is a story of love towards God and His creation because it is free of any notion of exploiting others. Therefore, their mission work was successful.

Eight: The Church trusts that the mission work of the Fathers did not end with their departure from the world because they are still living with us. Their lives are still witnessing to the contemporary age.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III (1993:11f) said,

There is a link between us and the fathers, a link between the living and the fathers who are in the other world. God is not a God of the dead, He is God of the living. We feel that those fathers are still alive and living among us, and we speak to them as we speak with the living ones.

We never feel that the saints had left our world, or departed from it or finished (their work), instead we feel their presence continually. We remember them not only in their feasts, but also in many of our prayers.

In our honour of the saints we honour the virtues which they lived. We love the saints because there are many good things in their lives which we love, and the church in its honour for the saints honours the holiness in their personalities. In the life of the saints, we see the spiritual principles appear in a practical way (My translation).

So the Coptic monks knew that they had a mission which was related to their context and they tried hard to be faithful to their call. In the next chapters we will examine whether or not they succeeded.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF COPTIC MONASTICISM

All forms of Christian monasticism - anchorite, eremite and coenobite (see 2.1.1 below) - came to birth in Egypt. All developed in one and the same period under various leaderships in different places and this testified to the work of the Holy Spirit in his children's lives. God was working through St. Paul, St. Anthony, St. Pachomius, and St. Macarius. Each one established his own spiritual and ascetic law and system for those who followed them.

2.1 The Meaning of the Word ¹ “*Monachos*” or “Monk”

The first instance of *monachos* in an ecclesiastical writing is found in the commentary on the Psalms by Eusebius of Caesarea, written, it seems, early in the last decade of his life, which began in 330 (Moreau 1966:1064).

Here Eusebius is reflecting on Psalm 67:6. He appears to use the verse to refer to the monks with whom he expects his readers to be familiar. He uses alternative translations to spell out different aspects of monasticism. For example, giving the monks "a home" was God's first and greatest provision for mankind, because they are the "front rank" of those "advancing in Christ". By the same token they are "rare".

But what does Eusebius mean by calling them "*Monachos*"?

Morard (1958:381), who holds that the historical function of the word "*monachos*" must have been to carry forward into Greek and Coptic usage a Semitic ideal of life that centred on celibacy (Hebrew. *yahid*), believes that it is possible to show that *monachos* specially refers to sexual continence.

¹ In the Arabic language monk is "raheb" which means "someone who fears." This translation, however, is not right because St. Antony once said to his spiritual children, "I don't fear God, but I love him, for love casts fear out of doors" (Waddell 1957:123)

She is supported by the fact that, immediately after saying that they are "girded up on their own," Eusebius identifies them as all those who "lead a solitary and chaste life."

They are addressed as those who "are practising the solitary - or single - life" This defines monasticism both in terms of personal discipline and also of domestic arrangements. They are "residing in the faith of Christ".

So monks are ascetics whose single life (whether in relation to marriage or in some more general moral sense) has expressed itself in a change of residence, so that they depend directly upon Christ. This is presumably as anchorites or in coenobitic monastery rather than upon ordinary pattern of domestic and civil life. One must note also the clear implication that the monks need to be claimed for Orthodoxy.

H.H. Pope Shenouda (1993:23) remarks, "The word is coming as in English "monk" or "moine" in French from "monakhos" in Coptic and Greek that means hermit a person that lives alone."

2.2 Types of Coptic Monasticism

There are three types:

2.2.1 Anachoresis: (anchorite)

This is the first definable stage in the genesis of Coptic monasticism. Anchorite is derived from the Greek word anachorein: "to withdraw, to leave" (Gregg 1980:8). One can not relate this monastic anachoresis, as certain historians have done, with the "anachoresis" of the peasants who fled from their villages to escape fiscal burdens. But certain circumstances could have furthered it, notably the persecutions, which drove some Christians to the desert.

Such was precisely the case, if we believe St. Jerome, with St. Paul of Thebes. He took refuge in the desert during the Decian persecution (249-250) and remained there permanently, embracing by free choice a way of life that necessity had at first imposed on him.

St. Jerome discussed the question of who was the first hermit, an issue about which there is much dispute. Some advance the claims of Elijah, others of John the Baptist. But

the general opinion was in favour of St. Antony. He, however, did not so much originate as popularise the anchorite's life. Abba Amatha and Macarius, St. Antony's own disciples, asserted that St. Paul the Theban was earlier in the field. St. Antony himself seems to have acknowledged as much (White 1973:12).

The monastic anachoresis has an essentially religious motive, arising from the ideals of the Christian ascetics of the first centuries. The Greek word "Monachos" according to its earliest attestations, described the ascetic as "solitary" because he renounced marriage in order to have no other concern but the service to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

By separating himself from the world through anachoresis, the monk realised in an effective way that renunciation of the world is the fundamental element of Christian asceticism. This distancing from the world, realised in material terms, was felt to be all the more necessary after the conversion of the Roman empire to Christianity, when the world began to attack the church not through persecution as in the past, but through persuasion.

Thus the monk appeared as the successor of the martyr, as St. Antony described monasticism as a "bloodless martyrdom" (Gregg 1980:16), a witness to the incompatibility of the world and the Christian faith (Atiya 1991:1661).

In its beginning, monasticism was anchorite. St. Pachomius began by living as an anchorite, under the guidance of the anchorite Abba Palamon. This stage may be described as "Antonian monachism", whereby a pious recluse or anchorite took to a solitary life of asceticism and austerity. St. Antony's example was the most famous, though by no means the only one of his age (Atiya 1968:60).

2.2.2 Eremite:

During St. Antony's lifetime, there developed the second stage of monastic life that of "eremite" or hermit, which may also be called "Collective eremitism" (Latourette 1975:126). These settlements multiplied, with the oldest growing around St. Antony's towering personality in the district of "Pispir" and spreading eastward into the outer mountains of what is now known as the Arabian desert in the direction of the Red Sea, approximately where the Monastery of St. Antony stands to the present day.

Another community arose at Chenoboskion, in the Thebaid near the hermitage of St. Palamon, from whom St. Pachomius the Great received his initiation into monastic life but it also appeared in the area of Schetis, Nitria and Cellia.

Here the solitary and the communal lives balanced one another. The monks lived alone, each in his cell during the week, and came together on Saturday and Sundays in church, where they took a meal together called the "agape" and participated in Eucharistic liturgy, celebrated by monastic priests.

Living as hermits, the monks were divided in a rather free fashion, it appears, into congregations, each of which had its church. One of the priests, assisted by a council of elders, exercised a certain authority. At Schetis, where there were four congregations in the fifth century, the whole body of monks was under the authority of one of them, considered "the father of Schetis".

But this authority was more moral and charismatic than judicial. In the early period, the life of the monks in the desert was not subject to any written rule. It was regulated above all by the traditional teaching of the elders, transmitted orally (Atiya 1991:1661f). This moral authority of the early monastic period is well illustrated by a famous story of St. Moses the Black:

A brother at Schetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him, "come for everyone is waiting for you", so he got up and went, he took a leaking jug filled it with water and carried it with him.

The others came out to meet him and said to him, "What is this father?" The old man said to them, "My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them and today I am coming to judge the errors of another" (Russell 1980:36).

Two features are strongly characteristic of this monasticism. One, is the manual work in the cell. Manual work was an obligation, each monk having to provide for his needs. At Schetis the majority of the monks devoted themselves to basket-making. This work was to be done continuously as much as possible. Second, prayer which consisted not only in the recitation of the office at appointed hours, but also in what was called *melete* (meditation), the recitation of texts from Scriptures, chiefly from Psalms. The monks were constrained to residence in their cells, which was called *hesychia*, (see below) a term borrowed from the

Hellenic tradition. In Egypt, and particularly in region of Oxyrhynches, stories were told of monks who lead an itinerant life, but in general Egyptian monasticism was not very favourably disposed to this form of asceticism, which was quite common in Syrian monasticism. "Remain seated in your cell" is the counsel that unflaggingly recurs in the "*Apophthegmata Patrum*" in reply to the young monk who asks an older one how he will be saved. "Remain seated in your cell", is the very definition for *hesychia*. The word implies, at the same time, solitude, silence, quiet reflection, but above all the steadfastness in one's cell that is the condition for the rest (Atiya 1991:1662).

Finally, there were three settlements in the western desert within a day's Journey of Alexandria, namely, Nitria, Cellia and Scetis.

The Nitrian colony was founded by St. Amoun, who being an orphan, was brought up by his uncle who forced him to marry when twenty-two years of age. The youth went through the bridal ceremony, but persuaded his wife to allow their union to be purely nominal. Henceforth, the pair lived in the same house, but were virtually separated.

St. Amoun worked all the day in his garden and balsam plantation, and returned in the evening only to pray and to share a meal with his wife. At night, after praying once more, he retired to sleep outside the house. After eighteen years, St. Amoun's wife urged her husband to hide his light under a bushel no longer, but to live in open separation from her.

In 325 A.D. St. Amoun left the house to his wife, and found a retreat for himself in "the inner part in the Mount of Nitria; for as yet there were no monasteries there" (White 1973:46). In this place he built two domed cells, in which he lived for twenty-two years where monks congregated around him before he "fell asleep". Palladius records that he used to visit his wife twice every year (:46).

Socrates said that St. Amoun and his wife retired to Mount Nitria immediately after their marriage where they lived the austere life (Schaff 1973:106).

Cellia, slightly north of Nitria, was the home of St. Macarius the Alexandrian, who had spent several years almost naked in the mosquito-infested marches of Mareotis. His feats of austerity astounded his contemporaries. He died in 393 A.D. at the age of one hundred

years. It was in Cellia that St. Arsenius came to live. He was a notable scholar in Rome and responsible for teaching Emperor Theodosius' sons.

One day he began to think about his life and the benefit of the glory of this world which is not constant. He began to pray, asking the Lord to show him the way of salvation. One day a voice spoke to him. "Escape from the people and you will be saved". He left everything and went to Schetis where he learned monastic life from St. Macarius.

St. Arsenius was famous for the life of silence and he has a well-known saying: "Many times I spoke and felt sorry, but I never feel sorry about silence" (My translation) (*Paradise of Monks* 1968:54f).

Schetis is Southeast of Nitria and a forbidding wilderness where St. Macarius the Great founded another monastery about 330 A.D. (White 1926:33).

2.2.3 Coenobitic:

Coenobite is derived from "koinos bios" means "common life" (Gregg 1980:15). This rule was established by St. Pachomius for a group of monks to live together. Monasteries were created only after disciples came to him and he learned by experience that it was necessary to organise their way of life.

The general plan of the monastery may be reminiscent of the military camps¹. St. Pachomius would have known as a soldier. Each monastery contained a number of "houses" and the whole body of the monasteries constituted the "Pachomian Koinonia" or congregation.

Each house, each monastery, and the congregation itself had at its head a superior, and was under rigorous material organisation. The monks shared everything in common: prayer, meals, work. Written rules regulated the life of the community down to the slightest detail.

¹ Historians said that St. Pachomius borrowed his monastic system from his previous military life.

Palladius said that an angel delivered a brazen tablet to St. Pachomius with the rule of his monasteries inscribed upon it (Russell 1980:88f). Sozomen affirms that the tablet was still preserved carefully during his lifetime (Schaff 1979:292).

The monastery was composed of an enclosing wall (one of the marks of the cenobium), a gate-house and guest-house, an "ecclesia" for worship with a refractory nearby of a kitchen and back house, a hospital, and a number of houses. These resembled barrack-blocks in a military camp holding between twenty and forty monks each.

The plan of the house is not clear. But it is believed to have included a common room for prayer and instruction and any other communal activity of the house, store-rooms, and separate cells for each monk. By Palladius' time, with increase in numbers, there were three monks to a cell (Meyer 1964: 92). There the monks slept on beds of blistered brick. In the Pachomian system they only reclined on chairs of similar material. Each house had its own house-master and second.

Agriculture was undertaken outside the walls, and the dead were buried in the old rock-cut tombs a few miles away, where the valley meets the mountain. Commercial and other business with the outside world would be entrusted to specially approved brethren (Chitty 1966:22 f.).

Communities of the same type--designated by the name of cenobitism--multiplied in Upper Egypt in the course of the third century. The most celebrated, after those of Pachomius, are communities in the region of Akhmim in the fourth and fifth centuries that were dominated by the powerful personality of St. Shenute (see 2.7.5).

2.3 Number of Monks:

At time passed, the monks rapidly became very numerous. From the time of the earliest documents high figures are given, but their accuracy is difficult to judge. Rufinus speaks of an Abbot Serabion in Fayum who was at the head of a community of about 10,000 monks. Elsewhere he affirms that in town of Oxyrhynchus, the monastic population of 5,000 monks at the end of the fourth century more numerous than the civilian population (Russell 1980:20).

Palladius declares that towards 390 A.D. there were about 5,000 monks in Nitria and 600 in Cellia. When St. Pachomius was alive, his congregation included 3,000 monks. Towards the end of the fourth century, 7,000 monks lived according to Pachomian rule. Nearly 1,300 lived at the Tabennese monastery alone (Meyer 1964:40,93). In the preface to his translation of St. Pachomius' rules, St. Jerome reports that 50,000 monks attended the chapter general of the congregation every year (Boon 1932:8). According to the Arabic *Life of St. Shenoute*, the monks who found themselves under the authority of this archimandrite were 2,200 in number (Amelineau 1907:143).



The cave of St. Macarius
recently discovered

2.4 The Aims and Motives of Monasticism

We should know that the motives of Coptic monasticism as expressed by the monks themselves are Biblical, spiritual and ascetic. There are many ideas about that:

2.4.1 Obedience to Christ's Command:

As a result of God's love, they obeyed His command to leave everything (Matthew 19.21, Mark 10.21, Luke 18.22) and preferred to live alone with their Lover; God. "We left everything and followed you" (Matthew 19:7).

St. Antony once said to the devil when he attacked him, "I do not run from your blows, for even if you give me more, nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ" (Gregg 1980:38). And he also said, "I do not now fear God, but I love Him, for love casts fear out of doors" (Waddell 1957:123).

St. Arsenius left people for the sake of God's love and when St. Marcus asked him, "wherefore do you flee from us?" he answered, "God knows that I love you: but I can not be with God and with men. A thousand and a thousand thousand of the angelic powers have one will: and men have many. Wherefore, I can not send God from me, and come and be with men" (Waddell 1957:124).

The Coptic Orthodox Church says in the prayer of the Fraction¹, for the Great Lent, in its Liturgy: "Fasting and prayer are those which the righteous, the just and the cross-bearers pursued, and dwelt in the mountains, deserts and holes of the earth, because of their love for Christ the King" (*Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil* 1992:296).

2.4.2 Unbloody Martyrdom:

As one of the sweetest fruits obtained from the persecution era against the Egyptian Church, Eusebius states that many Christians fled from the populated parts of Egypt to the surrounding deserts (Fr. Malaty 1986:3).

The persecution ceased but they preferred to settle there permanently to lead an "angelic" life devoting themselves to prayer and praising God. This happened with St. Paul

¹ Fraction: is a prayer said at the time of fraction of the Holy Bread near the end of the St. Basil liturgy.

of Thebes, who stayed in the desert for ninety years after the end of the persecution (Atiya 1991:1926).

By the end of the third century, monasticism was compared to martyrdom. It is then that Methodius Olympus writes that virgins will be the first to follow in the Lord's train into the kingdom of heaven,

Their martyrdom did not consist in enduring things that pain the body for a short period of time; rather it consisted in steadfast endurance throughout their whole lifetime, never once shrinking from the truly Olympian contest of being battered in the practice of chastity. Because they stood firm against the torments of pleasure, fear, sorrow and other vices, they carry off the highest honours of all by reason of their rank in the land of promise (Ramsey 1985:136).

This notion is repeated any number of times among the Fathers. St. Ambrose qualifies the relationship between martyrdom and virginity when he says that, "virginity is not praiseworthy because it is found in martyrs but because it itself makes martyrs" (:136). Virginity is not seen to be like martyrdom simply because it involves a complete struggle but also because it produces the same effect, death to self, expressed through the image of bodily death. Thus virginity, like monasticism, succeeds to the martyr's mantle, even though, as St. Augustine says, no one would dare consider virginity greater than martyrdom (:136).

An example for that is St. Antony the Great, the father of monasticism, who desired to be martyred, but as God did not plan it to be so, he suffered "the martyrdom of conscience. "St. Athanasius states: "When persecution finally ceased and Bishop Peter of blessed memory had suffered martyrdom, St. Antony left Alexandria and went back to his solitary cell, and there he was a daily martyr of his conscience, constantly fighting battles of faith. For he practised a zealous and more intense ascetic life."

Even in the second century amidst the severe waves of persecution, St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen spoke about asceticism as a daily practice of martyrdom. At the end of his "*Exhortation*", Origen raises the question: "What is it for us to be prepared for martyrdom, if in the end, martyrdom is not imposed on us? He does not hesitate to say that, if the preparation has been fervent enough, it (i.e. monasticism) could be a true "unbloody martyrdom" (Fr. Malaty 1986:3). The fathers of the desert were the successors

of the martyrs; they form the second generation of heroes of Christian intrepidity (Farag 1964:12).

The same teaching is often formulated by St. Cyprian. But already St. Clement of Alexandria had not hesitated to say that everyone could make his death a martyrdom provided that he was prepared for it with the fitting disposition (Bouyer 1960:210).

In the prayer of the consecration of the monk in the Coptic Church, they pray over him the prayers of the departed ones and he is considered from that moment as dead to the world. The church changes his name and gives him name of one of the saints as a mark that he is related now to the heavenly saints.

2.4.3 Life of Joy and Praising the Lord

Monks have desired to live the life of angels to praise the Lord day and night and for that reason they call monks "earthly angels or heavenly creatures" (Pope Shenouda 1992:27). Chitty (1966:31) said about Schehit, the centre of monasticism, that, "if you stood at the centre about the ninth hour, you would hear psalmody from every station until you thought you were up in Paradise."

The life of joy does not leave the monk even in his struggle against the Devil as what was said of St. Antony. "Antony remained and suffered no injury from the demons, and neither did he grow tired of the contest. His friends used to visit regularly, thinking they might find him dead, and they heard him singing, 'let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered...' He also said: All nations compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord I repulsed them" (Gregg 1980:41f).

Rufinus said, "the monks kept watch waiting for Christ like loyal sons waiting for their father." Some of the monks of Abba Apollo at Bawit stayed awake all night, "I saw them myself with my own eyes begin their hymns in the evening and not stop singing until the morning" (Russell 1980:22).

2.4.4 Life of Purity through Prayer

Monasticism in depth seeks total purity for the sake of unity with the Lord, through prayer. About prayer itself, the fathers had little to say. The life geared towards God was the prayer; and about contemplation, who could speak? Abba Arsenius prayed on Saturday evening with his hands stretched out to the setting sun, and he stayed there until the sun shone on his face on Sunday. The usual pattern was to say the Psalms, one after another, during the week, and to intersperse this with weaving ropes, sometimes saying "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me."

The aim was *hesychia*. This is quiet, the calm through the whole person that is like a still pool of water, capable of reflecting the sun. To be in true relationship with God, standing before him in every situation--that was the angelic life, the spiritual life, the monastic life, the aim and the way of the monk. It was life oriented towards God. "Unless a man can say, 'I alone and God are here', he will not find the prayer of quiet." Abba Antony said, "whatever you find in your heart to do in following God, that do, and remain within yourself in Him" (Ward 1975:xviii).

This personal integrity before God, without any disguises or pretences, is the essence of the spirituality of the desert. All ascetic effort, all personal relationships, life in all its aspects, was to be brought slowly into the central relationship with God in Christ.

The monks spent their whole life in the desert enjoying the presence of the Lord through prayer. By prayer they defeated the works of the demons (Gregg 1980:8) and opened heaven to bring the heavenly blessings. St. John of Lycopolis prayed for the coming of the flood of the Nile (Russell 1980:15). They considered themselves as the mediators between God and humanity and spent their life praying for the world.

2.4.5 Monastic life and Eschatological Attitude

Since the East is synonymous with paradise, we are made to recall still another monastic theme, which is that of monastic life as a return to paradise. Antony's settlement on the Inner Mountain is highly reminiscent of the situation in which the first parents lived before their fall from grace. St. Athanasius tells us that St. Antony planted a garden there, which is doubtless symbolic of Eden, and that he successfully rebuked wild animals that had come

into the garden and disturbed his plants, just as Adam and Eve had had dominion over the wild creatures with whom they lived.

This sway over animals is a relatively common idea in early monastic literature, as has already been noted. Abba Amoun, for example, was known to have summoned two large serpents from the desert to stand guard at his hermitage and protect him from robbers; by prayer he killed another serpent that was threatening the neighbouring countryside (Ramsey 1985:152).

Copts have this attitude not only in their worship, but also in their life. Due to this attitude many believers fled to the deserts not to escape from their responsibilities, but rather to struggle against darkness in order to discover the kingdom of God that dwells within their hearts. They became monks to attain the heavenly kingdom, which is not far from them.

Fr. Isaac the Syrian says, "if you are pure, heaven is within you; within yourself you will see angels and the Lord of angels." And of St. Pachomius it is recorded, "in the purity of his heart he saw the Invisible God as in a mirror" (Fr. Malaty 1986:4).

The historians frequently describe the lives of the desert fathers as a paradise. And indeed the anchorites attempted to become as innocent as Adam, by eliminating all vices and passions. To carry the analogy further, some of them received their food from an angel or a bird (e.g. St. Paul of Thebes).

The wild beasts obeyed them (Meyer 1964:66): "The desert for them was not only a restoration of the original Paradise, but also an anticipation of the future one. In a sense, the monks lived both before and after history, that is, removed from the temporal world of sin, living in the presence of Christ whom they saw spiritually and conversed with" (Fr. Malaty 1986:4).

St. Antony always reminded his disciples, "there is no need for us to go abroad on account of the Kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for virtue. For the Lord has told us before, the Kingdom of God is within you (Gregg 1980:46).

On hearing of the Egyptian hermits, one of the Gauls (France) said: "We Gauls ought not to be forced to live like angels" and St. John Cassian, who visited Egypt described the Egyptian monks as heavenly men or angels living on earth (Fr. Malaty 1986:4).

It was said of St. Antony, "He persuaded many to take up the solitary life, and so from then on, there were monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made a city by monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for the citizenship in the heavens (Gregg 1980:42f).

2.5 MONASTIC PRINCIPLES:

Whatever the monastic order is, wherever it was founded, or whatever the traditions in the monastery, monastic life always has the same four principles that every candidate has to be committed to. These four pillars of monasticism are celibacy (chastity), obedience, solitude and voluntary poverty. The monastic life derived these principles from the Biblical basis as I will indicate below. And Bouyer (1960:368) bears witness to this saying "nothing more purely Christian than the antecedents of monasticism, and nothing more purely evangelical than its primary motivations."

2.5.1 Celibacy (Chastity or Virginity):

One could begin with the relationship of virginity to God. Methodius of Olympus shows that the very word "virginity" (*Parthenia*) becomes "nearness to God" (*Parthia*) simply by changing one letter. This demonstrates that virginity "alone makes holy the one who possesses it and who has been initiated into its pure mysteries." St. Gregory of Nyssa elaborates on this aspect of holiness. Virginity, he says, is called the "uncorrupted" (*To aphthonon*); as such it is a participation in the uncorruptedness of God himself (Ramsey 1985:141).

For the Father has a Son, but has begotten Him in a virginal way, without passion, and the Holy Spirit is virginal as well. Virginity therefore gives us the opportunity to have fellowship with the holy God "It enjoys communion with the whole celestial nature, since it is free from passion it is always present to the power above" (:141).

But besides being in the likeness of God, "virginity bestows a certain disposition and power with regard to the divine life, furnishing those living in the flesh with the ability to assimilate themselves to spiritual reality". This is done by turning the soul away from earthly beauty and toward the contemplation of divine beauty, toward the contemplation of

a beauty that lies within the human soul itself once it has achieved the utmost possible purity and so is able to mirror the purity and beauty of God.

St. Ambrose emphasises a complementary aspect, the incarnational. For him virginity ascends into heaven in order to find there the Word of God and receive Him from the bosom of the Father unto itself. The pattern for this, of course, is our holy and pure mother, the Virgin Mary, in whose chaste body "the Word became flesh" (Ramsey 1985:142).

2.5.1.1 In the Biblical Tradition:

Celibacy is not a new idea in the New Testament. It was known from before. Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist were all celibate.

Chitty (1966:14) said, "the wilderness of Judaea is in itself a call to such a life. Its memories take us back to Elijah, Elisha, and St. John the Baptist--recognised from *Vita Pachomii* onwards as prototypes of the monks--and to our Lord's own temptation."

"For our constitution we need no other than the Divine writings", said St. Antony to his disciples (Farag 1964:13). From the beginning he was persuaded that the prophet Elijah was a model of ascetic life. He had his spirit fixed on this admirable figure in order to contemplate, as in a mirror, what had been his proper existence (:13).

St. Jerome discusses who was the first hermit, a question about which there has been much dispute. Some advanced the claims of Elijah, others those of John the Baptist; but the general opinion was in favour of St. Antony (White 1973:12).

2.5.1.2 In the Old Testament

The first commentators on the *Song of Songs*, Hippolytus and Origen, had understood this book of the Old Testament to be referring mystically to the marriage of Christ and the Church or to that of Christ and the soul of the Christian. By the end of the third century, with Methodius of Olympus, it was taken to have special reference to the virgin's relationship with Christ. So we find this interpretation in the later Fathers.

The virgin becomes Christ's own and follows the Lamb whenever he goes with a joy that is uniquely his own--with the joy of the virgins of Christ. St. Augustine says, almost in the second coming, "of Christ, in Christ, with Christ, after Christ, through Christ, for Christ." This is as it should be, for Christ is the "Archvirgin" and "the leader of the choir of virgins," as Methodius calls Him. He is the object of all the virgin's desires, "If you have disdained marriage with the sons of men."

St. Augustine writes, "...love with your whole heart the One who is fairer than the sons of men.... look upon the beauty of your lover... The very thing that the proud deride in him, see how beautiful it is!" His wounds, His scars, His blood all of this is lovely to the virgin" (Ramsey 1985:143).

In Isaiah, virgins are praised when it said:

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord surely separate me from his people" and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree". For thus says the Lord "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and hold fast my covenant, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name which shall not cut off. "And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant (Isaiah 56:3-6).

Here we ask who are the "eunuchs" who were praised by the Lord. Bromiley (1982:202) in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* lists this definition under the word "eunuch":

Jesus distinguishes three types of 'eunuchs': those who are so by birth, those who have been involuntarily castrated, and those who have "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:12)".

The last category is often interpreted figuratively rather than literally, in the sense that those who for the sake of the kingdom forego sexual life and marriage do so in order to focus their energies totally on a goal that reaches beyond the demand of existence-- the goal of establishing the kingdom of God on earth. A contemporary example of this last

group, familiar to Jesus, would have been the Qumran Essenes for whom celibacy was a part of the community discipline (Bromiley 1982:202).

2.5.1.3 In the New Testament:

There no doubt that Jesus Christ, our best example, was virgin, St. Mary and John the beloved were also virgins. Jesus Himself praised virginity when, "His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry."

But He said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs, who have been so from birth and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuch who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven... (Matthew 19:10-12).

The same principle was affirmed by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:6 "I say this by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." He continues in 1 Corinthians 6:25-40,

are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord.. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So that he who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

Bromiley (1985:627f) says,

In the New Testament, we find a somewhat different attitude toward marriage from the general stance of the Old Testament. Although marriage is still spoken of as a sacred institution and, in fact, the imagery of bridegroom and bride is used to describe the relationship between Christ and His Church- there are indications that the institution of marriage is not as decisive for the coming of the Kingdom as it was in the Old Testament. Here we find notable examples of celibacy: John the Baptist, the apostle Paul, and Jesus Himself. Some dispute the case of St.

Paul, but St. Paul's advice to the unmarried that they remain single "As I am" (1 Corinthians 7:8) makes this fairly clear, and it is not contradicted by other data.

In 1 Corinthians 7, St. Paul specially takes up the issue of celibacy as a "gift" (Gk. *Charisma*, v.7) that some people have and others do not. (Cf. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:12). The Church has generally understood this passage to refer to those who renounce marriage for the sake of the Kingdom; but also the theme of Isaiah 56:3-5.

For those who do not have this gift, Paul recommends marriage (1 Corinthians 7:9). For those who can bear it, however, he recommends the unmarried state (vv. 1,7f.,25ff.). For this reason our life should be free from the present time and direct itself toward life eternal (Hebrews 11:13-15).

Thus the general principle is that the Christian community should be governed in conduct not by the norms of society in this present age but by the norms of the eternal Kingdom, "for the form of this world is passing away" (vv. 29-31).

And St. Paul clearly understands marriage as belonging to the *schema* that is passing away. Jesus Himself stated this clearly in Matthew 22:30 (cf. Mark 12:25): "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" For this reason St. Paul sees advantages in remaining single. It allows one more detachment from worldly affairs and afford the opportunity for total preoccupation with the things of God (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

St. John Chrysostom (1986:25f.) said about 1 Corinthians 7, 'if you are searching for the best and most lofty path, then do not take a woman at all. St. Paul speaks generally, 'it is well for man....' He says not only for a priest. Later on he remarks, 'are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage.' I say this by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am (In state of continence)."

St. Paul often uses himself as an example when speaking of difficult matters: "Be imitators of me." Then he speaks to the virgins saying, "virginity does not simply mean sexual abstinence. She who is anxious about worldly affairs is not really a virgin. In fact, he says that this is the chief difference between a wife and a virgin. He does not mention marriage or abstinence, but attachment as opposed to detachment from worldly cares. Sex

is not evil, but it is a hindrance to someone who desires all this to a life of prayer (St. Chrysostom 1968:25f.).

All these verses affirm the idea that celibacy was something favourable since the first century for Christianity; long before the founding of monasticism towards the end of the third century.

The same idea was expressed by St. John in Revelation 14:1-5, "These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins". Wallerstedt (1993:616) said: "in the Old Testament prostitution and adultery symbolise idolatry, and virginity signifies faithfulness to God."

2.5.1.4 In the Early Church.

The attitude of the early Church towards self-mutilation appears to have been ambivalent. The Matthew 19:12 saying wielded a strong influence and in early exegesis was frequently interpreted literally. Nevertheless, only a few early Christians took the drastic step of self-castration in hope of avoiding temptation or sexual sin. The great theologian and linguist Origen, A.D. 185-254, being the most celebrated example. Canons were eventually adopted in the fourth century barring from the Christian service those who had emasculated themselves (Bromiley 1982:202).

2.5.1.5 In the Sayings of the Fathers:

The first Fathers in the church praised virginity (celibacy) in their writings and encouraged believers in the Church towards it and praised it like martyrdom. In St. Augustine's speech to his sister Merzellina he said, "virginity is not worthy the praising because it exists in the martyrs, but because it makes the martyrs. Virginity has brought from heaven what could be corresponded on earth" (Bishop Bakhomios 1979:11).

In the words of St. Jerome (c. 342-420), "it is a mark of great faith and of great virtue, to be the pure temple of God to offer oneself a whole burning-offering. And according to Apostle Paul, to be holy both in body and in spirit" (Atiya 1991:1668).

The Fathers also looked to virginity spiritually to explain its deep meaning. Virginity was the central thrust of their life rather than just a single virtue. A poem of St. Gregory Nazianzen praises virginity. "For me there is only one law, one thought-that, filled with

divine love, I might journey from here to the light-bearing God who reigns in heaven" (Ramsey 1985:146).

As St. Gregory of Nyssa explains, virginity is like a pipe in which a heavy flow of water is contained, and which, despite immense pressure, does not permit any of the water to escape, but pushes it upward, denying the pull of gravity. Thus virginity collects all the energies of the soul in a single great drive, rather than permitting them to be dissipated in a vast array of smaller drives, and so by the very strength of these energies the soul so pushed upward to an exalted love. This drive simply excludes everything else in the force of its Godward movement and makes marriage, with its concerns and preoccupation, impossible (Ramsey 1985:146).

2.5.2 Solitude:

The word "*monk*" means hermit or person living alone. This second principle of monastic life expresses the feeling that God's children are "expatriates" in this world. In addition to this, the spread of persecution and sins in the world have strengthened this movement in the church. The life of the Lord Jesus as our example shows us how he went several times to the mountain to pray alone (Mark 6:46 ; Luke 6:12). He taught in the temple in the morning, and at night He went to the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37).

Also before His public preaching, He spent forty days on the mountain (Luke 4:1-2), and His glory was manifested in a quiet place on a mountain. In the Old Testament, Elijah lived for a period alone by the brook of Cherith (1 King 17). John the Baptist was a man who lived in the wilderness.

In the New Testament we find that St. Paul when he was called, went directly to the Arabian desert to spend quiet time with the Lord (Galatians 1:15-18). From his epistles we also know that every now and then he had his quiet time with the Lord (Acts 20:13-15).

Barclay (1975:242) says in his commentary on the book of Acts, "the distance from Troas to Assos is twenty miles walking and thirty miles by boat because the person should pass around the Head of Laktiem against powerful Northeast winds. St. Paul arranged to walk so he could meet them in Assos. Why did he do so? Perhaps he needed some quiet

time with the Lord to prepare himself for the coming days or he desired to walk with the Lord Jesus Christ before meeting the people (My translation).

While still living in the palace, Abba Arsenius prayed to God in these words, "Lord, lead me in the way of salvation" and a voice came saying to him "Arsenius, flee from the people and you will be saved" (Ward 1975:8).

The fathers also agreed with St. John Saba on the principle "I cut off my speech with people to talk to you and I close my door so You would open Your door for me" (Bishop Bakhomios 1979:12). Solitude gives a person the chance to go to the inner self and meet God who is living in his or her heart. In the solitude of his own cell, the monk finds solace in prayer and the study of the scriptures and devotional literature.

St. John the Apostle was given his revelation when he was alone in Patmos. Solitude enables us to receive God's revelation. St. Antony said, "Just as a fish would die out of water, a monk would perish if he tarried long away from his cell" (Atiya 1991:1668). And he continued, "Fish, if they tarry on dry land die; even so monks that tarry outside their cell or abide with men of the world fall away from their vow of quiet. As a fish must return to the sea, so must we to our cell; lest it befall that by tarrying without, we forget the watch within" (Waddell 1957:63).

The desert offered the atmosphere for this solitude. Abba Poemen, the disciple of St. Antony, said that in the desert, monks are "Alone with the Alone" (Farag 1964:72). Abba Evagrius the monk said, "Solitude with love purifies the heart (Palmer 1973:115).

It was said of Abba John the Dwarf that when he went to church at Scetis, he heard some brethren arguing, so he returned to his cell. He went around it three times and then went in. Some brethren who had seen him, wondered why he had done this, and they went to ask him. He said to them, "my ears were full of that arguments, so I circled round in order to purify them, and thus I entered my cell with my mind at rest (Ward 1975:77).

2.5.3 Voluntary Poverty:

The third principle deals with the money and property. In monasticism a person gives up all his or her possessions. Our Lord Jesus Christ made this definite in Matthew 6:19-25, 19:23-26,29 and Mark 10:21 and Luke 16:13, 18:18-25. This conduct was very clear among the Christians in the early Church when they shared their possessions (Acts 4&5).

St. Paul deals with the same principle, "For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7). Meyer (1979:582) said that, "Godliness truly is great gain. It makes us content with what we have, and it opens to us stores of blessedness which the wealth of a Croesus can not buy. It is good to have just what is necessary. More than that breeds anxiety. Remember that you can carry nothing out of this world except your character." This principle was in the heart of the fathers. Godliness is gain more than money, so they kept themselves free from caring for collecting money. This, however, did not let them neglect work and live a lazy life. Instead they worked very hard using the time of work in praying and contemplation. At the same time, they kept for themselves what was necessary to cover their needs and gave the rest to the poor and the needy. This complements the sayings of St. Paul about work and support of the poor (2 Thessalonians 3:12; Ephesians 4:28).

For this cause, the solitaries gave up possessions as a main step to show their acceptance to the angelic life, e.g. the life of angels or heavenly life. Giving up possessions will be rewarded by God's glory. It is an essential step for the monk to leave everything and refuse to have anything. This has been accepted by the Egyptian government and incorporated in the civil law that a monk does not inherit and that his possessions are not inherited.

Poverty has been, in some ways, the truest touchstone and the most typical quality of the monk. It was the call to poverty, as it had been practised in the apostolic Church, that had transformed St. Antony from a pious young man into a monk. And when St. Antony died he had but four possessions to bequeath to others—two sheepskins, a cloak and a hair shirt (Gregg 1980:97). St. Antony said:

Those who count as a misfortune the loss of money, or children, or some other possessions, should know, first, that we ought to be satisfied with what God provides; and then, when required, we ought to be ready to give this back with equanimity, not tormenting ourselves with grief at its loss, or rather at giving it back; like those who, for a time, use what is not theirs, and then return it (Palmer 1973:25).

Cassian tells us that the fathers owned nothing but an undergarment, an outer garment, a pair of shoes, a sheepskin and a small rush mat. Everything else was held in common, and no one would ever say, "This is mine." If someone did, he would be obliged to perform a penance (Ramsey 1985:155). Poverty, however, was but one aspect of the

broader life of asceticism that the monk embraced. Asceticism consisted in fasting, continual prayer and solitude.

Abba Isaac, priest of Cells said to the brethren, "Our Fathers and Abba Pambo wore old garments woven from palm fronds and mended all over; now you are foppishly dressed. Go away from here, leave this place." When they prepared to go harvesting he said to them, "I am not giving you any more directions because you would not keep them" (Ward 1975:86).

A brother said to Abba Serapion, "Give me a word." The old man said to him, "What shall I say to you? You have taken the living of the widows and orphans and put it on your shelves." For he saw them full of books (Ward 1975:190).

It was said of Abba Macarius, once he left his cell and returned to find someone stealing whatever he had in his cell. So he stood by as if himself had been a stranger, and helped load the animal with all steals and led him out, saying, "We brought nothing into the world. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away: and as He willed, so it come to pass. Blessed be the Lord in all things" (Waddell 1957:140).

2.5.4 Obedience:

The final principle of monastic life is obedience. Obedience was the essential purpose which the Desert Fathers ascribed to the relationship which was formed between an Abba and a disciple. It is clear that for a new disciple, the first aim of living with or near an Abba would be to learn, from an older and more experienced monk, the basic practices of the monastic life, such as how to fast and to spend his time alone in his cell, and how to do his manual work.

This is assumed in the *Apophthegmata*, and sayings which discuss the importance a disciple's relationship with his Abba. It almost always refers to something more than these purely practical aspects of teaching. The relationship is seen as a form of training through obedience. A disciple's attainment of virtues and qualities is the aim of the monastic life is directly dependent on this relationship and directly affects his standing before God.

The old men used to say that if someone has faith in someone else, and makes himself subject to him, he does no need to apply himself to the commandments of God, but only to give up his will to his father, and he will not suffer reproach from God; for God requires nothing more from beginners than the labour which comes through obedience (Chadwick & Williams 1993:27).

Obedience and readiness to comply with and submit to the guidance and commands of his abbot starts when he is still a neophyte, but continues throughout his life.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has offered an example, "Though He were a Son, yet learned obedience" (Hebrews 5:8). "He became obedient into death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). This is why the Bible ordered us to obey our spiritual fathers (Hebrews 13:17).

Mar Philoxinas said that, "Obedience which is the daughter of humbleness not for man to do whatever he desires but it is better for him to cut his desires. The act of obedience is not only offering sacrifices, but also to offer himself as a holy sacrifice to the Lord (Romans 12:1,2)" (Bishop Bakhomios 1979:12).

Among Coptic monks, St. John the Short is considered a paragon of virtue and obedience. It is related that his mentor St. Poemen once handed him a dry and withered branch asking him to water it regularly. Though water was not easily available, St. John continued to look after it until the tree flourished and gave fruit. St. Poemen offered its fruits to the monks saying, "eat the fruit of obedience" (Atiya 1991:1668).

Once Abba Arsenius said to Abba Alexander, "when you have cut your palm leaves, come and eat with me, but if visitors come, eat with them." Now Abba Alexander worked slowly and carefully. When the time came, he had not finished the palm leaves and wishing to follow the old man's instruction, he waited until he had finished them. When Abba Arsenius saw that he was late, he ate, thinking that he had his guests. But Abba Alexander, when at last he had finished, came away.

And the old man said to him, "Have you had visitors? "No," he said. "Then why did you not come?" The other replied, "You told me to come after I had cut the palm leaves; and following your instructions, I did not come, because I had not finished." The old man marvelled at his exactitude and said to him, "Break your fast at once so as to celebrate the synaxis untroubled, and drink some water, otherwise your body will soon suffer" (Ward 1975:10f).

2.6 Origins of Coptic Monasticism:

What is the perfect Christian life? Can it be lived? If so, how? Does it entail the transformation of all human society? Can individuals be immersed in a prevailing or partially un-Christian society without compromising their principles and be fully Christian? To be fully Christian, is it necessary to withdraw from society? If so, must one live alone, or must those intent on the complete Christian life seek it in community with others?

If life in community is necessary, can there be a community, a human society, which will fully embody the Christian ideal? In one form or another these questions have been raised by Christians from the outset and have been recurrent themes throughout the centuries. Beginning in the third century, these questions became insistent and in the following two centuries they were increasingly demanding.

At first monasticism was primarily a lay movement, but it changed to become the secret power of the Church. Monasticism has displayed many variations and has been one of the chief ways in which the vitality of the Christian faith has found expression (Latourette 1975:221).

In the beginning of the fourth century, monasticism appears in the history of the church, and thenceforth occupies a distinguish place. Beginning in Egypt, it spread as an irresistible tide over the East and the West, and continued to be the chief repository of the Christian life (Schaff 1910:149).

The native land of monastic life was Egypt, the land where Oriental and Grecian literature, philosophy, and religion, Christian Orthodoxy and Gnostic heresy, met both in friendship and in hostility. Monasticism was favoured and promoted here by the deep spirituality of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the heritage of its fathers.

Egypt was the birthplace of monasticism by climate and geographic features, by the oasis-like seclusion of the country, by the bold contrast of the barren deserts with the fertile valley of the Nile, by the superstition, the contemplative turn, by the example of the Therapeute, and by the moral principles of the Alexandrine fathers. Alian says of the Egyptians, that they bear the most exquisite torture without a murmur, and would rather be tormented to death than compromise truth. Such natures, once seized with religious enthusiasm, were eminently qualified for saints of the desert (:155).

Numerous theories, which have given rise to an abundant literature, have been advanced since the end of the nineteenth century to explain the origins of monasticism in Egypt, so the issue is complicated and not easy to be discussed in details in this brief study.

Some explanations appeal to a revival of the way of life of the Therapeutae described by Philo, who were Jewish ascetics living in the neighbourhood of Alexandria in the first century. Other theories speak of the survival of certain practices of the ancient Egyptian religion (recluses of Serapis); or the influence of the Manichaean missions that reached Egypt from the third century; or more recently, since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, the influence of Gnostic sects. None of these explanations is completely convincing primarily because the originality of the Christian contribution is largely ignored in these proposals.

Professor Habashi (1948:182) emphasises that the Coptic Fathers lived isolated in the Egyptian villages separated from the outer world. Therefore they had not been influenced in their monastic life by the other monastic systems which were present already in India, West Asia and Greece. Habashi (1948:183) added that Coptic monasticism's principles were derived from Christianity directly, so they were different completely from the motivations on which non-Christian monastic communities established their views of asceticism and abstinence. These non-Christian groups were present in some Egyptian towns or near them during the Hellenic and Roman age. The famous groups were those who worshipped Serapis. This community was named the "Katoikoi", who were living beside the Egyptian temples especially in Serapium Manf. Another group, the mediators and seekers of healing from the psychic diseases whose name was the "Therapeutae", lived in the suburbs especially near the Mariot Lake shores in the western part of Alexandria.

The beginnings of the monastic movement are obscure, even though it is clear that a number of different factors contributed to the shape that it took. In this study, however, the focus is not on the historical origins of the movement, but on the mission of the Coptic monks in the 4th and 5th centuries, when it was already well established. St. Antony is considered to be "the father of the monks", and Chitty (1966:3) affirms that "for as yet there was no such custom." Indeed St. Athanasius remarks that before St. Antony "No monk knew at all the great desert" (Gregg 1980:31f). There is no reason to doubt St.

Antony's reputation as such a pioneer, nor to doubt this marked a new epoch in Christian experience" (:8f)

But the life of St. Antony bears witness that when he was converted to an ascetic life in 270 A.D., there were ascetics who had already withdrawn from the villages. The new feature with St. Antony--unless he was preceded in this way of life by St. Paul of Thebes--is that, instead of remaining near the village as the other ascetics did, he went into the interior of the desert and practised there an "Anachoresis that grew ever greater. This anachoresis is, in fact, what characterises monasticism properly so called" (Atiya 1991:1661).

Cassian agrees with all other ancient authorities in asserting the St. Paul and St. Antony were the first to take this step. They did so, he assures us, not out of cowardice nor through disgust with the world, but out of a desire to live in conditions which made it possible to live the higher life and to render the complete service to God (White 1973:11).

There are many factors which affected the formation of Coptic monasticism:

- 1) Ancient Egyptians were deeply religious people and if we follow the history of ancient Egypt we will discover how Egyptians established temples and kept mummies because they believed in the life after death. Egyptians believed that the life in the world is not the only life, so some of them abstained from the world's pleasure, looking for the life after death. Later on when they had adopted Christianity it was not difficult for them to strengthen their feeling for the coming life and prepare themselves by living the ascetic life (Habashi 1948:184).
- 2) The period of the Hellenic and Roman invasion of Egypt was full of oppression and wickedness which led many Egyptians to escape from the foreign evils through the monastic solitary life in the desert.
- 3) As a result of the religious persecution from the Roman emperors against Christians, especially in the third century, many Christians fled to the desert to get rid of the oppression. When the oppression stopped some returned to their normal life while others preferred the fellowship with the Lord in the desert than the return to the world. Others

who saw the heroic life of martyrs desired to imitate them but because the persecution was over they chose the monasticism as an unbloody martyrdom (Habashi 1948:185).

4) Certainly the personality and the life of the Coptic monastic leaders were powerful factors in the formation and stability of the Coptic monasticism. They drew people to them not through their science, because most of them were illiterate, but through the purity of their hearts and pity of their lives. Wisdom poured from their tongues in a natural way. Their purity, holiness and miracles all these drew the admiration of the people to monasticism (:186).

5) Coptic monasticism believed in the equality between the poor and the rich, the educated and the non-educated and all of them lived under one roof in love and harmony. This prepared Coptic monasticism to be a favourable life and near for the people, so when St. Antony began his monastic movement thousands enrolled joyfully in it.

All the previous factors help us to understand why the ideas of asceticism, abstinence and the pursuit of the spiritual life which Christianity practised suited the Egyptians. So they opened their ears and hearts to these principles.

The political, social and economic factors also played a role in developing Coptic monastic ideas and principles to reach lastly to their present deep form. Eventually Coptic monastic could establish a unique system of fellowship with the Lord which drew the admiration and praise of the whole world and became a blessing to world Christianity (My translation) (Habashi 1948:188).

2.7 KEY FIGURES:

2.7.1 ST. PAUL OF THEBES

Recorded in the *Life of St. Paul the First Anchorite*, written in Latin by St. Jerome (375-377 A.D.), we recognise that St. Paul was the first anchorite known all over Egypt for having travelled to the eastern desert. St. Paul, a native of lower Thebaid in Egypt, was highly skilled in both Greek and Egyptian learning.

He came into a rich inheritance when he was sixteen years old with the death of his parents. During the persecution of Decius (250 A.D.) he fled to the desert, as his brother

in-law threatened to betray him. There he lived in a cave that was shaded by a palm tree and furnished with a spring (Atiya 1991:1926).

After persecution, he so enjoyed his life of solitude and contemplation that he remained there until his death, about the year 341 A. D. So he lived there over ninety years. The Lord did not allow him to depart from this world without St. Antony discovering this (Lamp Saint) in the last days of his life. The Lord guided him to visit St. Paul, in his cave. After spending the night in vigil, St. Paul informed St. Antony that he was about to die and St. Antony should bury him.

St. Antony was to fetch the cloak that St. Athanasius had given him to wrap St. Paul's body. So St. Antony returned for the cloak, and once more undertook the arduous journey to St. Paul's cave. Even before reaching his destination, he had the vision of St. Paul's ascension to heaven, and arrived to find his body in the attitude of prayer. Two lions arrived to help dig the grave, and St. Antony buried St. Paul. Taking St. Paul's tunic, he returned to his heritage. So he handed us his history which was written by St. Jerome (Waddell 1957: 27f).

Through this story, which was told by St. Jerome, we can say that St. Antony, as the father of the monastic family, received the blessing of the complete eremite life from the blessed hermit to deposit it within his monks' hearts. As heavenly creatures and faithful departed ones sent their representatives--angels and apostles-- to venerate this saintly life of St. Paul and his departure so the visible church also sent St. Antony for the same reason (Fr. Malaty 1988:13f).

2.7.2 ST. ANTONY

St. Antony is, generally, considered the Patriarch (Father) of the monastic family (Waddell 1957: 29). St. Antony was born of Christian parents about 251 A.D., in Coma (Chitty 1966:208), now known as "Kemn-el-Arouse" in Middle Egypt.

After experiencing the death of his parents when he was eighteen years of age, he was left as a guardian for his younger and only sister, called Dious. One day about six months later when he entered the church he was struck by the reading of the Gospel in which our Lord speaks to the rich young man, "If you would be perfect, go sell all you have, give to

the poor and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). He took this advice seriously, as a personal invitation addressed to him by God. He sold about 300 acres of fertile land, gave most of it to the poor keeping back only a little for his sister. He then placed his sister in the charge of a community of virgins or nunnery.

He began to live the ascetic life "before his own life, for monasteries were not as yet numerous in Egypt", and anyone who turned to this form of life lived "not far from his own village." The young Antony took for his model an ascetic who was a holy man (White 1973:13). This was the custom of young ascetics from the beginning, namely to study under a master or "guru" in order to learn the principles of spiritual life, prayer and fasting (Fr. Malaty 1986:18). Here he worked for his living and for alms to give to the poor. He fortified himself against all worldly ties, and prayed continually.

After a while, St. Antony left to strike out on his own in the western desert, and took shelter in an abandoned tomb carved in the side of a mountain. In this solitude he fought off temptations of the flesh and demonic attacks. He was about thirty-five (in 285 A.D.) when he left his retreat to move to the east bank of the Nile to the "Outer Mountain" at Pispir in the Eastern Desert (Gregg 1980:40) where he lived in complete solitude in an abandoned fort or watch-tower (White 1973:13). After 20 years, his reputation attracted followers who settled near him, and wished to copy his holy life. In 305 A.D. the followers broke down the door of his retreat and St. Anthony became their leader, teaching them the ascetic life constantly by word and example. "St. Antony's discourse to the monks" (Gregg 1980:43-64) is perhaps the first rule proposed for an embryonic monastery.

He said: "The Scriptures are really sufficient for our instruction, yet it is well for us to encourage each other in the faith, and to employ words to stimulate ourselves. Be you, therefore, like children and bring to your father what you know and tell it. While I, being your senior, share with you my knowledge and my experience" (Fr. Malaty 1986:19).

Five years later, he again retired into solitude in the Inner Mountain (Mount Qolozum), 20 miles from the Dead Sea, near the place where today stands the monastery of St. Antony.

It was there that he lived for about forty years, until his death. He maintained himself with the work of his hands and the produce of his garden or with what his disciples brought

him (Atiya 1991:149). Thus, St Antony's followers formed an order or family of which he was the head. So it was by accident and not by design, and certainly not in imitation of pre-existing models, that Christian monasticism as an organised force developed out of the asceticism of individuals (White 1973:14).

So St. Antony was not only the father of monks, but of monasticism itself. He was a miracle in his age, the mere looking to his face filled the heart with joy as one of his disciples told him. His silent life was a sermon which taught thousands (Pope Shenouda 1993:23).

Anchoritism did not make St. Anthony a contemplative unconcerned with the fate of his brothers; it made him a spiritual father beyond all others. He felt the responsibility to teach others the same angelic life. (Bouyer 1960: 315).

He escaped from the cares of the world but not from love. Thus he was obliged to visit Alexandria during the persecution against Christians, engineered by the Roman ruler Maximin Daja in 316 A.D. His purpose was to offer himself for martyrdom, if the Lord willed it. He spent his time "ministering to the confessors in the mines and prisons" (Gregg 1980:65). But to his grief, it did not please God that he should die a martyr. When the persecution ended, he returned to his cell to be a "daily martyr to his conscience, ever fighting the battles of faith." Again he visited Alexandria to support Pope Athanasius against heresy (Arianism) in 352. Pagans and Christians alike rushed out to greet the holy old man, but he soon returned to the desert, for he felt like a fish out of water in the towns (:70). From every part of the world people came to him --even to the innermost part of the desert-- seeking cures of the body, mind and soul.

2.7.3 ST. MACARIUS THE GREAT

The life story of St. Macarius (the Great), "one of the greatest desert fathers of the Coptic church", was told in the *Vita Macarii* by Abba Serapion, the fourth-century bishop of Thmuis who was a disciple of St. Antony and a friend of St. Macarius (Meinardus 1989:72). The elder Macarius introduced the hermit life in the frightful desert of Scetis (Schaff 1910:190).

The saint of Scetis was the son of a village priest. His parents' property was confiscated, and St. Macarius was born into poverty. He learned the Scriptures and was ordained a reader. As was the custom, his parents decided he should marry, but St. Macarius avoided associating with his wife because of his high esteem for virginity. He earned a subsistence by going out with the caravans to the desert of Natrun to fetch salt (Meinardus 1989:72).

On one occasion the caravan camped in the vicinity of the *wadi*, or valley which was to become his future abode. While he was asleep, he had a vision in which an angel promised that his followers would inhabit that land. On his return home, his wife was stricken with a fever, and died soon afterwards.

After distributing his possessions among the poor, St. Macarius settled as a solitary near a neighbouring village. A girl from this village accused St. Macarius of seducing her, whereupon the villagers hung sooty pots and pans around his neck and beat him, saying: "This monk has seduced our daughter." The girl bore a child, but confessed then that another man was the father. St. Macarius' reputation was restored, and the people began to revere him for the way in which he had borne the false accusation so meekly.

This experience led him to the inner Desert of Scetis, where, at that time, no ascetics had settled. He became the pioneer of the settlement which was to produce so many saints in the centuries that followed. His first settlement was in the vicinity of the present Monastery of al-Baramus. It was here that St. Macarius gave guidance and counsel to the two "Little Strangers" from overseas, Maximus and Domitius (Meinardus 1989:72).

After the death of the Roman princes, St. Macarius was led by an angel to a rock south of the *wadi*. The angel said unto him: "Begin to make for thyself a dwelling at this place, and build a church, for certainly after a while, a number of people will inhabit this place." This church, with the cells around it, forms the nucleus of the present monastery.

However, although a community of monks grew up around him, St. Macarius lived as an anchorite, and he discovered the true concept of anchorism that it was not merely an isolation from men, but a sincere desire for unity with God, the lover of mankind.

The true hermit flees bodily from other people, but practically he loves everyone. The successful leader of hundreds of ascetics, could have created a community of love through

himself as an example, and through his preaching (Fr. Malaty 1986:48). For a long time St. Macarius ate only once a week, and slept standing and leaning on a staff, an example for all to behold (Schaff 1910:166). St. Macarius was ordained a priest, perhaps in 340 A.D., when at the age of forty, he attained the grace of healing and predictions (Chitty 1966:34).

He was greatly influenced by St. Anthony the Great and visited him at least twice (Fr. Malaty 1986:34). Knowing that St. Anthony had long dwelt in the "Inner Desert", St. Macarius wanted to obtain a rule of life from him. He became St. Anthony's disciple, who was instructed in the lore of monastic life. Subsequently St. Macarius went again to St. Anthony for support and consolation. St. Antony invested him with the monastic habit and presented with a staff which St. Anthony had long possessed (White 1973:67).

In 374 A.D. the emperor Valens expelled the Orthodox from Alexandria and the rest of Egypt. St. Macarius was banished to an island. A few years later, however he returned to the Desert of Scetis.

Abba Serapion relates that at the death of the saint, "the monks came from their cells and threw themselves upon his holy body ... and placed his holy body in a cave near the church which he had built" (Meinardus 1989:72).

Though he had instructed his disciples to hide his body, "people from Chechouir, his country, came and gave to his disciple, John, the gold which he was forbidden to love, and he showed them the tomb of the saint. They took him to the town and built a church in his memory, where he remained buried for about 170 years, (probably 270 years) until the time of the domination of the Arabs. As to his disciple John, because of his love for wealth, he was attacked by elephantiasis after the death of our father Macarius" (:72).

St. Macarius was succeeded by Abba Paphnutius. Abba Bishoi, in his *Life of the Greek Saints Maximus and Domitius*, writes: "Abba Paphnutius, the disciple of Abba Macarius, became the father of Scetis after him..." (:72). Abba Serapion regards Abba Paphnutius as the greatest of Macarius' disciples.

The monks called the *hegoumenos* (Abbot) of St. Macarius monastery, the father of Scetis. Abba Paphnutius, born between 301 and 311 A.D., was a follower of St. Antony, and retired to the desert. He could expound the Old and the New Testaments without reading from them.

It is said that St. Macarius wrote many "Spiritual Homilies"; sayings, letters, prayers, and treatises, but neither Palladius nor Rufinus know of any literary works attributed to him. These homilies have a pre-eminent position in the history of early Christian mysticism and have proved a source of inspiration to modern mystics (Fr. Malaty 1986:56).

2.7.4 ST. PACHOMIUS

He is the founder of the Coenobite system or cloister life (Schaff 1910:157).

2.7.4.1 His Boyhood:

About 285 or 292 A.D. Pachomius was born in Upper-Egypt of pagan parents (Latourette 1975:227), but he hated paganism from his boyhood. As a child, his parents took him with them somewhere on the river to sacrifice to those (creatures) that are in the waters. When those (creatures) raised their eyes in the water, they saw the boy, took fright and fled. Then one who presided over the sacrifice shouted, "Chase the enemy of the gods out of here, so that they will cease to be angry with us, for because of him they do not come up. At once his parents reproached him, "Why are the gods angry with you? The boy sighed after God and went away home" (Veilleux 1980:25).

Another day his parents brought him with them to the temple, where they were going to offer a sacrifice. After the sacrifice, they gave him a drink of the wine which had been poured for the demons. But at once he vomited it out vigorously. His parents were distressed about him, because their gods were hostile to him (:25).

Long before he was converted to Christianity, he sought a virtuous life and longed for chastity. He related the following story to his disciples. On one occasion his father asked him to carry some food to their labourers in the field. As he went along the road the devil set on him a crowd of demons in the form of dogs intent on killing him. But the boy raised his eyes to heaven and wept. At once they scattered. Because he arrived late to the field, he had to spend the night there. A beautiful daughter of a labourer tried to entice him to her bed, but he rebuked her, saying; "Let me not commit that impure act! Have I a dog's eyes that I should go and sleep with my sister?" So God saved him from her hands. Then he fled, running away to his home (Veilleux 1980:26).

2.7.4.2 His Conversion:

The Roman Emperor, Maximin, ordered the prefect of Egypt to send some of the troops based in Egypt to put an end to a revolt in Ethiopia. The troops were selected and Pachomius was among them. On their way, they had to stop at Latopolis (Esna) in Upper Egypt. There, Pachomius was impressed by the characteristics of the local people who brought the soldiers food and drink.

Pachomius asked about the people and he was told that Christians were merciful to strangers and to all people, even their enemies. Again he asked, "What would a Christian be?" and was told, "They are men who bear the name of Christ, the only begotten-Son of God, and do good to all men, hoping in Him who made heaven and earth and us men". Hearing of such grace, his heart was filled with fear of God and with joy (Chitty 1966:7).

Withdrawing apart from the camp, he spent the whole night praying before God saying: "My Lord Jesus Christ, God of all saints, may your goodness quickly come upon me to deliver me from this affliction, and I will serve the humankind all the days of my life" (Veilleux 1980:27). Before reaching Ethiopia, the troops were ordered back because the revolt had been quelled. Back in "Chenoboskion" he was baptised (about 307 A.D.), after spending some time as catechumen.

2.7.4.3 Joining the Monastic Life:

St. Pachomius spent three years moving from one village to another, helping the needy and comforting the afflicted, even though his heart was flamed by God's love, aiming to devote every moment to prayer and singing hymns. Many peasants loved him and followed him, leaving their villages behind.

However, he decided to be a disciple of a hermit named Abba Palaemon, who lived in Kasr-El-Sayad. St. Palaemon refused to open the door of his cave to Pachomius, advising him against monasticism. However, because of Pachomius' persistence, the hermit received him kindly (Fr. Malaty 1986:27), and clothed him in the monk's habit ("schema") (Chitty 1966:9). Under the guidance of St. Palaemon, Pachomius practised a severe order of asceticism.

2.7.4.4 Founder of the Coenobite System:

Although St. Pachomius was very happy with this angelic life, he was sad because many believers longed for this way of life but could not practice it. Anyhow, he did not cease from praying on their behalf. One day when St. Pachomius had wandered far in search of wood, he came upon a desert village of Tabennesis on the banks of the Nile near where the river forms a bend north of Thebes. An angel of God appeared to him saying, "the will of God is to minister to the race of men, to reconcile them to him" (Chitty 1966:10).

Palladius said that an angel delivered a brazen tablet to St. Pachomius with the rule of his monasteries inscribed upon it (Russell 1980:88f). Sozomen affirms that the tablet was still preserved carefully (Schaff 1979:292). These rules could be observed even by ordinary Christians.

On his return to his cave, he related everything to his spiritual father, Abba Palaemon, who was very pleased, saying that it is God's will that a monastery would be established with this order. It is a wonder that a very old hermit who had spent all his life under the anchorite order and who had never heard of this new form of monasticism did not oppose his disciple. Instead he blessed him and helped him to build a little lodge and then went back to his own place, declaring his sincere desire to help him establish this new order.

After a further period of asceticism, resulting in purity of heart and the conquest of demons, St. Pachomius began to attract ascetic followers in a more organised manner. The early *Sahidic Lives* provide a story, apparently distinct from that series of events, of how local villagers came to live with St. Pachomius, forming a little colony of anchorites. The testimony talks about how they pooled their resources and ate food together, being in other respects independent and how they regarded St. Pachomius as their father, although they treated him with some disdain, and how he acted for the most part as their servant (Rousseau 1985:60).

Soon some anchorites living in the area came to visit St. Pachomius and erected some cabins nearby. By 315 A.D., St. Pachomius had a small group of disciples, who would eventually number in the thousands. When Tabennesis proved too small for the growing

number of monks, St. Pachomius found it necessary to start other communities, beginning at Phabou not far away.

2.7.4.5 A Wiser Leader:

St. Pachomius was a successful abbot, for he taught his disciples more by his behaviour than by his words. Some of his disciples tell us that they were attracted by his example, saying, "We used to think that all the saints were made by God from their mother's womb so holy and unalterable ... , now we see the goodness of God in the case of our father that from pagan parents he has become so God fearing and is clad in all commandments of God. Let us die and live with this man; for he guides us rightly unto God" (Chitty 1966:2).

The following are some examples of his interest to teach his monks through his behaviour:

A. Once while walking, one of the young monks asked him not to carry his own food since he was carrying enough for both of them. The abbot refused saying: "It is written that the Lord is like his brethren in everything, how can I, the weak one, distinguish myself from my brethren and not carry my food?...It is written also, that he who desires to be great has to be a servant" (Fr. Malaty 1986:28).

B. While he was collecting the harvest on an island, he asked his disciple Tadrous (Theodore) to unfold a mat to lie on, for he was very sick. Tadrous tried to put a carpet under it, but he objected. The abbot also objected, when the same disciple tried to give him some dates. Tadrous asked him why he was refusing, and the abbot replied that he was afraid for perhaps there was a monk more sick and in more need of the carpet and those dates.

C. St. Pachomius was a successful abbot, for he opened his heart with sincere love before opening his monastery. He dealt with his followers as a father and as a president or ruler. Once Abbot Pachomius was fasting, weeping and praying unceasingly on behalf of ten monks whose thoughts were defiled. One of the abbots begged him to cast those monks away, for he would die for their sake. St. Pachomius replied to him, "O wicked abbot, how do you dare to say cast them away?! Do you not hear that Moses put himself down on behalf of his disobedient people?!" (:29).

D. Every time he prayed he would remember the recommendation of the Apostle, "Pray for everyone, either for the emperor or for orthodox men of rank, so that we might lead a calm and quite life in all honour and devotion" (1 Timothy 2:2). That was why St. Pachomius, when he prayed, would pray for the whole world (Veilleux 1980:138).

2.7.4.6 THE PACHOMIAN ORDER

Palladius refers to six rules that were inscribed upon a brass tablet, which was given to St. Pachomius by the angel of God (Meyer 1964:92f). Rules were gradually developed for the operation of the community. By the end of the fourth century the Pachomian system was fairly mature and stabilised (Latourette 1975:227).

These rules can be summarised in the following points:

You shall not allow each man to eat and drink according to his strength; and proportionately to the strength of the eaters, appoint them their labours. Prevent no man from fasting or eating. Appoint the tasks that need strength to those who are strong, and the weaker and more ascetic such as the weak can manage.

No one could be admitted to his monasteries if he was escaping from any responsibility or from justice.

The neophyte remained for a probationary period from one to three years, in which he had to prove the seriousness of his intention before acceptance (Schaff 1910:197). In this period he was requested to learn how to read and write, and to memorise twenty psalms and two epistles of the New Testament.

Illiteracy was banned in the Pachomian coenobites. When they were about to eat, a Psalm was to be sung before a prayer. One of the monks read from the Bible, while others ate together.

Work was compulsory even for the abbots of the monasteries. The aim of monastic work was two-fold, namely to avoid idleness, which is the root of discouragement, and to contribute to the support of the monastery. A popular slogan against "freeloading" brethren was: "If a monk will not work, let him not eat" (Fr. Malaty 1986:33).

Manual labour was united: agriculture, boat building, basket-making, mat and coverlet weaving. By these activities, monks not only earned their own living, but also supported the poor and the sick (Schaff 1910:197).

They were divided, according to the grade of their ascetic piety, into twenty four classes, named by the letters of the Greek alphabet. They lived three in a cell. They ate in common, but in strict silence, and with the face covered. The sick were treated with special care. On Saturday and Sunday, they partook of the communion.

St. Pachomius, as abbot, or archimandrite, took oversight of the whole system. Every monastery, however, had its local administration subject to the local abbot, who had an assistant, storeman and librarian (Schaff 1910:197). Every group of labourers, such as copyists, bakers, gardeners, camel drivers, and weavers had their own supervisor. Also foreigners had their own supervisor of their own nationality probably to surmount the language barrier.

Every three or four monasteries lying near to one another were united in a clan, with a president elected from among their abbots. The monks met periodically to discuss their local problems. The clans were united under a superior-general, who was head of the principal monastery. The central administration was held in the chief monastery in Tabennesis, then transferred to Phebou.

There are two points that reflect the “humanitarian element” in the Pachomian *Koinonia*. The sick had full attention and care and were exempt from restrictions of food. They were granted medical attention as well as spiritual care. On the other hand, numerous visitors, strangers and pilgrims flooded to the St. Pachomius institutions. They were received with great hospitality and kindness. Monks washed their feet and served them food and drink in the guest-house adjacent to the monastery’s entrance. This was included within its boundaries, but there was no contact with the interior cells reserved for the monks (Pourrat 1919:156).

The Pachomian monasteries embraced monks from different nations: Libyans, Nubians, Syrians, Greeks, Romans, Cappadocians, Ethiopians,...formed the monastic order. To each nation was accorded a special ward, under the leadership of a fellow citizen who acted for the abbot.

Father Pachomius was diligent to instruct them in the knowledge of the saints, and was working for the salvation of the brothers' souls as a vineyard cared for by a good and industrious gardener. One who is zealous in keeping his vineyard with all firmness and care, looking after its wall or its hedge against thieves and beasts. He also sets scarecrows for the birds, lest they spoil his harvest (Veilleux 1980:145).

2.7.4.7 His Departure¹

St. Pachomius succeeded in establishing many monasteries occupied by thousands of monks, as well as a convent which embraced four hundred nuns under the guidance of his sister, Mary. At that time the plague spread in Upper Egypt, and eventually reached his monasteries. About one hundred monks and some abbots died.

St. Pachomius moved from one monastery to another until he himself became sick for forty days (Fr. Malaty 1986:26f). When he became very sick he did not inform any of the brothers that he was ill. Nor did he believe in his illness, and because of his strong will, he went with them to the harvest. While he was reaping, he fell on his face in their midst. The startled brothers ran to him and lifted him from the ground. They discovered that, because of the sickness, he had a high fever in his body. They brought him to the monastery where he lay down on the ground, while his belt fastened. They pleaded with him to let them unfasten it because of the fever. They wanted him to lie down on a bed like all the sick brothers. However, he did not obey them, but remained lying on the ground.

His illness was protracted. It was during the Forty days of the Lord's Passover in the year 346 A.D., when all the brothers of the monasteries were gathered at Phabow to celebrate the Passover together, that an angel of the Lord came to him. The angel said, "Prepare yourself, Pachomius, because the Lord will take a great offering from your house on the day of the feast." He thought to himself, "Perhaps the Lord will visit me on the Saturday of the Lord's feast." He spent the four days of the Passover without eating, grieving and sighing within himself, so that the unity of the Koinonia might not be dissolved (Veilleux 1980:172).

¹ When the Coptic Church speaks about the death of a person, it calls it a departure because the church believes that he is not dead, but enjoying the Paradise with the Lord.

On Friday evening, he called the responsible abbots and asked them to imitate him; to be awake, to be kind to everybody, to be long-suffering and humble and to act unceasingly (Fr. Malaty 1986:26f). After a long speech with the fathers, he fell unconscious for a little while. Then he made the sign of the cross with his hand three times. Suddenly he opened his mouth and gave up his spirit (:178).

2.7.4.8 THE INFLUENCE OF ST. PACHOMIUS RULE IN THE WORLD

Latourette (1975:229) says, "in 358 when St. Basil was in his late twenties, he visited Egypt and was profoundly impressed by what he saw there of the Pachomian monasteries. During their student days at Athens, he and Gregory of Nazianzus agreed to join in living the ascetic life."

Later, St. Basil distributed part of his property among the poor and embarked on the monastic life in a secluded spot across the river from this establishment. Others joined him, then he laid down the Longer Rules and the Shorter Rules. In them, St. Basil was deeply indebted to what he had seen in the Pachomian monasteries in Egypt (:229).

St. Pachomius' rule was the prototype of Eastern and Western monastic rules. Originally in Coptic, it was translated into Greek, then Latin, by St. Jerome in 404-5 A.D.

The rules influenced the "*Regular Vigilli*" (Gaul fifth century) and the "*Regular Tarnatensis*" (six or seventh century). Benedict and Caesarius of Arles knew it. It played a large part in the spread of coenobites in Ethiopia, Rome, Palestine, Asia Minor and Gaul (Mohler 1971:58).

2.7.5 ST. SHENOUTE

Worrell said St. Shenoute was "the most remarkable man whom the Copts ever produced, the founder indeed of Coptic Christianity" (Atiya 1968:67). Pearson and Goehring (1986:259) said the same, "Shenoute was the most important leader of Coptic Christianity in his day"

Yet in the *Lausiac History of Palladius* (Meyer 1964) and the *Conferences of John Cassian* (Luibheid 1985), St. Shenoute of Atripe makes no appearance. None of his apophthegms are recorded in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Ward 1981), nor is he to be found in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Russell 1980).

Yet some have ranked him second only to St. Pachomius for his contribution to the development of Egyptian monasticism, and his name is still accorded the highest veneration in the Coptic Orthodox Church (Bell 1983:1).

Why, then, this curious neglect on the part of these, and other, early writers? The reason is simple: they were, for the most part, Greeks writing for a Hellenistic audience, and St. Shenoute was first and foremost a Copt.

His way of thinking was Coptic, his monks and his monastery were Coptic; and all his surviving letters and sermons were written in Coptic. Indeed, it was St. Shenoute who was primarily responsible for the development of Coptic literature (:1).

Atiya confirms the same fact saying, "his followers numbered more than two thousand monks and a couple of thousand nuns, all of purely Coptic origin; which in fact accounts for the absence of his name from all the European literature of the time concerning the Fathers of the Desert (Leipoldt 1906:1195f).

Fr. Malaty (1986:59f.) in his book about the fathers of the Coptic monasticism said, "although St. Shenoute is a famous father in the history of Egyptian monasticism, nevertheless his name is absent from European literature of the time concerning the Fathers of the Desert." Fr. Malaty gives two reasons for this:

First, St. Shenoute started a deliberate movement to purge Coptic literature of every element of Hellenic culture. No one was permitted to speak Greek in his monasteries; and in his preaching and writings he used only the Sahidic Coptic language. For many

centuries, no Western father wished to translate any of his works. Actually he was a national hero who tried hard to keep the Egyptian identity.

Secondly, contrary to other Egyptian monastic orders all his monks were of purely Coptic origin. No foreign person could be admitted to his communities because he tried to raise the Coptic national feeling, as Greek culture was connected with paganism in his time (Pearson 1968:258). Pearson continues, "Shenoute was an important spokesman for the interests of certain Coptic Christians in their struggle against the Hellenized, pagan element in the local area. He became one of the founders, without realizing it, of the independent church of Egypt" (:259). Atiya (1968:67) explains this fact: "Shenoute was not a theologian of consequence, but rather a moralist, an administrator, and an inveterate enemy of heathenism and Hellenism."

2.7.5.1 St. SHENOUTE'S LIFE

According to Besa, St. Shenoute¹ was born in the village of Shandawil² to God fearing parents, but neither the date of his birth nor his death is known with certainty. Ladeuze suggested that he died in 452 while Leipoldt argued for 451 (Bell 1983:7).

But most modern scholars seem to prefer that he died in 466 (:7). So if we accept the view of Besa that St. Shenoute was one hundred and eighteen years old when he died (Bell 1983:89), it would require a birth-date of 348. Doiry (1937:17) said it was 343 and Fr. Ibrahim (1959:35) said 333 A.D.

When he was ten years old, he was put under the guidance of Abba Pjol, his maternal uncle and Abbot of the Red Monastery in Upper Egypt (El Masry 1956:207). Besa said he was nine years old at the time (Bell 1983:8).

He proved to be spiritually attuned to a rare degree, and strove continuously after spiritual excellence. The intensity of his yearning after righteousness was such that he attained great sanctity and enjoyed studying as well teaching others, both monks and laity (El Masry 1956:207). Amelineau has conjectured that he was master of novices under Abba Pjol (Bell 1983:8).

¹ The name, incidentally, means "son of God" in Coptic.

² It is nine kilometers north of Sohag.

One day, some old ascetic in the monastery heard a voice saying, "behold Shenouda has become an archimandrite" (i.e. chief of anchorites). So when Abba Pjol entered into the joy of the Lord in 385 (Bell 1983:9), St. Shenoute was elected to take his place as Abbot of the White Monastery of Atri² in the desert of Thebes for more than sixty-five years (Pearson 1968:258). He ruled over 2200 monks and 1800 nuns.

He is called "archimandrite" for he used to practice the eremitic life from time to time, and encouraged some of his monks to withdraw to the desert after a few years of coenobitic life, without completely severing connections with the monastery.

He established two schools in the White Monastery and encouraged the monks to receive education. Since he believed that education was the only effective weapon against pagan customs, he felt responsible for the establishment of schools in the nearest villages.

One event in Shenoute's life is of especial importance. In 431, he, with Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, attended the Council of Ephesus. The story in Besa's *Life of Shenoute* about his violent clash with Nestorius may be open to doubt, but that he attended the council can be accepted as historical fact. It is quite possible that it was on this occasion that he was given the rank of an archimandrite in recognition of his services (Atiya 1991:2133).

2.7.5.2 HIS MONASTIC RULES

St. Shenoute's coenobitic order differs from that of St. Pachomius, and is stricter and much more comprehensive (Bell 1983:9). I will not mention all the rules but only some interesting points about them:

- + The novices spent a probationary period in certain houses outside the walls of the monasteries and not inside them as in the Pachomian order.
- + A written undertaking was signed by the novice before he became a monk, and was recited by him before the brethren in the church. The signed and witnessed undertaking was kept in the monastery archives and read as follows:

² Atri^e is situated on the West bank of the Nile by the modern day town of Sohag, and faces the "Panapolis" or Akhmim.

I vow before God in his holy place, the word which I have spoken with my mouth being my witness: I will not defile my body in any way; I will not steal; I will not bear false witness; I will not lie; I will not do anything deceitful secretly. If I transgress what I have vowed, I will see the kingdom of heaven, but I will not enter it. God, before whom I made the covenant, will destroy my soul and my body in the fiery Gehenna because I transgressed the covenant I made (Bell 1983:10).

- + There is no mention of the classical promises of poverty, chastity and obedience; although these were implied in the cenobitic pursuit of perfect morality.
- + Short prayers were recited by every group of monks before the beginning of their work. Private prayers consisted of psalms and church hymns, which were recited in the cells under the guidance of the spiritual father.
- + Common prayers were also performed by monks who assembled four times daily for this purpose, at morning, noon, sunset and night. They assembled and departed in complete silence, thinking only the prayers they have recited.
- + The Eucharistic liturgy was performed weekly. Families and dwellers near the monasteries were permitted to visit the monasteries on Sundays, attend the Vespers service, hear the sermon and participate with the monks in the Eucharistic liturgy on Sundays. The monks fed these multitudes and St. Shenoute himself preached to them.

2.7.5.3 ST. SHENOUTE AS POLITICAL LEADER AND SOCIAL REFORMER

The role of St. Shenoute was very unique because he tried to free the Copts from the Hellenic effects in order to preserve the nationality and language of his country. He struggled to raise the Coptic national feeling (Pearson & Goehring 1986:258).

St. Shenute played a great role in serving his community.

First: He constructed the White Monastery which became the spiritual centre of the area after receiving the position of leadership after the death of his uncle Pjol in 385 (Bell 1983:9).

Pearson (1986:264) says, "The White Monastery also became the focal point of activity for the Christian laymen they attended services in the monastery and listened to the sermons of Shenute."

Second: He became the champion of the native population against the abuses of the upper classes and government officials. He also advocated rights of the poor (Leipoldt 1906:175f).

Third: Leipoldt also describes how he provided refuge in the monastery at a time of barbarian invasions (Pearson & Goehring 1986:41).

Pearson (1986:266) summaries the work of the Saint in the area by the saying: "We know that Shenoute played several different roles in relation to the local Christian population: source of refuge, spokesman for their economic rights, and spiritual adviser."

According to St. Shenoute, worship is correlated to social life, and religion is practical love and piety. St. Shenoute with his thousands of monks were not isolated from the Egyptian community. Bell (1983:11) said, "in its hey-day, therefore, the White Monastery, with some twenty square miles of land and hundreds of monks and nuns, was a most important economic institution in the region of Akhmim and, seen as a great industrial cooperative, it enabled thousands of poor farmers to find both accommodation and employment.

2.8 EARLY MONASTICISM AMONG WOMEN

Monasticism, in all its forms, was adopted by women, for they were not any less devoted than men in their love towards God. The Gospel states that many women followed our Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry even to His cross and His tomb and all the time they earnestly desired to devote their lives to worship Him (Luke 8:2,3).

According to St. Luke, our Lord Jesus Christ praised Mary, Martha's sister, who preferred to sit down by the Lord's feet to listen to His divine teaching, than to wait on Him like her sister. "Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful; and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41,42).

Thus Mary was the first Christian who is counted as a living example of the true monastic life, i.e., the life of contemplation. For that reason it was easy for Mary to pour her expensive perfume on His body as emblem of pouring her life for the Lord. When the Lord defended and praised her act, He praised the way of sacrificing life for Him. St. Mary, was presented to those who lived in "the houses of the virgins" at Alexandria, as the great model of the virgins. She was depicted by the virgins as "The virgin of virgins" and their patroness (Fr. Malaty 1978:65f).

2.8.1 COMMUNITIES OF VIRGINS

Since the first century, many women preferred to live in virginity, not despising the conjugal life, but devoting all their lives to their spiritual Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

These holy virgins played a vital role in the early Christian church, and had a special place in the hierarchy of the church. As well as worshipping God, they also tended to the welfare of widows, orphans, the elderly and the sick. Communes of virgins were called parthenons" (Chitty 1966:2).

St. Antony had entrusted the care of his sister to one of those communes (Hanna 1948:81). In the beginning, the virgins did not live in convents in the desert, but in houses, either separate or in groups.

One of the virgins who lived in their houses was St. Amoun's wife. About 297 A.D., Amoun was compelled by his uncle to marry. He lived with his wife for eighteen years as brother and sister. She not only loved the chaste life of virginity but also recognised the excellence of the solitary way. She asked him to leave her in the house and to build himself a cell in the mountain of "Nitria." He came back to visit her twice a year (Fr. Malaty 1986:66). Schaff (1910:197) said "The sister of Antony and the wife of Amoun became centres of female cloister life, which spread with great rapidity".

2.8.2 WOMEN'S CONVENTS

Father Malaty (1986:66) said, "the first monastic community in the world for women was founded in Alexandria by St. Syncletica who has been considered the "Mother of nuns". Her biography and teaching has been preserved by St. Athanasius. Though she intended to live a solitary life, many young women were attracted by her spirituality and her teaching and decided to stay with her. She lived till the age of eighty and never failed to lead her daughter nuns by her words and her example even when she was suffering from cancer in the last three and half years of her life.

It was with tears that St. Athanasius wrote about her terminal sufferings and he described them as Job's sufferings. Three days before her death, she had the vision of heaven and departed in ecstasy.

St. Pachomius was the founder of two women's convents. One was in Tabennesis, near Dandara, in Upper Egypt, containing of some four hundred nuns and administered by his sister Mary (:66). It was in this convent that St. Theodore's (Tadrous) mother decided to stay, when her son refused to see her. It was then that she herself chose monasticism, saying, "I shall not only see him one day among the brothers, but I, too, shall gain my soul...". The other convent was founded across the Nile from Tismenae.

Hanna (1948:81) said the following about the Coptic convents, "The first organised group of nuns were organised by St. Pachomius' sister. She desired to see him, but he advised her to worship God in the life of solitude. She accepted his advice because that was what she wanted. The brothers built for her a place near their monastery in Tabennesis. The place was known, so many virgins came and joined her in the life of prayer, austerity

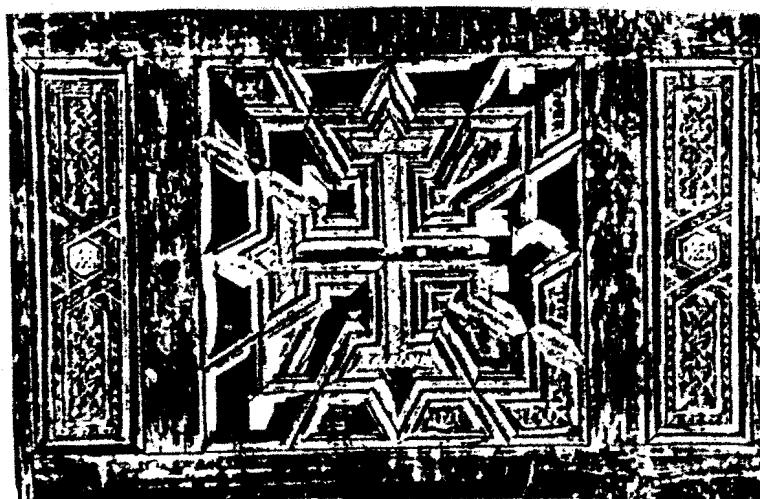
and fasting. The brethren built for them many adjacent cells and the first convent was composed.

Schaff (1910:197) affirms the same idea saying, "Pachomius also established a cloister of nuns for his sister, whom he never admitted to his presence when she would visit him, sending her word that she should be content to know that he was still alive".

The rules prescribed by St. Pachomius were the same for men as they were for women, except for the domestic side, where monks, for instance, would take care of the building of monasteries, while sewing and cooking were left to the nuns (Hanna 1948:81). Palladius refers to this fact, that apart from the priest and deacon, no man was allowed to go across to the Pachomian women's convents, and the priest and deacon went to the nunnery only on Sundays (Meyer 1964:95).

The angelic life of the desert fathers attracted even Coptic and foreign women, who put on the attire of monks and lived in cells as if they were men, struggling for a perfect life. There were many famous abbesses, such as St. Hilaria (or Hilary), St. Anastasia and St. Appolinaria.

Some foreign abbesses came to Egypt and visited its desert to be guided by the Coptic monks, like St. Melania who was escorted to Nitria by Isidore and spent six months there in 374 A.D. (Russell 1980:9), and her granddaughter Melania the younger who visited Egypt in 418 A.D.



Traditional Coptic cross
engraved over wood

2.8.3 SOME KEY NUNS AND FEMALE HERMITS

2.8.3.1 ST. HILARIA (OR HILARY THE EUNUCH)

The Emperor Zeno (474-491) was once very depressed, because his oldest daughter, of 18 years old had been lost for a long time, and his other daughter, Theopesta, was possessed by an evil spirit. She was sent to the elders in Scetis to pray for her.

When she arrived at Scetis, many monks assembled for prayer requesting God's mercy, and after a few days, they asked St. Hilary, the Eunuch to take her in his cave and pray for her. St. Hilary refused at first, but under pressure he eventually accepted the princess, in his cave and prayed for her till the morning. The Lord granted her complete healing and all the monks were pleased because they loved the emperor for his goodness.

The emperor, the empress and the court were pleased at the arrival of the princess, and the emperor immediately sent to the monks of Scetis inviting St. Hilary to the palace in order to receive his blessing. With many tears, St. Hilary accepted.

St. Hilary was warmly received in the palace; and soon afterwards the emperor and his wife asked him secretly "Our father, why did you embrace and kiss our daughter all the night?!" St. Hilary promised to tell them if they would promise not to prevent him from returning to his cave. With this he said to them: "I am Hilaria, your daughter!!" Immediately they embraced her, asking her to stay with them in the palace. But she told them that she was more happy in her monastic life than in her former life of luxury.

Three months later she reminded them of their promise, and how she had asked them not to tell anybody about her true identity. No one in the desert knew her as a woman except her spiritual father "Pomei" who had guided her for three years. She then went and lived in a cave for five years more and then departed in peace to her Bridegroom Whom she loved very much (Fr. Malaty 1986:69).

2.8.3.2 MARY THE EGYPTIAN¹ :

The September feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross was a great annual feast where many pilgrims come to Jerusalem. Mary, the harlot, joined the pilgrimage out of curiosity. She then found herself unable to enter the place of the Cross until she confessed and renounced her sin. She went across the Jordan, beyond the sight of other people (Chitty 1966:153).

Abbot Zosima contemplated, during the Great Lent, the divine grace which helped him to live in one of the monasteries of Palestine for a long time. He asked, "Is there a monk on the earth who could be of help to me and show me a kind of asceticism that I have not achieved? Is there a person to be found in the wilderness who has surpassed me?"

Suddenly an angel appeared to him and led him to the monastery by the river Jordan, where he witnessed ascetic practice and angelic life. He was humiliated in his own eyes. On the 20th day of his spiritual journey, and while he was praying, he caught sight of something that looked like a human form, with long silver grey hair.

"Is it an illusion?"

"Is it a ghost?"

"Is it the deceit of the devil? He turned his sight and realised that it was a human form, naked, its skin was dark as if burned by the heat of the sun. He was overjoyed, hoping to find one of the holy hermits of the wilderness, who devoted all their lives to the fellowship with the true friend, Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

He ran in pursuit of that figure but it began to run away from him. When he approached it, he shouted, "Why did you run away from me, O servant of God! Wait for me, in God's name, I tell you. Why do flee from such an old man as me?" As he said these words, he saw as if the human figure had fallen into a hole among the rocks. He knelt down and began to cry as a child, and the echo of his cry filled all the desert. "For Jesus' sake forgive me Abbot Zosima, for I can not turn towards you. I am a woman and I am naked. Throw me your cloak so that I may cover my body and turn to you and ask for your blessing!" He was astonished for she knew him and called him by his name.

¹ The source of the story is (Fr. Malaty 1986:74f).

He threw his cloak, she picked it up and covered her body. Then she turned to Abbot Zosima and said, "Why did you wish Abbot Zosima, to see a sinful woman? Why did you wish, to learn or hear from me? He threw himself on the ground and asked for her blessing, but she bowed down before him saying, "Abbot Zosima, it is for you to give blessings. You have been blessed with the grace of priesthood, and for many years you have been standing before the holy altar and offering the sacrifice of the Divine Mysteries."

But with tears he said to her, "O honourable mother, I see that you have died to the world. God had granted you wonderful graces, for you called me by name and recognised that I am a priest though you have never seen me before... I ask you to give me your blessing for God's sake, for I need your prayers." In the face of his supplications she was obliged to say, "Blessed be God who cares for the salvation of men and their souls." He answered, "Amen".

Then she asked him, "why have you come man of God, to see such a woman who is naked and devoid of every virtue?" She also asked him about the Christian people, the shepherds, and the kings. Abbot Zosima answered, "by your holy prayers, O mother, Christ had granted peace to all. But I beseech you to pray for the whole world, and for me the sinner". She accepted to pray out of obedience to him. Though she was in the desert, she was not in isolation from the church. She was a living member, asking on behalf of all her brothers and sisters.

He asked her about her story and she told him, "when I was 12 years old, I rejected my parents' love and went to Alexandria. When I remember how I lost my virginity there at the very beginning and gave myself up to sensuality, I become ashamed." "When I was about 17 years old, I lived like a fire of vice that burns people. I did not believe in God, but I used to say, 'I shall do just as I like, and no one will stop me.' When I saw people going to Jerusalem, I suddenly desired that I might go with them to have more new lovers who could satisfy my passion."

"When I saw people going inside the church which is built on the Tomb of Christ, I was anxious to see what they would do there. I tried to enter the church with the crowd which was struggling to get through the doors, but suddenly I felt some power pushing me away

from the door." "I did my best and tried to enter, and for the second time I was stopped. I was prevented from entering by a secret mighty power, I lost all my strength. I began to weep and lament and beat my breast and to sigh from the depth of my heart." "Why could I not enter? Was it my sin which prevented me from entering?" "Then I looked up over the door and saw an icon of the most Holy Mary and the purity of her complexion put me to shame. Now all my past miseries were clearly exhibited before my eyes and my sins tormented me."

"Then I knelt before the icon and begged for another chance to follow my saviour. I asked the Virgin's help, and asked my Saviour to save me and lead me in His way. I vowed that, as soon as I had seen the Holy tree of the Cross, I would renounce the world and its pleasures and would go whenever He would lead me. As I prayed, I found myself full of confidence. Then I tried again to enter the church and went in without any difficulty and found myself within the Holy place. Throwing myself on the ground I kissed the Holy Cross with tears and trembling, I forgot myself until midday. I returned again to the icon where I made my vows and praised God for accepting a sinner like me."

I asked the Holy Mother to lead me in the life of purity and I heard a sound saying to me, 'if you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest'. She did the same and lived there now for forty years praying and praising the Lord all the time. She struggled in becoming accustomed to this hard life, but finally through God's help, He gave her a great peace in her heart. She asked Abbot Zosima to come next year on the Holy Thursday while carrying the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ in a sacred vessel, then she disappeared in the depth of the wilderness.

The Abbot waited the year and on Holy Thursday he took the life-giving Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and put into a basket some figs, and dates and a small quantity of lentils that had been soaked in water. Having reached the bank of the Jordan, he sat down waiting for her. After sometime he began to pray. After praying, he saw her coming on the surface of the water towards him. With joy and peace, she asked him to bless her and took part in the Holy Communion. She raised her arms towards heaven and sighed with tears, saying, "O Lord let your servant depart in peace, according to your

word, for my eyes have seen your salvation". She asked the father to come again to visit her in the place where he first saw her the next year.

He asked her to take the small amount of food he brought, so she touched the lentils with the tip of her fingers and took three grains, put them in her mouth, saying that the grace of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to keep the nature of the soul undefiled, and again she asked him to pray for her. Then she crossed the Jordan passing over the water and disappeared in the wilderness. Another year passed, and he again went into the wilderness, but he saw the dead body lying on the sand. Abbot Zosima felt very sad and sat down beside her weeping for long time, praying the psalms which are suitable for such occasions.....

After a little while, he began to wonder where he should bury the body, but he noticed something was written on the sand near her head, "Abbot Zosima, On the night of the Lord's passion, Maundy Thursday, I went to my Saviour. Bury the body of humble Mary in this very place. Let dust return to dust and pray for me.."

The father was astonished how she returned to this place after partaking the Holy Communion last year, on the same day, at the same hour and died. He was amazed at how her body was kept without decay for a whole year. At the moment, a lion came out of the wood, licked her feet, and began to dig a hole large enough to bury the body. After praying and weeping, the father covered the body with earth.

2.9 FAMOUS MONASTERIES AND CONVENTS

There are ten monasteries and six convents in Egypt. Monasteries are scattered in different desert regions, but convents are located within the cities.

2.9.1 The Monasteries

The ten monasteries are the following:

- (1) The Monastery of St. Antony the Great, in the Eastern desert, near the Red Sea.
- (2) The Monastery of St. Paul the Hermit, in the Eastern desert, to the south-east of the previous monastery.
- (3-6) Four monasteries in the Western desert, in Wadi-el Natroun;

- (3) St. Bishoy Monastery.
- (4) The Monastery of our Lady (The Syrian) which is very close to the previous one.
- (5) The Monastery of the Virgin Mary (El-Baramous), five kilometers north of the previous two where the relics of two foreign saints Maximus and Dometius lie.
- (6) The Monastery of St. Macarius is ten kilometers south of the St. Bishoy monastery.
- (7) St. Samuel's Monastery in the wilderness of Antinoe which is accessible from Fayium.
- (8) St. Mina's Monastery in Mariotis to the south-west of Alexandria., not far from the monuments of the Cathedral of St. Menas, built by Emperor Arcadius (395-408 A.D.).
- (9) St. Pachomius Monastery at Edfou in Upper Egypt.
- (10) The Monastery of Our Lady, known as El-Muharaq on the Western edge of the valley 30 kilometers north of the city of Assiut.

2.8.2 The Convents

The six convents are the following:

- (1) The Convent of St. George, within the walls of the Babylon Fortress in Old Cairo. Jeremiah the Prophet lived in this area when he was compelled to go to Egypt during the Babylonian captivity.
- (2) The Convent of St. Mercurius (of two swords), also in Old Cairo, but outside the Fortress.
- (3&4) St. Mary's Convent and St. George's Convent, in the section of Medieval Cairo known as Harit Zaweila.
- (5) St. Marina's Convent, in the heart of Cairo, is located in Haret-el-Room.
- (6) St. Damiana's Convent, which stands on the site on which Saint Damiana was martyred in 303 A.D. in Barari (wilderness) near Damietta.

In the peak period of monasticism (3rd.-5th. century) there were hundreds of monasteries and convents all over Egypt. But most of these convents and monasteries had been changed to be either parish churches or deserted completely for many reasons:

First, recently the towns and villages crept towards the monasteries and convents due to cultivating the desert to increase the planted area. So the nearby monasteries and convents

lost their quietness and isolation from the world, therefore they were deserted by their inhabitants.

Second, the number of people who are willing to commit themselves now to be nuns and monks decreased generally due to the materialistic temptation. So there is no need to renovate more convents and monasteries.

Third, most of the ancient convents and monasteries were built of bricks and clay, therefore not all of them could resist the attack of natural factors of destruction. The Coptic church, under the jurisdiction of H.H. Pope Shenouda III, tries now to discover the places of these demolished convents and monasteries and rebuild them again.

Fourth, it is not easy to get now an official permission to renovate the convents and monasteries because this needs a presidential permission.

The Coptic Church concentrates its care for keeping the ten monasteries and six convents working as bright centres of spirituality. The convents and monasteries play a great role in the life of Egyptians generally.

Egyptians are used to visit these convents and monasteries to enjoy a quiet time with the Lord. Also these monasteries and convents provide the visitors with a spiritual guidance and a solution for their spiritual problems. Many sick visitors both Moslems and Christians, are healed every day from their diseases or freed from the power of demons through the prayers of nuns or monks.

The custom in the Coptic Church that the bishops and the Pope are chosen from among the monks. If we study the church history deeply we will discover the great role which was played by the monasteries and convents to provide the best church leaders and to keep the faith alive.

Having finished the historical part of my description of Coptic monasticism, and I shall proceed in the next chapter (C.3) to analyse the mission of the Coptic monks and nuns.

CHAPTER 3

THE “CENTRIPETAL” MISSION OF THE COPTIC MONKS

As had been explained before in (C.1), the mission of Coptic monks was a centripetal rather than a centrifugal mission. Coptic monasticism could attract famous people as well as simple farmers, but that does not mean that there was no direct “outreaching” mission.

If we want to understand the mission work of the Coptic monks, we should study the world in which they lived. It was the world of the remnants of the pre-Christian religions with all their evils and vices, so it is not amazing to find that Abba Apollo (305-405 A.D.) speaks at length about paganism in Egypt. He explained the polytheism still prevalent in an ingenious way, suggesting that there were practical reasons for deifying nature (Russell 1980:17).

The power of the Devil was great due to the belief in the power of demons in healing, in bringing luck, in their harm of attacking people and in interfering in nature. Therefore it is not uncommon to find demons mentioned in a great number of the stories of the fathers.

Egyptians generally believed that all diseases came or could be prevented by appeasing the deities which would stop the power of demons. They thought that the Nile's gods would help them to increase the amount of water coming to it, so they offered sacrifices to these deities, waiting for their help (:18)

Many false ideas about the power of demons and how demonic to please them spread because of people's fear. Egyptians worshipped many deities to help them in their struggle against demons. It is interesting that the work of the monks concentrated on the same area which Egyptians feared. In other words they offered a relevant and contextualised Christian Gospel which met the needs of the people as they experienced them. It is important to understand, however, that the mission of the Coptic monks was more centripetal than centrifugal. In other words, it was in the first place “attracting” rather than “outreaching” in

character. For that reason the attracting dimension is examined first (in this chapter), and the direct outreaching dimension in chapter 4.

In this chapter the mission work of Coptic monks will be studied under two major headings:

3.1 They offered new ideals.

3.2 They offered a new style of life, the "heavenly life" according to God's will.

3.1 They offered new ideals

3.1.1 They lived the Bible:

Monks gave to the Bible its proper position as the power of inspiration. So the call of St. Antony was a biblical one (Gregg 1980:31) as a witness to the centrality of the Bible. The monks used the Bible in all their conversations with others. St. Pachomius taught the illiterate to help them read the Bible. Chitty (1966:27) said, "There is insistence in the rule [of St. Pachomius] that all who enter the community must learn to read if they cannot do so already, and must learn considerable portions of Holy Scriptures by heart".

Rofinus also said that Abba Or was originally illiterate. But when he came out of the desert to the inhabited region, a special charisma was given to him by God and he was able to recite the Scriptures by heart. Indeed, when a book was given to him by the brothers, he was able to read it because he was familiar with the Scriptures (Russell 1980: 63). When we follow the lives of other fathers we will find the same principle; they meditated on the Bible day and night, and they took their inspiration and teaching from the Bible. St. Antony said, "The Scriptures are sufficient for instruction" (Gregg 1980:43).

The Bible took its proper place as a guide and teacher for Coptic monks. Cassian affirms this fact in his conferences with the famous fathers. In the first conference, Abba Moses spoke about the "thoughts". He said, "the main source of thought is the Bible, to which the father gave the description of "pure gold". Abba Moses warned against false interpretation as a source of deception (Luibheid 1985:55).

In the second conference, Abba Moses spoke about "discernment". He used the Scripture as the safest way to discernment saying, "Very rightly it is called 'good senses' and the full weight of Scriptures forbids us to do anything without it, even to the extent that we are told not to drink the wine of the soul without being guided by it" (:63).

In the third conference, Abba Paphnutius spoke about "the three renunciations". He mentioned three types of calling and used St. Antony as an example of hearing and obeying God's call when he heard the Scriptures in the church and began his monastic life. The Fathers believed that the Scriptures, which they heard in the church, were not common human words, but the call of God Himself.

In the same conference (three), Abba Paphnutius spoke about the authority of the Scripture (:85). The same principle is found in the speech of the blessed Isaac, "On Prayer." He selected a verse from the Scriptures (1 Timothy 2:1) and applied it as an example of the four types of prayer (:107).

St. Pachomius always said to his disciples, "strive, brethren, to attain that whereunto you have been called; to meditate on the Psalms, and the lessons from the rest of the Bible, especially the Gospels. And I myself find rest in serving God and you according to God's commandment" (Chitty 1966:21).

Someone asked Abba Antony, "what must one do in order to please God?" The old man replied, "pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes; whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it, keep these three precepts and you will be saved" (Ward 1975:2).

In the stories of the fathers, I discovered how the Bible was central to their thinking and lives. Now the custom is that every novice should memorise daily a certain amount of verses from the Bible. It is also the important item in the program of the daily life of the monk.

As heavenly creatures the monks proved that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

It was this "saturation" of the life of the monks with the message of the Bible that brought about the disciplined and transparent attractiveness of their lives to others. Since

mission has to do in the first place with integrity and a radiant Christian identity, this Bible-filled nature of their lives represents the deepest basis of their mission.

3.1.2 Biblical ideas about the joyful presence of heaven and the Kingdom

The message of the monks is not their own worthiness, but the everlasting faithfulness of God. God, they say, does not lie and he is constantly present with the monk, turning his sorrow into the joy of the Kingdom. Jacob, to continue the image, wrestled with God in darkness. Permanently crippled, he goes towards the brother he has betrayed and says to him, "Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God" (Genesis 33.10). So there is in this text the image of the new Adam restored to heaven in the midst of his trials, not subsequent to them. There are images of light and joy, the life of the angels, and sounds of heavenly mirth.

Monks are not seen as gloomy men obsessed with their own asceticism, but as those who are more alive and approachable because of it. Even their physical appearance shows the new life that is within them. After forty years of solitude, Abba John of Lycopolis is described as having "a bright and smiling face" (Russell 1980:35). Abba Bes is described as meek, gentle and utterly serene. Abba Theon went out at night in order to give water to the wild animals. In Nitria, Abba Ammonius welcomed those who came to the community with a feast:

Those who intended to live in the cells were invited to the church for a feast. And while they were still enjoying themselves, each brother filled his cloak or his basket with loaves or other suitable things from his own cell and brought them to the new ones, so that no one should know which gifts had been brought by which brother (Russell 1980:35).

There was the old man called Didymus who was said to be a man of "charming countenance"; inspite of his unappealing habit of treading on scorpions with his bare feet. Another monk who made an impression on the visitors by his cheerfulness was Abba Apollo. He told them that happiness was not an option but an obligation for Christians.

He used to say, "Those who are going to inherit the kingdom of heaven must not be despondent about their salvation. The pagans are gloomy... the Jews wail, and sinners mourn, but the just will rejoice...we who have been considered worthy of so great a hope, how shall we not rejoice without ceasing?" (35).

They present themselves as a heavenly creatures. St. Athanasius spoke about St. Antony when he began establishing monasteries in the mountains and desert. He changed these desolate areas into a city of monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for the citizenship in the heavens (Gregg 1980:42f.).

That happened when the people at that time were so busy with the earthly things that there was no place in their thinking about heaven. We know from history that the period of the third and fourth century was a period of peace in Christianity after long time of persecution, so there was a temptation for relaxation.

Chadwick (1985:1) in his introduction to Cassian affirms that "St. Augustine wrote a famous book to persuade that secular Rome with its prosperity was not a necessary sign of God's favour or God's will, and that men and women were to seek another kingdom more lasting, the kingdom of God.

It is interesting that monks looked to heaven not only for something coming in the future but as something to be enjoyed here and now. St. Isidore wept at the table. He explained the reasons for his tears. "I am ashamed to partake of irrational food; I am a rational being and I ought to be in a paradise of pleasure because of the power given to us by Christ" (Meyer 1964:31f.). The eschatological belief was something deeply relevant for the Coptic monks. The Kingdom was a daily reality for them. Abba Isaac said, "The second request of the very pure soul is to see the coming of the Father's Kingdom. What this means, first of all, is that each day Christ should reign among holy men".

Father Isaac related that to the future Kingdom when he said, "There also is the promise, definite in regard to its time of fulfilment, made to all saints, to all the sons of God, the promise that Christ will say to them 'Come you blessed ones of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the time of the world's creation' (Matthew 25:34). Gazing eagerly toward that set time, the soul is filled with longing and expectation and it says to Him: 'May Your kingdom come' (Matthew 6:10)" (Luibheid 1985:113).

Cassian and Germanus asked Abba Moses in the first conference: "What is the end and the object which inspires you to endure all these trials so gladly?" After a long speech, Abba Moses answered them, "The objective of our life is the kingdom of God" (:39). Ramsey (1985:152) said, "Since the East is synonymous with paradise, we are made to recall still another monastic theme, which is that of monastic life as a return to paradise".

3.1.3 The cross and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ as the subject of their meditation and worship.

Abba Apollo said, "it is useful for the monks to keep the remembrance of the Saviour's passion in their minds constantly" (Russell 1980:78).

Usually people ask "what is the meaning of the asceticism of the old fathers". Some may answer that it is a persecution complex, as if they were people who liked to suffer for the sake of suffering itself. Others regard, it is a type of asserting the "self" when some people like to do something heroic to gain the praise of others.

The same problem faced Gregg (1980:2) when he wrote the introduction of the life of St. Antony. He said, "to our age and culture the figure of Antony is thoroughly startling-- even offensive. Other centuries did not think him so bizarre, but from the first there must have been a mixture of admiration and puzzled fascination in the response of those, Christians and non-Christians alike, who learned of his life".

The cross for the monk was not something he hated or an emblem of defeat and submission, rather it was the sign of active struggle and victory. A sign that the world is crucified to him and he is crucified to the world because he is connected with another glorious world which he enjoys everyday.

A brother asked an old man, "how can I be saved?" The latter took off his habit, girded his loins and raised his hands to heaven saying, "so should the monk be: denuded of all things in this world, and crucified. In the contest the athlete fights with his fists; in his thoughts the monk stands, his arms outstretched in the form of the cross to heaven, calling on God.

The athlete stands naked when fighting in a contest; the monk stands naked and stripped of all things, anointed with oil and taught by his master how to fight. So God leads us to the victory" (Russell 1980:34).

The cross also carries its joy. It is always connected with the resurrection. Rufinus said in his introduction, "but if the tears of the monks and the stories of their pain forms the central part of these texts, it is nevertheless not the whole of them. The cell of the monk is called the "Furnace of Babylon" but it is also said that there "the three children found the Son of God." We always find the other side of the cross, which is the resurrection (Russell 1980:34).

The cross was not an outer sign to be made, but a true power over demons. Abba Dorotheus sent Palladius to his cistern about the ninth hour to fill a jar with water for their refreshments. As Palladius went there he saw an asp down in the well, so he did not draw water. He went back to tell Abba Dorotheus, "We perish, Father, I saw an asp in the well." Abba smiled solemnly and looked at him, then shook his head and said: "If the devil sees fit to turn himself into a serpent or a turtle in every well, and falls into our drinking supply, shall we forever remain thirsty?" And he went out and drew water from the same well, and was the first to break his thirst by swallowing (After making the sign of the cross over the water). He said: "Where the cross goes, the evil of everything loses ground" (Meyer 1964:33). This leads directly to the next section.



Ancient marble columns
Coptic Museum

3.1.4 A new idea about demons and their power:

Egypt had a long inheritance of worshipping idols and sometimes this worship was mixed with Satanism. So Egyptians believed in the existence of demons and were very afraid of them, so they tried to appease them in many ways. It is interesting that St. Antony in all his speeches, which were written by St. Athanasius, spoke about the Devil as a weak and conquered enemy and other fathers took the same mood of thinking.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III (1993:17) said, "St. Antony said to the demons, 'I wonder for your gathering around me in big number, if you are truly powerful, it would be one of you enough to frighten me.' Pope Shenouda continues by saying, "through faith, St. Antony was assured of the demons' weakness and through that faith he would defeat them" (My translation).

First, St. Antony affirmed the presence of demons around us (Gregg 1980:47). He said "For the present, that which is pressing and necessary for us is simply to know their unscrupulous tricks against us. To gain the gift of discrimination of spirits, we should pray earnestly and live the life of asceticism" (:47) So there are demons and we should be careful of their deceit.

Second, when St. Antony spoke about the creation of demons, he said, "the demons were not created as the figures we now identify as 'demon' for God made nothing bad. They were made good but fell from the heavenly wisdom" (:47).

Third, the devil takes many forms to terrify us, sometimes as a horrible shape like that description in Job 41:9-12. His aim said St. Antony, is "I will pursue, I will overtake" (Exodus 15:9) or he may lie to us. But our role is "not to fear his manifestations or to worry about his words, for he lies" (:49).

Fourth, we should know that the devil has lost his power. The Saviour drew it away with a hook and like a beast of burden he received a halter around the snout. Like a runaway, the

devil was bound by a ring for his nostrils, and his lips were pierced by an iron clasp. He was also bound by the Lord like a sparrow, to receive our mockery (Gregg 1980:49).

St. Antony also affirmed, "since the Lord made His sojourn with us, the enemy is fallen and his powers have diminished (:52) and he has no power to act" (:52).

It is great that St. Antony, all the time, encourages us not to fear them (:49ff.) and that he puts in front of us the example of our Lord Jesus and the holy Fathers (:51f.).

Fifth, St. Antony reminds us rather to live a just life, trust in God and to know the grace that has been given to the faithful by the Saviour to combat demons, in His saying: Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy (Gregg 1980:54). He assured us "that the Lord will be our fellow worker for the conquest of the devil" (:57)

Lastly, he warned us that "we ought not to boast about expelling demons, not become proud" (:59f.). Pope Shenouda III (1993:42) said, "St. Antony in his humbleness could burn the demons and cast them away" (My translation).

St. Athanasius, to give a practical example to prove his sayings about St. Antony and the demons, mentioned a dialogue between the Saint and the devil.

St. Antony said: once someone knocked at the door of my cell. And when I went out, I saw someone who seemed massive and tall. When I asked, 'who are you?' he said, 'I am Satan.' I said, 'what are you doing here ?' and he asked, 'why do the monks and all other Christians censure me without cause? Why do they curse me every hour? When I replied, 'why do you torment them?'

He said, 'I am not the one tormenting them, but they disturb themselves, for I have become weak. Haven't they read that the swords of the enemy have failed utterly, and that you have destroyed their cities? (Psalm 9:6) I no longer have a place-- no weapon, no city. Marvelling then at the grace of the Lord, I said to him, "even though are always a liar, and never tell the truth, nevertheless this time, even if you did not intend to, you have spoken truly."

'For Christ in His coming reduced you to weakness, and after throwing you down He left you defenceless' Upon hearing the Saviour's name, and being unable to endure the scorching from it, he became invisible" (Gregg 1980:62).

If this is the view of St. Antony, the father of all monks, it is not strange to notice the same tone in the sayings of other fathers. St. Antony encourages them to experience their victory in the Lord and usually they used the sign of the cross, as the cross is the place of victory, to defeat the devil. St. Antony said about demons, "they are cowards, and they are utterly terrified by the sign of the Lord's cross, because in it the saviour, stripping their armour, made an example of them" (:57f.).

It is common in the life of the Fathers to have authority over demons and to cast them out. This is due to their trust in the victory of the Lord. The devil also could not find a place in their life to argue about, because their life was pure.

One of the brethren asked Abba Isidore, an elder of Scete, "Why do the demons fear you so much?" The old man said to him, "Since the time I became a monk I have taken care that anger not rise as far as my gorge (Ramsey 1985:162).

This quiet confidence in the victory of Christ over the demons made the monks highly attractive and effective representatives of the kingdom of God. Their purity of life and steadfastness of faith made them like oases of refreshment in the desert of a demon-plagued society. Many people would therefore consult them or call in their help when tormented by demons.

3.1.5 Radical simplicity and common sense

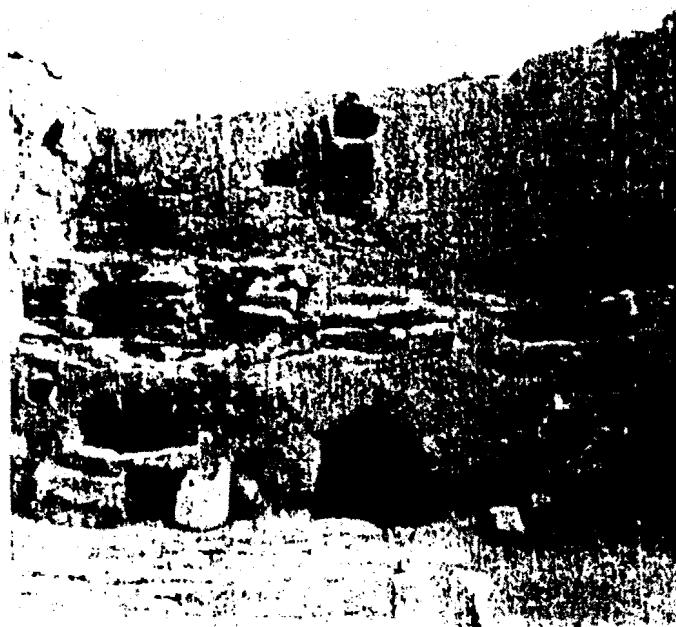
The desert Fathers withdrew from ordinary society and sought the solitude of the desert. This was the first step in their "spirituality". Then they placed themselves under spiritual fathers. After that, the daily life was their prayer. At that time of luxury in the world for them was a radically simple life: a stone hut with a roof of branches, a reed mat for a bed, a sheep-skin, a lamp, a vessel of water or oil. It was enough. Food and sleep were reduced to the minimum. "one hour's sleep a night is enough for a monk if he is a fighter", they said (Ward 1975:xiv).

But they were happy in the fellowship with their Saviour. He was their joy. They had a horror of extra possessions. "A disciple saw a few peas lying on the road and he said to his father, "Shall I pick them up?" But the old man said in amazement, "why? Did you put them here?" He said, "no." "Then why should you pick them up?" (Ward 1975:xiv). The

Lord Jesus was their precious pearl, so they desired nothing beside Him. He was everything to them. They tried many experiments, especially with fasting, but the final conclusion was, "for a man of prayer, one meal a day is sufficient". When a young monk boasted of fasting longer, they asked him searching questions about the rest of his life.

The ideal was not sub-human but super-human, in other words the angelic life. This was to be interpreted in the most practical and common sense way. There is a story of John the Dwarf who announced to his brother that he was going off into the desert to live as ^{an} angel. After several days of acute hunger, his brother heard a knock at the door. He asked who was there, and when a voice said, "John." He replied, "John is now an angel and has no need of food and shelter". But at last he took in the humbled John and set him to work again (:xiv).

True, the Fathers had presented new ideals about life, eternity and how to be happy. They were challenging ideals, because the fathers were the pioneers in setting them, but after a while the world discovered in these ideals the true meaning of the happy and spiritual life. This was due primarily to the credibility of the monks, who not only believed and preached these high ideals but succeeded by and large to put them into daily practice. It is to this aspect of the presentation of the ideals of the kingdom of God that the following section is devoted.



**The traditional monastery oven
original kitchen of the monastery**

3.2 They presented a new style of life:

The holy life of the Fathers was something known all over the world and many attest to this fact. Egypt has therefore even been called "the home of sanctity" (Russell 1980:10).

Egypt was considered, at that time, a holy land similar to Jerusalem and famous visitors enrolled in its pilgrimage. After their spiritual experience they wrote about the blessings and benefits they gained: "I hear that you are penetrating the hidden places of Egypt, visiting the bands of monks and joining the round of heaven's family on earth...", Jerome wrote in 375 to his friend Rufinus. Many years later Rufinus himself records his visit to Egypt with nostalgia, "when we were drawing near this place they were aware that foreign brethren were approaching, and at once they poured out of their cells like a swarm of bees. With joyful speed and glad haste they ran to meet us" (:3).

About the last stage of his journey to Scetis he wrote, "this is the utter desert where each monk remains alone in his cell... There is a huge silence and a great quiet there" (Meyer 1964. XVIII). The huge silence of the desert was frequently invaded at the end of the fourth century by many visitors. St. Athanasius opened the door of Egypt by writing the *Life of St. Antony* in 357 A.D., one year after Antony's departure.

So the whole world was opened to the Coptic monastic inheritance. In addition to this praise of St. Antony the Great, however, there are various other accounts written by visitors who came to the desert during the fourth and fifth centuries.

Travellers through Egypt had told about the monasticism they saw there. The *Life of St. Antony* confirmed their wonder. Fired with enthusiasm, visitors began to undertake the journey into Egypt in order to learn from the monks at first hand; Basil the Great came, then Rufinus, Melania, Jerome, Palladius, and John Cassian with Germanus.

Rufinus tells us that the aim of these visits was to take a picture by outsiders, dependent on what they observed during their brief visits and what they were told. Moreover, these accounts were meant for the edification of a very different audience from the Coptic monks. They were primarily for the monks of the West, eager to follow the same spiritual path though under different physical and mental conditions.

Therefore, if we accept that the Western spiritual leaders had been edified by the Coptic monks and St. Benedict, for example, affirmed that he got his spiritual guidance from the Eastern fathers (Heufelder 1983:47,100,175), this bears witness that the lives of the Coptic monks have inspired the whole Christian world and they helped, through their holy life, in building the kingdom of God.

In what follows I will examine the different aspects of their lives and how that was for the glory of Christ and the spread of His Kingdom.

3.2.1 They kept the pure life in a pagan world as a witness of their love for Christ.

The monks knew that their calling was a calling to a holy life. They left the world to be owned by the Lord and to live with Him in continuous fellowship. That fellowship demanded a pure life; therefore, the fathers lived in daily repentance. They sought for the joy of the beloved Jesus and this joy is not separated from the holy life. So they kept the holy life. They were ready to sacrifice everything to live a pure and witnessing life. This is revealed by many sayings and stories:

The beleaguered devil undertook one night to assume the form of a woman and to imitate her every gesture, solely in order that he might beguile St. Antony. But in thinking about the Christian considering the excellence won through Him, St. Antony extinguished the fire of his opponent's deception. (Gregg 1980:34). St. Antony frequently stressed the importance of the pure heart, saying:

It is good to hear and obey the Apostle, for he says, 'Examine yourselves and test yourselves.'

Now daily let each one recount to himself his actions of the day and night, and if he sinned, let him stop (.55).

There was a story of a pure virgin who lived a pure life in her house and she affirmed in her heart to keep her virginity by God's grace. But the devil put in the heart of one of the youth in the area to desire to do sin with her and he began to visit her several times. When

she felt that he looked at her with lust, she began to be sad so as to stop his way and prayed to save him.

One day while she was weaving inside the house, he knocked at her door. She went to open while carrying the needle in her hand. "Why are you coming here, man?" she asked. He answered, "your love, my mistress". "What do you love in me?" she asked again. "Your eyes, I love very much and I can not find rest when I see you" he answered again.

When she heard that, she poked out one of her eyes with the needle which was in her hand and she threw this eye to him. He stopped her quickly from doing the same with the second eye. Soon, she left him and shut her door. When the young man saw that the virgin lost her eye for him, he became sad and repented for what he did. Later he left the world, and escaped to the desert to become a monk. He kept the life of purity until the end of his life because of what he was taught from this pure virgin (Fr. Anastasy 1980:135f.) (My translation).

St. Pachomius said, "keep the purity of your body and heart, because if you do this you will see God" (:202). He also said, "keep your self from the lust because it is the mother of all sins and he who obeys it will loose his purity and will know nothing of the mysteries of God" (:202) (My translation).

In the days of the Khalifa (Ruler) Marwan Ibn Mohamad in the eight century, he asked the Bashmorin to help him in his struggle against the Kherasin. And he left for them the freedom in Egypt to do what they want, so some of them attacked a convent near Akhmim, in upper Egypt, and took one of its young and beautiful nuns. Her name was "Pheronia", and she was originally from Syria. They took her by force because of her beauty. While they were discussing who will take her, she lifted her heart to her King, the Lord Jesus.

She prayed to the Lord to help her to keep her virginity, even if the price for that is her life. She got an amazing idea to save her purity. She asked to meet the leader of the army because she wanted to tell him a very important secret. When he came, she said, "I will tell you the secret on condition that you will let me to go in peace" and he accepted the condition".

"My fathers were very wise," said Pheronia. "They discovered a secret which they gave to us. This secret is an oil on which we have said long prayers. If you anoint yourself with it, you will not be afraid of anything, death, or sword. You will be sure about the safety of your life. I know

this. The trial and test will prove that I told you the truth. I am ready to anoint my neck with this oil and you hit me or else I will anoint your neck with the oil and I hit you".

The leader was afraid for himself so he asked Pheronia to anoint her neck with the oil. She was very happy because she was not afraid of death. Instead she was waiting for the moment in which she would go to her heavenly bridegroom. She preferred death rather than to live in the body without her purity. She asked him if she could go to the church to bring the oil and to pray. He accepted that while watching her. Then she went to the church and prayed asking the Lord to keep her purity and to prepare her for eternity.

She brought oil from the church, anointed her neck, and gave him more to keep for the future. Then she said to him, "Please hit my neck, with all your power, to be sure about the oil". He was very happy about the secret oil and so he hit her neck with all his power. In a moment, her head separated from her body and fell on the ground. The leader and the soldiers were amazed for the courage of this virgin and her love for keeping her virginity. They left the place, feeling sorry for what they did. They left everything they took from the nuns, but the picture of this pure, young virgin remained intact in their memory (Fr. Anastasy 1980:141f.) (My translation).

Abba Ephrem was on the road. A prostitute tried by her flattery, if not to lead him to shameful intercourse, then at least to make him angry, for no one had ever seen him angry. He said to her, "Follow me."

When they had reached a very crowded place, he said to her, "in this place, come, do what you desire." But she, seeing the crowd, said to him, "how can we do what we want to do in front of so a great a crowd, without being ashamed?" He replied, If you blush before people, how much more should we blush before God, who knows what is hidden in darkness? She was covered with shame and went away without having achieved anything (Ward 1975:51).

One of the fruits of their purity was the joy of the Lord. The Fathers changed the earth to be a heaven through their praise. Chitty (1966:31) said "if you stood at the centre of Nitria about the ninth hour (three o'clock), you would hear psalmody from every station of monks (fifty stations) until you thought you were up in Paradise."

In fact they showed the Christian virtues in their pure form. Certainly monasteries were, in that time, schools of spirituality.

3.2.2 Prayer:

It is well known that the daily program of the Fathers was the life of contemplation and prayer. Abba Epiphanius said, "the true monk should have prayer and psalmody in his heart without ceasing" (Chitty 1966:73).

Ward said in the introduction of the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, "prayer was a great action to be fulfilled in the body politic; the monks were like trees, purifying the atmosphere by their presence" (Russell 1980:12). Abba Isaac said:

The whole purpose of the monk and indeed the perfection of his heart amount to this total and uninterrupted dedication to prayer. For just as the edifice of all virtues strives upward toward perfect prayer so will all these virtues be neither sturdy nor enduring unless they are drawn firmly together by the crown of prayer (Luibheid 1985:101).

"It was said of Abba Arsenius that on Saturday evenings, preparing for the glory of Sunday, he would turn his back on the sun and stretch out his hands in prayer towards the heaven till once again the sun shone on his face" (Ward 1975:12).

The brethren asked Abba Agathon, "amongst all good works, which is the virtue that requires great effort?" He answer, "forgive me, but I think there is no labour greater than that of prayer to God. For every time a man wants to pray, his enemies, the demons, want to prevent him, for they know that it is only by turning him from prayer that they can hinder his journey. Whatever good work a man undertakes, if he is preserved by it, he will attain rest. But prayer is warfare to the last breath" (:18).

The fellowship with the heavenly Father was something of great importance to the Fathers. They were sure that they left the world to gain the life of constant prayer.

3.2.3 Charity:

The aim of the monk's life was not asceticism, but God. The way to God was charity, so St. Antony the Great said, "my life is with my brother" (Ward 1975:XV). He also said, "if we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalise our brother, we have sinned against Christ" (Ward 1975:2). Rousseau (1985:159), when he spoke about St. Pachomius and his community said: "Christianity meant, for its citizens, not just asceticism, but the wider-ranging hospitality that had attracted Pachomius to Thebes and that came to characterise his own communities."

So the life of the Fathers was full of stories showing love towards all people, love to the brothers, to unbelievers and even love to their enemies:

An old father with a brother led their lives together. Now the old father was charitable. It happened that there was a famine and people came to his door seeking alms, and in charity the old father gave to all who came. Seeing what was happening, the brother said to the old father, "give me my share of loaves, and do what you like with yours."

The old father divided the loaves and gave alms from his share. Now many people hastened to the old father, learning that he supplied everyone, and God-seeing that he supplied everyone blessed these loaves. But when the brother had consumed his own food, he said to the father, "Since I have only a little food left, Abba, take me back into the common life again."

So they began again to live in common. When scarcity came again, the needy came back seeking alms. Now one day the brother came in and saw they were short of loaves. A poor man came, and the old father told the brother to give him alms. He said, "it is no longer possible, father." The old father said to him, "go in and look."

The brother went inside and found the bin full of loaves. When he saw that, he was filled with fear, and taking some he gave to the poor. In this way he learned the faith and virtue of the old father, and he gave glory to God (Ward 1975:42).

Before Abba Poemen's group came to the Scetis, there was an old man in Egypt who enjoyed considerable fame and repute. But when Abba Poemen's group went to Scetis, men left the old man to go to see Abba Poemen.

Abba Poemen was grieved at this and said to his disciples, 'what is to be done about this great old man, for men grieve him by leaving him and coming to us who are nothing? What shall we do, then to comfort this old man?' He said to them, 'make ready a little food, and take a skin of wine and let us go to see him and eat with him. And so we shall be able to comfort him.' So they put together some food, and went.

When they knocked at the door, the old man's disciple answered saying, 'who are you?' They responded, 'tell the Abba it is Poemen who desired to be blessed by him.' The disciple reported this and the old man sent him to say, 'go away I have no time.' But in spite of the heat they preserved saying, 'we shall not go away till we have been allowed to meet the old man.'

Seeing their humility and patience, the old man was filled with compunction and opened the door to them. Then they went in and ate with him. During the meal he said, 'truly, not only what I have heard about you is true, but I see that your works are a hundredfold greater,' and from that day, he became their friend" (Ward 1975:138).

3.2.4 Faith:

If the Fathers had no faith, it would be impossible for them to sell everything and live in a desolate desert like that. Also the Fathers carried out various heroic actions through their faith in the Almighty God, God of the impossible. An example of this is Abba Copres who was an old priest living in the desert. He was ninety years old and a superior of fifty brothers at the time of the visit of Rufinus, who said, "we will speak later how his faith could change the sandy poor desert to be a fertile land and by this way could teach the same faith to the simple peasants" (Russell 1980:83).

Abba Copres spoke about another man of faith, Abba Patermuthius who through faith did many miracles.

Once Abba Patermuthius came down from the desert to visit some brothers, former disciples of his, who were stricken with disease, for God had revealed to him that one of them would die. But evening was already approaching and the village was still some distance away.

Not wishing to enter the village at night, since he avoided unsuitable times and practised the Saviour's precepts, "Walk while you have the light" (John 12.35) and, "If any man walk in the day, he stumbles not" (John 11.9).

He addressed the setting sun with the words, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ stand still a little in your course, until I arrive at the village." The sun, which had already become a semicircle on the horizon, stood still and did not set until he came to the village. As a result, the miracle became obvious to the villagers.

They all gathered to watch the sun and marvelled to see that for many hours it did not set. When they saw Father Patermuthius coming out of the desert, they asked him what this miraculous sign could mean.

He said to them, "Do you not recall the words of the Saviour: "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, greater works than these shall you do." (Matthew 17:20; John 14:12). At once fear overcame them, and some of them remained with him, becoming his disciples.

He went into the house where one of the sick brothers was, and finding him already dead, went up to the bed and prayed and kissed him and asked which he preferred, to go to God, or to continue to live in the flesh.

The brother sat up and said to him, "it is better to depart and to be with Christ. (Philippians 1:23) To live in the flesh is not essential for me" "then sleep in peace, my child" he said, "and intercede with God for me" The brother, just as he was, immediately lay back and died. All who were present were amazed and said, "truly this is a man of God." Then he buried him in a fitting manner, and spent the whole night singing hymns (Russell 1980:83f).

It was said about Abba Bessarion by his disciple Doulas, "one day while we were going to see an old man, the sun was setting. So Abba Bessarion said this prayer, "I pray you Lord, that the sun may stand still till we reach your servant," and that is what happened (Ward 1975:34).

Another time when Abba Bessarion had occasion to do so, he said a prayer and crossed the river on foot and then he continued on his way. Filled with wonder, I asked his pardon and said, "how did your feet feel when you were walking on the water?" He replied, "I felt the water just to my heels, but the rest was dry" (:34).

Abba Bessarion did many miracles, and most of them were for the benefit of others and strengthen their faith. His disciple Doulas said,

One day when we were walking beside the sea I was thirsty. I said to Abba Bessarion, "Father, I am very thirsty."

He said a prayer and said to me, "drink some of the sea water." The water proved sweet when I drank some. I even poured some into the leather bottle for fear of being thirsty later on. Seeing this, the old man asked me why I was taking some. I said to him, "forgive me, it is for fear of being thirsty later on." Then the old man said, "God is here, God is everywhere" (:34).

At the end it should be known that the saints spoke about their virtues not for themselves or glory, but for the benefit of others. St. Antony said "it's not for myself, but for the sake of your love and advancement that I speak" (Gregg 1980: 60).

The major part of heroic stories were not told by the saints themselves, but by their disciples either while they were alive or after their departure. The saints tried hard to keep their virtues secret because they knew their biggest enemy was vainglory.

Abbot Syncletica said, "a treasure that is known is quickly spent: and even so any virtue that is commented on and made a public show of is destroyed. Even as wax is melted before the face of fire, so is the soul enfeebled by praise, and loses the toughness of its virtues" (Waddell 1957: 95)

An interesting story about how the Fathers tried hard to hide their virtues is said about Abba Moses the Black:

At one time a provincial judge heard of abbot Moses and set out into Scetes to see him: but the old man heard of his coming and got up to flee into the marsh. And the judge with his following met him, and questioned him saying, "tell me, old man, where is the cell of the abbot Moses?"

And he said, "why would you seek him out? The man is fool and a heretic." So the judge coming to the church said to the clergy, "I had heard of the abbot Moses and came to see him: but lo! we met an old man journeying into Egypt, and asked him where might be the cell of abbot Moses, and he said, "why do you seek him? He is a fool and a heretic"

The clergy, on hearing this, were perturbed and said, "what was this old man like, who spoke thus to you of the holy man?" And they said, "he was an old man wearing a very ancient garment, tall and black" And they said, "it is the abbot himself: and because he did not wish to be seen by you, he told you these things about himself" And mighty edified, the judge went away (Waddell 1957:94).

It is amazing that even when the Fathers hide themselves and their virtues people were edified.

In this chapter I examined the centripetal dimension of the mission of the Coptic monks. Throughout the chapter it was clear that the integrity and consistent devotion of the monks was the aspect that made their lives most attractive and fruitful for the kingdom of God. Their confident faith in the victory of Christ over the demons and spontaneous joy at their belonging to God meant that many people consulted them or called them in when they had various personal problems. The miracles attributed to the monks, controversial as this will

always be to historians and researchers, are something real for us as Coptic people. We see every day various miracles being performed through the faith of monks. These miracles testify at least to the trust and faith that people had in the monks and to the beneficial effect that they had on Egyptian society at that time. On the basis of this centripetal mission, it is now time to the more direct centrifugal mission of the Coptic monks.



The ancient sewage system in the monasteries

CHAPTER 4

THE “OUTREACHING” MISSION OF THE COPTIC MONKS

4.1 THE FATHERS AS SERVANTS OF HUMANITY

Henry (1987:275) said in his article about monastic mission that "Monasticism is a school for the Lord's service" therefore the leaders of monasticism felt their responsibility towards humanity and tried to help all people in sacrificial love. St. Antony said, "My life is with my brother" (Russell 1980:XV). He also said, "If we gain our brother, we have gained God out, if we scandalise our brother, we have sinned against Christ" (Ward 1975:2).

Some ask how was it possible for Coptic monks to love the world, while at the same time they love the life of solitude, and going away from the world. Abba Arsenius answered this question when the Abbot Marcus said to him: "Wherfore do you flee from us". He answered, "God knows that I love you: but I can not be with God and with you" (Waddell 1957:6). And the Saints stayed with God for the sake of the people. They filled their time with prayers for the people. A monk's heart is burdened with the problems of others. He prays intensely for other's needs and difficulties. He knows that God is the only answer for the different problems of people's life.

It is amazing how Coptic monks identified with the community and tried hard to make life easier and more blessed for people. Luther thought that "Monastic vows are incompatible with proper love of one's neighbour, with duty to one's parents, and with service to one's fellow men (Lohse 1963:591f). Maybe that was the case in Luther's context, yet if we follow the influence of Coptic monasticism on society, we discover the positive role they played in their time. Gregg (1980:9) said that St. Antony was significantly involved with people and their affairs.

When Cassian spoke about miracles in the life of the Fathers, he observed that their theme was "not the performance of wonderful works, but the purity of love" (Luibheid 1985:176).

Russell said in his translation for the Coptic monastic tradition that "the work of monk produces the fruits of charity and this is the concern of the monks and of those who visited them" (Russell 1980:45). Love of people was the leading rule in the life of the Fathers, love toward all without, whether people are Christians or not.

Rousseau, (1985:149f) in his study about the community of St. Pachomius, said,

So much for the inner, personal goals of the ascetic life as Pachomius envisaged it. But none of those goals was pursued in total isolation from society. It is doubtful even hermits were that remote in their endeavours, but certainly the members of Pachomius' monasteries were not.

The formation of the communities, the conduct of the daily life and the development of structure and authority, even the most intimate pursuit of spiritual ideals--all took place under the scrutiny of those who were not members of the Koinonia. Indeed, curiosity could be persistent and intrusive, drawing people from far afield, to visit the communities and see their way of life for themselves.

It is clear enough, that monks themselves could expect constant streams of visitors. These were received gladly, even if with caution. Priests and other clerics, for example, were to be shown due honour on such occasions. The monks were willing to pray with them during the Synaxis¹.

4.2 MISSION AS LOVE IN ACTION

In this section, which makes up the bulk of the chapter, I will discuss the missionary role of Coptic monasticism under five headings. The focus is on different aspects of Christian love toward people, revealed in the "outreaching" activities of the monks. The five dimensions of their love in action are:

- 4.2.1 Love towards the poor.
- 4.2.2 Love in serving others.
- 4.2.3 Love in healing the sick.
- 4.2.4 Love in practising justice and helping others to take their rights.

¹ Synaxis is the early morning doxology, which includes the Liturgy.

4.2.5 Love in casting out demons and banishing their authority over people.

4.2.1 Love towards the poor:

The poor were the deepest concern of the monks, and they felt when they gave to the poor they gave to the Lord Himself. St. Antony, when he decided to leave the world and become an anchorite he sold everything and gave it to the poor (Chitty 1966:2). It was this voluntary poverty of the monks that made them sensitive to the plight of the physically and materially poor. They knew the pangs of hunger and thirst, which made them natural allies of the suffering people.

Abba Serapion organised a regular trade between the Fayyum and the city of Alexandria on a large scale, sending wheat and clothing down to the poor of Alexandria. The reason given was that there were no poor near the monasteries.

From the labours of the brethren they despatch whole shiploads of wheat and clothing to Alexandria for the poor, because it is rare for any one in need to be found living near the monasteries (Russell 1980:13).

Palladius spoke about one of the monasteries of St. Pachomius, which was in Panapolis. He said:

A place of about three hundred monks. They even keep swine. When I objected to that practice, they answered me: "With us it is an old custom that they are nourished with the fruits and vegetable leftovers. What is dropped is thrown out, and in this way is saved. The pigs are killed and their flesh is sold, but the pig's feet are given to the sick and the old as the area is poor but heavily populated (Meyer 1964:95).

An old man said, "When someone asks something of you, even if you do violence to yourself in giving it to him, your thought must take pleasure in the gift according to that which is written, 'If someone asks you to go a mile, go two miles with him'. That is to say, if someone asks something of you, give it to him with your whole soul and spirit" (Russell 1980:85)

Abba Apollo may have been famous for his personal austerity and for fasting, but when there was a famine in the Thebaid, the people assumed that Apollo's community of monks would have food. It seems, in fact, that they had plenty of baskets of bread which they shared with the surrounding district (Russell 1980:14f). They were concerned to keep this life of giving to the poor and they considered it as the real cause of the heavenly grace.

A brother asked an old father, "How is it that in these days some afflict themselves in GC their manner of life and do not receive grace as the ancients did?" The old father said to him, "In those days there was charity and each one caused his neighbour to make progress, but now that charity has grown cold, each one pulls his neighbour back, that is why we do not receive grace" (.59).

If we read the stories of most of the desert fathers, we will see how they upheld the custom of giving to the poor. Usually the father has his own hand work to live with a small part of the income and he gives the rest to the poor (Meyer 1964:94).

There is a story of St. Paphnutius, when a wealthy merchant sent to him ten sacks of beans and lentils. The saint asked him to be a monk and he gave his money to the poor (Russell 1980:96).

Waddell (1957:21) wrote about a monk whose sole possession was a single codex of the Gospels and who sold it to feed the hungry. When challenged, he said, "I have but sold that word which ever said to me, 'sell what you have and give to the poor.'"

The Fathers believed that money is owned by God and that they are stewards of it. The eschatological feeling of eternity freed them from the temptation of money. The devil showed Abba Patermius the treasure vaults of Pharaoh full of pure gold. The man said to the devil, "Your money perish with you" (Acts 8.20) (Russell 1980:85). A similar tale is told of Abba Pambo:

Melania said, "When I first came from Rome to Alexandria and heard about the virtue of Abba Pambo from Abba Isidore, I took him a silver coffer containing three hundred pounds of silver and invited him to share in my wealth. He was sitting weaving palm leaves, and he merely blessed me and said: "May God reward you."

And he told his steward Origin: "Take this and dispense it to all the brethren down in Libya and on the islands, for those monasteries are in greater need."

He gave him orders not to dispense any of it in Egypt because that country was better off."

She continued: "I was standing by and expecting to be honoured or praised by him for my donation, but I heard nothing from him, and so I spoke up to him: "So you may know, O lord, how much it is, there are three hundred pounds."

He did not so much as raise his head, but said: "My child, He who measures the mountains knows better the amount of the silver. If you were giving it to me, you spoke well; but if you are giving it to God, who did not overlook the two obols, then be quiet" (Meyer 1964:44).

It is interesting that when a monk plants a garden, he keeps little for himself because he lives a life of austerity, but rejoices in giving the crops to visitors and the poor.

The monks were renowned for the loving welcome they gave to their guests and there are instances, in the stories of the Fathers, of such hospitality. The most striking is the description of the reception given to the visitors in Nitria and Cellia, in the Latin version of Rufinus: "What can I say that would do justice to their humanity, their courtesy, and their love;.... Nowhere I have seen love flourish so greatly, nowhere such quick compassion, such eager hospitality" (Russell 1980:35).

St. Antony spoke about the great virtue of giving to the poor, saying: "It was revealed to him in his desert that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and everyday he sang the Sanctus with the angels" (Ward 1975:5). Giving to the poor for the Fathers had no limit, as it was said about Abba Nistheros:

A brother saw Abba Nistheros wearing two tunics and he questioned him saying, "If a poor man came to ask you for a tunic, which would you give him?" He replied, "The better one."

And if someone asked you for one, what would you give him?" The old man said, "Half of the other one." The brother said, "And if someone else asked for one, what would you give him?" He said, "I should cut the rest, give him half, and gird myself with whatever was left." So the brother said, "And if someone came and asked you for that, what would you do?"

The old man said, "I would give him the rest and go and sit down somewhere, until God sent me something to cover myself with, for I would not ask anyone for anything." (130).

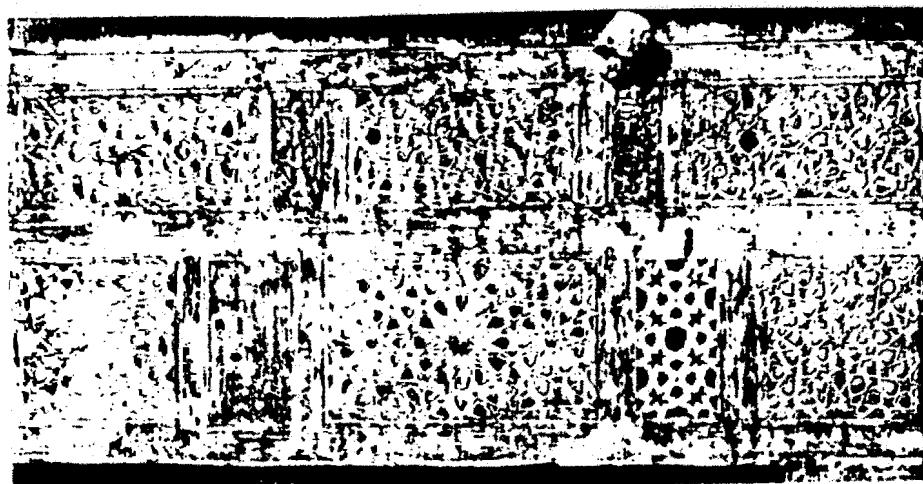
Abba Theodore of Phreme had acquired three good books. He came to Abba Macarius and said to him, "I have three excellent books from which I derive profit; the brethren also

make use of them and derive profit from them. Tell me what I ought to do: keep them for my use and that of the brethren, or sell them and give the money to the poor?"

The old man answered him in this way, "Your actions are good; but it is best of all to possess nothing." Hearing that, he went and sold his books and gave the money from them to the poor" (Ward 1975:63).The fathers also related the acceptable prayer with giving to the poor. Abba Nilus said, "Go, sell all that belongs to you and give it to the poor and taking up the cross, deny yourself; in this way you will be able to pray without distraction"⁹⁶ (Ward 1975:129).

It was St. Shenoute's policy to welcome the needy and the distressed of all classes and to give them consolation. Once a man named Luke, afflicted by want, hunger and hopelessness came to him; St. Shenoute did not settle the question by offering a loaf of bread to satisfy the man's hunger or by giving him alms.

Such charitable relief would partly solve the problem for it was contemporary--but, with such discretion, he offered him some seeds and after instructing him how to cultivate them, advised him to get in touch with him occasionally. The seeds grew up, the harvest flourished ready for the reaper's sickle and thus the man found a permanent means whereby to live (Farag 1964:39).



An ancient sanctuary veil
St. Macarius Monastery

4.2.2 Love in serving others:

The lives of the fathers is characterised by serving all people. They felt that they were sent by the Lord to wash the feet of humanity. Although they choose a life of solitude, that solitude was not a sick or passive one, rather they felt the burden of helping all needy people. Therefore, we will find their service in every aspect of life. Actually their service began with praying for the world. They left the world not because they hated it, but to serve it "from outside". From a position of power, through their intimate fellowship with the Lord, they could do a heroic work in the world for Him.

Abba John of Lycopolis was regarded by his fellow citizens as one who foreknew and revealed things hidden in the future. He told everyone what he had done in secret. He predicted the rise and fall of the Nile and the annual yield of crops (Ward 1980:15). The father did all this through prayer. We are not amazed to find that Coptic monks changed a pagan city to be a city for monks, a kingdom of God. Rufinus said that Oxyrhynchus, a town of the Thebaid, was filled entirely with a population of monks and nuns, who lived in deserted temples and treated the town as a gigantic monastic establishment (Russell 1980:22).

As Henry (1987:275) said, "in monasticism we see the church turning outside to embrace the world" So, contrary to popular perceptions, the Coptic monks did not renounce the world in order to turn their backs on it, but precisely in order to embrace the it in the name of Christ.

4.2.2.1 Spiritual issues:

The monks were spiritual counsellors to the people, as Rufinus observed:

This is a very explicit statement of a theme frequently discussed today, the place of the holy man in society. The monk, especially the hermit, it is said, was, in fourth century Egypt, a focus of spiritual power for his neighbours. As one who was outside society, disassociated from its petty factions and ambitions, he was a point of appeal, a peacemaker between men; he was also a friend of God, the one who had influence at the court of heaven; he was at the very lowest, good luck for those fortunate enough to be near him (Russell 1980:12).

Therefore the Fathers called St. Antony "The light of the world" (Gregg 1980:28) as a result of his spiritual leadership. Baker said, "St. Antony, knowing no Greek, but able to preach the simple message of the Gospel in the vernacular" (Cuming 1970:27). Speaking of Coptic monks, J. Lebreton says,

we also find there the character of old monks quite faithful, they are no more than Coptic peasants, illiterate. They challenge the written word, they speak little. Their sentences are a strong relief. They are words full of the Holy Spirit, and, as said by one of their disciples, their speeches are penetrating as swords. They delight in parables, in anecdotes: with none of the dogmatic discourses, none of sermons, with few miracles, few visions, but the spontaneous expressions of the profound life of the heart.

These sentences are not quoted from formal written biographies. They are isolated fragments which little by little were collected. Their historical value is great, at least when we are not looking for individual portraits, but for a collective picture where the whole monastic life of Scetis is reflected (Farag 1964:76f.).

This observation reflects the way by which the Fathers taught others. Usually the father begins to live alone. After he receives a deep spiritual experience through his fellowship with the Lord and with the help of the spiritual guidance of other Fathers who are older than him, disciples begin to gather around him.

At that moment, his fame starts to spread, so people who need his spiritual guidance come to ask him or listen to his sayings from his disciples. Most of the Fathers welcome visitors, especially those who are keen about their spiritual growth. Some Fathers prefer the quiet life away from the people, like Abba Arsenius. One day he was a teacher of king's children noted for his wisdom. But he left the palace to come to Egypt and live in the Scetis. The sayings and guidance of those Fathers reach the people even through their disciples. Actually the fathers taught with their life more than with their words.

Monasteries remained as colleges of spirituality and people from the whole world came to enrol in them. Some monks like St. Pachomius and St. Shenoute had their spiritual literature which circulated throughout the world. Other literature was written by the visitors recorded from the mouths of the fathers themselves, like John Cassian, Palladius and St. Jerome.

4.2.2.2 Day to day issues

In normal aspects of life, monks made life easier for people:

(a) In agriculture:

Monks made the desert blossom. The *Historia Monachorum* contains stories of flourishing agricultural projects-- gardens of vegetables for the use of the monks and their visitors, green plants growing which were never there before, peasant farming in rich soil, and gardens full of trees. Vegetables for cooking were taken from the garden of Abba Copres for his visitors.

Abba Copres seems to have been particularly involved in agricultural improvement in Egypt. While visitors were talking to him, a peasant came in with a shovelful of sand. The explanation Abba Copres gave of this was as follows:

The land bordering us was infertile, and the peasants who owned it scarcely had a double return from the seed they sowed.... I said to them, "If you have faith in God even this desert sand will bear fruit for you." Without a moment's hesitation they filled the folds of their tunics with the sand which had been trodden by us, and bringing it to me, asked me to bless it. They sowed the sand together with the corn in their fields and at once the land became extremely fertile more than anywhere else in Egypt. As a result, it is now there custom to do this, and every year they troubled us for sand.

The writer of the account adds that Copres himself took advantage of this system of fertilisation:

He took us into his own garden and showed us date/palms and other fruit trees which he had planted himself in the desert. This had been suggested to him by the faith of those peasants to whom he had said that even the desert can bear fruit for those who have faith in God: "For when I saw that they sowed sand and their land bore fruit," He said, "I tried to do the same and I succeeded (Russell 1980:14f).

If the system is regarded as the transference of more fertile soil to other soil, this is an instance of agricultural improvement of a high order.

(b) *The flooding of the Nile:*

Moreover, throughout the *Historia Monachorum* the Nile is apparent as the source of wealth and life in Egypt. Therefore, there are stories of pagans taking their idols down to dip them into the Nile to ensure flooding at the right time. So if the people depended on the prayers of these monks as if on God himself (Russell 1980:50), the monks played a great role to help people in that matter.

They prayed for the flooding of the Nile. John of Lycopolis was regarded by his fellow citizens as one who foreknew and revealed things hidden in the future. He predicted the rise and fall of the Nile and the annual yield of the crops (:15). The Fathers used the occasion of the pagan ceremonies for blessing the Nile as a tool for preaching the Gospel. This was another instance that revealed the contextually relevant way in which they presented the Gospel to the people of Egypt.

Rufinus said that the ceremonies necessary for the flooding of the Nile were of central importance in Egypt. John of Lycopolis was asked to bless the water in place of the pagan priest. Apollo met a procession of pagans taking a statue to dip into the Nile waters, and caused commotion among them and in the neighbouring villages by halting the procession by his prayers. The conversion of these pagans followed (:18).

(c) *Helping in the daily life:*

In the harvest: The monks helped the farmers by working with them in the time of the harvest. There are stories about the blessing the farmers received through the work of monks.

Helping the other new monks: by building their cells.

Abba Or was about ninety years old, living in Thebaid and he was the father of the hermitages of a thousand brothers. Rufinus said that he looked like an angel and his face was so radiant that the sight of him alone filled one with awe.

It was known of this father that when a large number of monks came to him, he called together everybody who lived near him and built cells for them in a single day, one delivered mortar, another bricks, another drawing water, and another cutting wood. And when the cells had been completed, he himself saw to the needs of the newcomers (Russell 1980:63f).

Some monks helped others by bringing them bread and fruit or medicine in the dry desert like Abba Apollonius who will be mentioned later on (4.2.3.2). Abba John was unique in serving others:

It was said that when his spiritual father Abba Bemuah became old, he stayed sick in bed for twelve years. Abba John served him during this period with great sacrifice. When the time of Abba Bemuah's departure came near, he gathered the fathers and held the hand of Abba John and said to them, "keep him because he is an angel and not a man" (My translation) (*Arabic Synaxarium* 1978:88).

Because it was difficult to get water in the desert, some monks took the responsibility of carrying water for the old people. Abba Moses the Black was famous for doing that and he did it for two reasons, **first**, as a labour of love or compassion towards the old and needy people; and **secondly**: because he believed that a monk should work hard if he wanted to defeat the devil. Palladius said:

Abba Moses stayed in his cell six years then, standing in the middle of his cell every night praying, never shutting his eyes--and still he could not control his mind (because he was suffering in this time from evil thoughts). He started another way of life. Each night he went out to the cells of the old men and more ascetic than them, and he took their water pitchers and kept them filled without their knowledge. For they have their water a good way off--some two miles, others five, and some only half a mile (Meyer 1964:69).

Another father, Abba Pior, helped the fathers get water in another way. Abba Moses reported about him as follows:

When I was a youth in the monastery we dug a large cistern twenty feet across. Eighty of us had been digging away there for three days and we had gone about a cubit farther than usual. We had expected to find a spring but had not found water.

Deeply disappointed, we were considering giving up the task. Abba Pior happened along then from the Great Desert at the sixth hour, in the heat of the day, and the old man was wearing a cloak. He greeted us and then said, "why have you become faint of heart, O ye of little faith? For since yesterday I have seen you losing heart"

And he went down into the pit of the cistern on a ladder and prayed along with them. He took up the pickaxe and said while striking his third blow: "O God of the holy Patriarchs, do not bring to naught the labour of your servants, but send them the water they need." And at once

water spouted forth so as to sprinkle them. Then he said another prayer and left. They tried to get him to eat; he did not accede to their wishes, however, but said: "That for which I was sent is accomplished; I was not sent for this (Meyer 1964:115f).

It is important to note that Father Pior considered what he had done as a mission he was sent to accomplish--a mission of helping others in their affliction.

(d) Helping the people against wild beasts

Abba Bes was an old man who surpassed everyone in meekness.

Once when a hippopotamus was ravaging the neighbouring countryside, the farmers called on this father to help them. He stood at the place and waited, and when he saw the beast, which was of enormous size, he commanded it in a gentle voice, saying, "in the name of Jesus Christ I order you not to ravage the countryside anymore". The hippopotamus, as if driven away by an angel, vanished completely from the district. On another occasion he got rid of a crocodile in the same way (Russell 1980:66).

It is amazing that as the Fathers helped the people against wild beasts, they also helped wild beasts out of compassion. But I feel amazed at how these wild beasts felt the healing power of the Fathers. Probably this is the authority which the first Adam had in the Garden and had returned to the fathers through the redemption and their intimate fellowship with the Saviour.

It was said about St. Macarius that one day he was praying in his cave in the desert. There happened to be another cave nearby which was the den of a hyena. While he was at prayer, the hyena suddenly appeared and began to lick his feet. And taking him gently by the hem of his tunic, she drew him towards her own cave.

He followed her saying, "I wonder what this animal wants to do? When she led him to her own cave, she went in and brought out to him her own cubs, which had been born blind. He prayed over them and returned them to the hyena with their sight healed. She in turn, by way of thank offering, brought the man the huge skin of a large ram and laid it at his feet. He smiled at her as if at a kind and sensitive person, and taking the skin, spread it under him" (Russell 1980:110).

(e) The work of reconciliation between the people

The people felt the love of monks, their care and prayers for them. They also trusted in the monks as people of God, so it was easy for the monks and nuns to play a role in helping people through the work of reconciliation.

Piamoun was a nun who lived with her mother spinning flax, and she was deemed worthy of the gift of prophecy. A more powerful town attacked her village with spears and cudgels.

An angel appeared to her and revealed their attack. So she sent for the elders of the village to warn them and advised the elders for reconciliation with their enemies.

Now the elders were afraid, and they fell at her feet, begging her, and said, "we can not come to an agreement with them, for we know their drunkenness and frenzy. But if you have mercy on the whole town and your own home, go out and make peace with them yourself."

She did not agree to this, but she did go to her own abode and she stood all the night praying. She prayed, "Lord, who judges the world, whom nothing unjust pleases, now when this prayer reaches you, may your power fix them to the place wherever it may find them".

And along about the first hour, when they were about three miles away, they were fixed to the spot and could not budge. It was made known to them that this hindrance was due to her intercession. So they sent to the village, suing for peace, making it clear that this was "because of God and the prayers of Piamoun, for they stopped us (Meyer 1964:91).

Even the pagans trusted the Fathers in the act of reconciliation and the Fathers used these occasions for preaching to the pagans and leading them to Christianity. It said about Abba Apollo that he was asked to make peace in a pagan village and spent considerable time catechising a brigand chief there, who became both a Christian and a monk (Russell 1980:18).

While travelling through a certain region, Abba Milesios saw a monk whom someone had seized under the pretext that he had committed a murder. The old man went and questioned the brothers. Learning that he had been wrongly accused, he said to those who were holding him, 'Where is the man who has been killed?' they showed him to him. Telling them all to pray, he went up to the dead man. While he was stretching his hands towards heaven, the dead man stood up. He said to him in front of everyone, 'Tell us who killed you.' The man said, 'As I was going into the church, I gave some money to the priest. He stood up and killed me; then he took me and threw me into the abba's

monastery. Therefore I beseech you to take the money and give it to the children.' Then the old said to him, 'Go, and rest until the Lord comes and awakens you' (Ward 1975:124).

By this way the saint stopped the fight between the people and saved the innocent monk.



An ancient Photo of St. Macarius Monastery

4.2.3 Love in healing the sick:

This the monks did through their prayers, but sometimes also through direct medical help. But the important question here is what was the relation between healing and faith? or did the Fathers ask people to believe in our Lord Jesus before they healed them? Certainly the Fathers connected their healing by faith in the Lord and we can understand this from many evidences:

Firstly, in most of the cases we find the person converted to Christianity after his healing. The difficulty was that those who recorded these miracles did not mention the details of the previous conversation which happened between the father and the healed person before his healing.

Secondly, the Fathers refused to do the healing miracles when they felt that these miracles will give them glory instead of giving the whole glory to God. They were very sensitive to vainglory because their great burden was to give all glory to God so that the miracles could lead people to believe in the Lord.

Thirdly, the prayers of the unction of the sick in the Coptic Church relate healing with repentance and believing in Christ.

Fourth, the witnessing life of the Fathers led the sick people to understand the relationship between their healing and the intimate fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the healed ones were anxious even to enter this angelic life of the Fathers and certainly the Fathers told them about the costly price of discipleship.

4.2.3.1 Through prayer

If we consider the stories of the desert fathers we will find that most of them received the gift of healing the sick. If we ask what was the motive for this we know of their love for the people, and of their desire to return humanity to the condition of redemption--complete health for body, soul and spirit.

Some fathers thought that diseases were due to the power of the devil over the body of some people, others were wise enough to distinguish between diseases which come from the devil and those which are according to the will of God.

An example of the first group was St. Macarius, who attributed the illness of a girl to the "magic arts." Those were counter-acted by the prayers of the saint and the girl was healed (Russell 1980:18).

Palladius also gave us a similar story about St. Macarius:

They brought him a young boy possessed by an evil spirit. He put one hand on his head and the other over his heart, and he prayed so intently that he caused the boy to be suspended in the air.

The boy swelled up like a wineskin and became so inflamed that he became afflicted with erysipelas¹. Suddenly crying out, he emitted water through his sense organs, and he returned once more to his former size. Abba Macarius handed him back to his father then, after anointing the boy with holy oil and pouring water on him (Meyer 1964:65).

An example of the latter group was Abba John of Lycopolis who healed people by sending oil to them.

For example, "The wife of a senator who had lost her sight through developing cataracts on her corneas asked her husband to take her to the saint. When he told her that the saint had never spoken with a woman, she begged only that he should be told about her and offer a prayer for her. This he did, and moreover sent her some oil."

She bathed her eyes in the oil only three times and on the third day regained her sight and publicly thanked God (Russell 1980:54).

But the same saint, said Rufinus, was asked by someone, who was one from the company of Rufinus and who had suffered from a fever for three days, to be healed. The father said to him that for the present this affliction was to his advantage and had come to him because of the weakness of his faith.

However, the Saint gave him some oil and told him to rub himself with it. When he did this he brought up through his mouth all that was in his stomach, and delivered from the fever, walked to the guest cell without assistance (:54).

It is interesting that in both cases the Fathers tried to heal sick people. Cassian believed that the Fathers sought not the performance of wonderful works, but the purity of love when they performed these miracles of healing the sick (Luibheid 1985:175). Rufinus

¹ A skin disease.

affirms that the monk's work produces fruits of charity and that was the concern of monks and of those who visited them (Russell 1980:45).

An interesting question is why the Fathers prefered to use oil rather than to simply lay their hands over them?

First; the Coptic Church always uses oil in the Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick. In the Sacrament the priest prays seven set prayers, then anoints the sick person with oil. The early fathers used oil, because it was something ecclesiastical, based on the practice of the New Testament churches (e.g. James 5:14).

Secondly, they tried to hide their gift of healing under the form of oil and if we read the sayings of the fathers, we will discover how sensitive they were to vainglory. For example, when Cassian met Abba Nesteros and spoke about "the gifts of God", the father said: "These men did not make selfish use of the power to work such miracles."

The fathers proclaimed that these miracles had not been done through any merit of their own, but by the Lord's mercy. Faced with the awe evoked by these wonders, they referred to the words of the apostles in order to ward off glory among men. "Brothers, why are you amazed at this? Or why do you keep looking at us, as if it were our power and our pity which caused this man to walk?" (Acts 3:12) (Luibheid 1985: 178).

St. Athanasius spoke about the spiritual experience of St. Antony in healing:

These things he taught the ones he encountered. And with those who suffered he sympathised and prayed--and frequently the Lord heard the prayers he offered on behalf of many people.

And Antony was neither boastful when he was heeded, nor disgruntled when he was not: rather he gave thanks to the Lord always. He encouraged those who suffered to have patience and to know that healing belonged neither to him nor to men at all, but only to God who acts whenever he wishes and for whom ever he wills. The ones who suffered therefore received the words of the old man as healing, and learned not to dwell on their infirmities but to be patient. And the ones who were cured were taught not to give thanks to Antony, but to God alone (Gregg 1980:73).

4.2.3.2 Through direct medical help

Some Fathers were expert in medicine like Abba Isidore who was a contemporary of St. Athanasius. Dawson said, Abba Isidore worked as a director of the hospital which was connected with Damanhoor Bishopric and after that St. Athanasius asked him to be responsible for the Medical School which was part of the Alexandria Theological Seminary. He was a highly gifted professor and many famous scientists trained under his leadership, like the famous Professor Galinos-- the father of medicine who stayed in Alexandria for five years (Mawad 1994:11).

It was said that the medical studies in that school were very advanced because the old Pharaonic medicine kept its substance through the early Christian ages. Many foreign students went to Alexandria to get their medical studies through Abba Isidore who even prepared nearby monasteries for his foreign students (:11).

The monasteries also had some physicians at that time. There were some famous personalities who practised medicine in their monasteries, e.g. Kosman, Demian, Abakir and John.

The relation between the monasteries and medicine encouraged some monks to use simple forms of medicine with prayers to heal people. The following is an example of this practice.

Abba Apollonius was a businessman who renounced the world and lived on Mount Nitria. As he was too advanced in years to learn a craft or to work as a scribe, he lived on the mountain for twenty years engaged in this business: with his own money and his own effort he would buy all kinds of medicines and groceries at Alexandria and provide for all the brethren in their sickness.

He could be seen making his round of the monasteries from early morn to ninth hour, going in door after door to find out if any one was sick. He used to bring grapes, pomegranates, eggs, and cakes such as the sick fancy, and he found this a very profitable livelihood in his old age.

When he died he left his wares to one just like himself, and he encouraged him to carry on with this service. For there were five thousand monks living on the mountain, and there was a need for this visiting, since the place was a desert (Meyer 1964:48f).

4.2.3.3 The aims of the monks in healing the sick

The aims were similar to those of casting out demons, but some stories help us to see other dimensions of healing.

(a) As a tool for repentance and confession of sins.

When they brought St. Matthew the Poor a sick lady who had an unknown and difficult disease, he knew by the Spirit her actual condition. He asked her to confess her sin in front of the people. She confessed that she had married two brothers, so she suffered from this disease. The father prayed for her, and she was healed (My translation) (*Arabic Synaxarium* 1978:177).

(b) To lead others to Christ.

This was one of the central aims of the monks' healing ministry, as can be seen in the following story:

The story began when the Devil appeared to Abba Hor, who lived a holy life in solitude in the desert. He said to him, 'certainly in the desert you can defeat me because you are living alone, but if you are brave, go to Alexandria.' The father accepted this challenge and went to Alexandria where he spent some time visiting prisoners and the needy bringing them water to help them.

One day while the horses were running fast downtown, they hit a child who fell dead. Abba Hor had been standing there, so the Devil stirred the people to accuse the Father that he was the person who killed the child. People gathered and began to insult him. Abba Hor was not disturbed. Instead he carried the child, praying to the Lord in front of them, and he made the sign of the cross over him. Life returned to the dead child and he gave the boy to his parents.

The crowd glorified God for the miracle (My translation) (*Arabic Synaxarium* 1978:168)

(c) To confirm the Lord Jesus' words

Abba Daniel¹ said, "In Babylon the daughter of an important person was possessed by a devil. A monk for whom her father had a great affection said to him, "Noone can heal

¹ He was the disciple of Abba Arsenius.

your daughter except some anchorites whom I know; but if you ask them to do so, they will not agree because of their humility.

Let us do this: when they come to the market, look as though you are going to buy their goods and when they come to receive the price, we will ask them to say a prayer and I believed she will be healed." When they came to the market they found the disciple of the old man sitting there selling their goods and they led him away with the baskets, so that he should receive the price for them.

But when the monk reached the house, the woman possessed with the devil came and slapped him. But he only turned the other cheek, according to the Lord's command. (Matthew 5:39). The devil, tortured by this said, "what violence! The commandment of Jesus drives me out." Immediately the woman was cleansed. When the old men came, they told them what had happened and they glorified God saying, "This is how the pride of the devil is brought low, through the humility of the commandment of Christ" (Ward 1975:43).

(d) To show the power of the sign of the cross

Many old men came to see Abba Poemen. One day it happened that a member of Abba Poemen's family came whose child's face, through the power of the devil, was turned backwards. The father seeing the number of Fathers present, took the child and sat down outside the monastery, weeping.

Now it happened that one of the old men came out and seeing him, asked him, "Man, why are you weeping?" He replied, "I am related to Abba Poemen, and see the misfortune which has overtaken my child. Though I want to bring him to the old man, we are afraid he does not want to see us. Each time he hears I am here, he has me driven away."

"But since you are with him, I have dared to come. If you will, father, have pity on me, take the child and pray for him." So the old man took the child, went inside and behaved with good sense.

He did not immediately present him to Abba Poemen, but began with the lesser¹ brethren, and said, "Make the sign of the cross over this little child." Having had him signed by all in turn, he presented him at last to Abba Poemen. Abba Poemen did not want to make the sign of the cross over him, but the others urged him, saying, "Do as everyone else has done." So groaning he stood up and prayed, saying, "God, heal your creature, that he be not ruled by the enemy." When he had signed him, the child was healed immediately and given back whole to his father (Ward 1975:139f.).

(e) To show the Christian virtues

Abba Poemen said of Abba Nisteros that he was like the serpent of brass which Moses made for healing of the people. He possessed all virtue and without speaking, he healed everyone (:131).

¹ Because he knew that if he asked Abba Poemen first he would refuse to pray to hide the healing gift which he had.

4.2.4 Love in practising justice

The main concern of Coptic monks was to enjoy sweet fellowship with the Lord. This was not because they hated people, or were passive toward people's needs, but because they trusted that they would serve the world better "from outside".

They could only change the world to be the Kingdom of God if they stood on a solid foundation of fellowship with God. As a result they gained the energy and authority needed to change the world.

Rufinus explains this better "The monk in general terms is the champion of society in spiritual warfare" (Russell 1980:13). St. Macarius speaking about monks to Palladius said, "Tell them that for Christ's sake I am guarding the walls" (Meyer 1964:58f). What are these walls? They are the walls of society which need protection through the prayers of the monks against the attacks of devil.

While monks are "outside" in deep fellowship with the Lord, they can better see the society in relation to its evils and needs and therefore knew how to change circumstances. So, their "going out" was not a passive or a morbid movement; they left the world for the sake of the world.

St. Shenoute was an example of that principle:

St. Shenoute lived at one of the most critical periods (343 to 466 A.D.) in Egyptian history, when a great gulf was created between the Egyptian and Byzantine people. Egyptian peasants lived almost as slaves and worked hard to the advantage of the Byzantine tyrant rulers or the aristocratic class.

Farag (1964:37f) said, "if we consider the great mischief that prevailed over society in Abba Shenoute's time, we should thank him for his successful attempts not only in opposing, but also in uprooting them." In spite of his great zeal to practise the eremitic life, he had taken himself over to plead for the oppressed in the courts, and if he failed he would write to the emperor himself (Fr. Malaty 1986:61).

It was Shenoute's policy therefore to welcome the needy and the distressed of all classes and to give them both mental and physical consolation. His methods in giving this

consolation are closely related to those adopted by the modern social welfare institutions (Farag 1964:39).

Thus he urged his people not to surrender to oppression, but to struggle till the end. He created Egyptian nationalism or Coptism. For this reason he used only the Coptic language in his preaching and not the Greek. In general meetings he stirred up the multitude saying:

The hearts of those rulers are filled with wickedness, counterfeits, injustice and covetousness.

They have one aim; to collect money at the expense of the poor who are the victims. Who can enumerate the sufferings which the people bear by those rulers?!

I know someone who finds no food to eat nor to feed his animals. I think they want to make Egyptians their slaves, put the yoke on their shoulders (Fr. Malaty 1986:60f.).

When some thousand people were captured by the Blemye invaders of Upper Egypt, St. Shenoute met the leader of those invaders and said to him, "take the spoils and give me the people" (El Masry 1956:208). The chief readily accepted, and handed over to him twenty thousand captives. He opened his monastery to those captured people to settle there for months.

All the monks devoted their time to service. Seven monks who were doctors treated the wounded. During this period, ninety-four people died and were buried in the monastery and fifty-two babies were born. Eight thousand five hundred "Ardab" of wheat was consumed, besides a great amount of lentils, oil and beans (Fr. Malaty 1986:61).

We can imagine the large number of guests who lived in the monastery for this long period, and how the monks believed in practical love above any monastic canon or rule.

St. Antony also played a role in defending prisoners and serving them. St. Athanasius said, "St. Antony served the confessors in his usual manner, and like one who had been bound along with them, he was the one suffering in those ministrations (Gregg 1980:66).

Other fathers related their healing of the sick with the practice of justice, like Abba Amoun,

Abba Amoun, when he was living as a solitary in Nitria, had a child suffering from rabies brought to him, bound by a chain. A rabid dog had bitten him and had given him the disease. His suffering was so unbearable that his whole body convulsed.

When Amoun saw the child's parent coming to entreat him, he said, "Why are you troubling me, my friends, seeking something which is beyond my merits, when the remedy lies in your own hands? Give back to the widow the ox which you have killed surreptitiously, and your child will be restored to you in good health."

Their crime having thus been exposed, they happily did what they had been told; and when the father prayed, the child instantly recovered (Russell 1980:111).

4.2.5 Love in casting out demons and banishing their authority over the people.

It is amazing that the fathers had a great authority over demons. There are many reasons for this authority.

First: The Lord promised that the resurrected life will be manifested by a great authority over the demons (Mark 16:17,18). As the fathers achieved this life through their holy living, they enjoyed authority over the devil.

Gregg (1980:11) said that Antony's domination over the demons and his numerous healing and visions are presented unambiguously as results of his zeal and rigour. The spiritual labours of the ascetic may have been in some sense their own reward, but they clearly were not the only expected reward.

Palladius spoke about St. Macarius who "because of being worthy to gain discernment, he made a great progress. By the time he was forty he received the gift of fighting spirits and of prophecy" (Meyer 1964:54f).

Second: Old paganism had been closely connected with the power of the demons, so the kingdom of God should be revealed in its authority over the demons. St. Antony said, "since the Lord made his sojourn with us, the enemy is fallen and his powers have diminished" (Gregg 1980:52).

Third: For the fathers, the cross of the Lord and its power was something central because the cross was the place where the devil was defeated forever. Therefore, the Fathers used the sign of the cross to banish the Devil and its power. St. Antony said:

So when demons come to you at night and they wish to tell what the future holds, or they say "We are the angels," disregard them, for they are lying. And should they commend your asceticism and call you blessed, ignore them and have nothing at all to do with them.

Instead, sign yourselves and your dwelling. And pray, and you will watch even as they become invisible. The truth is, they are cowards, and they are utterly terrified by the sign of the Lord's cross, because in it the saviour stripping their armour, made an example of them (57).

Fourth: It was out of love for people that the Fathers destroyed the demons' work. The demons tormented the people if they had authority over them. Casting out demons was an important mercy work for monks to relieve the people from the power of demons.

Once a young man who had a demon was brought by his weeping mother to St. Macarius the Egyptian. He was tied to two men. This was how the demon acted: After downing three bushels of bread and a Cilician jar of water, he would retch out the food and vaporise it. In this way both food and drink were as it were consumed by fire.

Now this young man did not have enough food from his own mother, so he ate his own excrement often even he drank his own water. As his mother was weeping and beseeching the saint, St. Macarius took the young man and prayed for him, invoking God. After one or two days, when the fever had abated, blessed Macarius asked her: "How much would you have him eat?" She answered: "Ten pounds of bread" Then he censured her on the grounds that this was too much. He prayed over the young man and fasted for the space of seven days; then he put the young man on a diet of three pounds and obliged him to do some work. Thus cured, the young man was brought back to his mother (Meyer 1964:57f).

Fifth: Demonstrating their authority over demons was a witness and a preaching for the people.

Most of the Fathers had this authority over the demons and casting out demons was a prevailing ministry in all the monasteries.

People came from all over the world to be healed from the evil effects of demons.

I think it is not easy to mention all the stories which speak about casting out demons because there are many, but I shall mention some stories which will serve to illustrate the theme.

St. Antony gave a leading example about the authority over the demons. He often emphasised the monk's vocation as a warrior against demons. So he tutored the other monks in the use of prayer and the sign of cross for the dispersion of evil spirits. He gave detailed advice about how to determine whether one's cell is being visited by demons or by angels (Gregg 1980:8).

Sixth: The Fathers also were concerned about the spiritual attacks of demons on the monks themselves. There was an interesting story of St. Macarius.

While the Abbot Macarius was living in that part of the desert where he alone had his dwelling (for the lower desert was full of brothers), he was looking down the road one evening, and saw the devil come in the shape of a man, wearing a linen tunic full of holes, and from every hole a little jar was dangling: and the old man said to him, "Whither away, Malignant?"

And he made answer, "I go to stir up these brethren that are down below." And the old man said, "And why take so many little jars with you?" And he said, "I bring some relish for the brethren, and the reason why I carry so many is that if one is not to their liking, I show another, and if that does not please, I hold out another: and it can not be but that some one of them all will serve."

And so saying he departed. But the old man remained there looking down that road until he should return, and when he was coming back, he said to him, "May it be well with you." But the devil said, "How can you say that, when they have all turned contrary to me, and not one of them will heed my advice?"

And the old man said, "So you have no friend at all?" But the devil said, "One friend I have, that agrees with me, and whenever he sees me, he will turn this way or that, as simple as you please." And when he was asked the name, he said, "he is called Theopemptus."

He took his departure, and with that the Abbot Macarius rose up and went down to the lower desert. and when the brethren heard it, they came out to meet him, and each made preparation, hoping that St. Macarius would abide in his cell. But he asked for the cell of Theopemptus and made his way towards him.

And when he had been joyfully received and they were sitting together by themselves, the old man said to him, "How is with you, my son?" And he answered, "Thanks to your prayers, I am well". And the old man said, "Do thoughts not trouble you?"

And he answered, "For the time being I am well" For he was ashamed to say it. And the old man said to him, "Look you, after many so many years in the desert, and held in honour by all, and at my age, for I am old man, my thoughts torment me." And Theopemptus made answer, "Believe me, father, they do the like with me."

The old man invented one by one the imaginations that as it might be harried him, until Theopemptus had confessed it all. Then he said to him, "How do you fast?" He said, "Until the ninth hour." The old man said, "Fast until evening, and meditate always without ceasing on somewhat from the Gospel or the other scriptures; and as often as any unclean thoughts come upon, never look down, but up, and God shall be swift to help."

Soon thereafter the abbot Macarius departed into his own solitude. And again looking down the road, he saw the devil returning, and asked him, "Whither away?" He answered, "To stir up the brethren as before." But when he was coming back, he asked him how the brethren did.

He answered, "Ill, for they are all become rustic, and, what is more than all, he that I had for a friend and that did what I bad him, has turned round, I know not how, and seemed to me harsher by far than any of them." And he swore that he would not go there again, not in great while: and so saying he departed (Waddell 1957:138f).

The story speaks about a monastic experience, yet it gives us an idea of how the demons tempted the people, how the monks were alert to that demonic work and how they tried through prayer and spiritual work to combat it.

One day when Abba Macarius was going down to Egypt with some brethren, he heard a boy saying to his mother, 'Mother, there is a rich man who likes me, but I detest him; and on the other hand, there is a poor man who hates me, and I love him.' Hearing these words, Abba Macarius marvelled. So the brethren said to him: 'That is this saying, Abba, that makes you marvel?' the old man said to them, 'Truly, our Lord is rich and loves us, and we do not listen to Him; while our enemy the devil is poor and hates us, but we love his impurity' (Ward 1975:112).

4.3. Their role against the heresies.

The Coptic monks believed that they are fighters who keep watch over the world to protect it from any heresy. Even though the struggle against heresy could be seen as something taking place within the church, the monks saw this as not different from the struggle against other forms of evil in the world and it therefore deserves to be treated in this chapter on their "outreaching" mission. St. Arsenius said "one hour's sleep a night is enough for a monk if he is a fighter (Waddell 1957:23). "The monk, like Jacob, wrestles in the night with God who is unknown in a lifetime's effort and discipline" (Russell 1980:34).

"The idea of the monk as the one by whom human life is preserved and honored by God" (Russell 1980:13) was seen as his responsibility to stand very firm against heresies.

St. Antony gives an idea about the attitude of the fathers towards heresies. Gregg (1980:10f) in his introduction to the *life of St. Antony* said,

At any rate, Athanasius does nothing to suggest that Antony's prayerful contests with demons are more distinctly spiritual or have a more hallowing effect than his denunciations of schismatics and heretics. It has long been recognized that the portrait of Antony as an outspoken adversary of the Arians, is deeply colored by his biographer's passionate advocacy of the doctrine of Nicaea.

When anathematizing heretics in the *Vita Antonii*, Antony is speaking the words of the bishop of Alexandria. On three occasions, Athanasius's Antony explicitly condemns the Arians and their dangerous teaching (Chapters 68-70, 89, 91). Antony's discipline and his advance in virtue were controlled by Orthodoxy's understanding of salvation."

This shows, how the Fathers were very keen in their defense for the Orthodox faith of the Church. Actually the life of solitude did not prevent them from being involved in the contest against heresies to the degree that some of them suffered many afflictions to defend the faith.

It is true that the monks took this responsibility for themselves, as St. Macarius said, "Tell them that for Christ's sake I am guarding the walls" (Russell 1980:13). Monks are presented as defenders, the guardians of the world's peace and faith, constantly keeping watch on the frontiers, armed against the heresies for the sake of mankind. The monks

were like trees, purifying the atmosphere by their presence (:12). They obeyed the commands of the Lord to be the watchmen of society. In their solitude they heard God's will and then went out to warn the people (Ezekiel 33:7). They felt the responsibility of leading others to God's Kingdom and tried hard to remove any obstacle which hindered the people from enjoying this kingdom. They spoke frankly against the evils of society and refused any compromise.

St. Antony abhorred the heresy of the Arians, and he ordered everyone neither to go near them nor to share their erroneous belief. Once when some of the Ariomaniacs came to him, sounding them out and learning that they were impious, he chased them from the mountain, saying that their doctrines were worse than serpents' poison.

On another occasion when the Arians falsely claimed that he held the same view as they, he was quite irritated and angry at them. Then, summoned both by the bishops and all the brothers, he came down from the mountain, and entering into Alexandria, he publicly renounced the Arians, saying that theirs was the last heresy and the forerunner of the Antichrist (Gregg 1980:81f).

But at the same time, St. Antony tried, through conversation, and friendship to win back some heretics to the Orthodox faith (:82).

The work of the monks against heresies took different forms, sometimes condemning them. It is important to know that most of the Fathers adopted this view against heresies. Some of them even shared in the ecumenical councils which defended the faith to give monasticism a share in the struggle of the Church. St. Shenoute presumably accompanied St. Cyril the Great to the Council of Ephesus in 431 (Atiya 1968:66). Abba Isidore also went with St. Athanasius to the ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325 (Meyer 1964:32).

From history, we know that St. Shenoute was one of the fathers who was involved in the long struggle against heresies. Pearson (1968:267) said, "St. Shenoute condemns "Manes, the Manichaean atheist, who rejects the law and the prophets..." Elsewhere, Shenoute argues that the Lord remains God while becoming a man but that those drowned in the "bad faith of Manes" do not believe it (:267). Pearson claimed that once the Saint burned two of their priests (:315), and he wrote many letters against them (:316).

Most of the Fathers, however, rejected the idea of using force to lead the heretics to Orthodoxy and there are many stories speak about the love and tenderness of the Fathers toward the non-Christians. If some used some hard words or actions against heretics that may be due to the deep zeal to save those heretics from the results of their heresies.

Abba Sarabion was so burdened by the salvation of the heretics that he went on to Lacedomia and heard about one of the first men of the city who together with his whole family was Manichaeans, but righteous in everything else.

He sold himself to this man as a slave, and within two years he had turned the man and his wife away from heresy to the church. Then they no longer regarded him as a servant, but as a relative, a brother, or a father, and they gave glory to God (Meyer 1964:107).

In the lives of St. Pachomius and St. Antony, the Name of Jesus was always accompanied by the title of Christ to confirm His divinity. But we note how it is said of St. Pachomius that "More than the everlasting torments, he feared to be estranged from the humility and sweetness of the Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Chitty 1968:27,76).

Other Fathers suffered to keep the Orthodox faith, as related in Sozomen's narrative,

Athanasius' death had been the signal for the forcible intrusion of the Arian Lucius on the bishop's throne at Alexandria, under the protection of the Emperor Valens. Athanasius' nominee, Peter, had fled to Rome. Orthodox resistance brought imperial action, and very soon a number of bishops, with priests and monks, were on the road to exile at Diocaesarea in Palestine.

Isidore of Damanhur was among them. The two Macarii were exiled to a pagan island in the Delta. But when the pagan priest's daughter became possessed and was healed by them, the people of the island destroyed their temple and replaced it with a church. The two monks were quickly allowed to return to their desert (Schaff 1979:358).

As the monks had credibility and power among the people, they used it to defend the Orthodox faith and they succeeded in keeping the faith through their struggle and prayers.

4.4 Serving other religions (mission work towards pagans).

It seems that one of the Apostle's sayings has also been fulfilled with regard to these monks: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). For at one time, a gross and obscene idolatry abounded in Egypt, more than in any other nation. The Egyptians had worshipped dogs, apes and other animals. They also considered garlic, onions and other common vegetables to be gods. The holy Father Apollo spoke about this and explained the reason for polytheism which was once prevalent.

He said, "Our pagan predecessors 'deified the ox, for example, because by means of this animal they carried on their farming and produced their food. They deified the water of the Nile because it irrigated the whole countryside. They also venerated the soil because theirs was more fertile than any other land" (Russell 1980:73f).

The Fathers were not indifferent toward the paganism which was present in their age. Although they chose a life of solitude and contemplation, yet because they considered themselves the servants of humanity and the Kingdom of God, they tried to lead pagans to the knowledge of the Lord.

Through the effect of monasticism, pagan Egypt was gradually converted to Christianity and many temples were changed into churches or monasteries. The prologue to the Greek *Vita Prima of St. Pachomius* speaks thus of the 'repentance of the Gentiles being multiplied in the Church, the bishops guiding them to God according to the teaching of the Apostles" (Chitty 1968:55).

The secret of the success of Coptic monasticism in this work is related to their love and compassion toward the pagans. The "*Apophthegmata Patrum*" stated how St. Macarius led some pagans to the true faith.

Once when the Abbot Macarius was climbing up the mountain in Nitria, he bade his disciple to go a little way before him. As he went on ahead, he met a priest of idols, hurrying swiftly, and carrying a great log. And the disciple shouted at him, "Whither so fast, devil?" At which the irate priest beat him so soundly that he left him half dead: and again hurried on his way.

A little further on, he met the blessed Macarius, who said to him, "May it be well with you, O toiler, may it be well!". The priest in surprise, said, "What good do you see in me, that you wish me well?" To which the old man made answer, "Because I see you toiling and hastening,

though I do not know why?" The priest said, "And I, moved by your salutation, knew you for a great servant of God: now some other miserable monk, I know not who met me and threw insult at me, but I gave him back blows for words."

Then seizing the feet of St. Macarius, he cried to him, "I will not let you go unless you make me a monk". So taking the road together they came to the place where the stricken brother lay, whom they both lifted him up. When the brethren saw the priest in company with the blessed Macarius they were dumb-founded: and in wonderment they made him a monk, and because of him many pagans were made Christian (Waddell 1957:143).

If we discuss the attitude of the Coptic monks toward the non-Christians we will find two major lines. The first attitude was contempt towards the unbelievers. This attitude was adopted by the young zealous monks who saw the evils of paganism and its bad effects on the society. They tried to lead unbelievers to Christ by their own efforts and methods. Certainly their results were bad. They failed to see that prayer and love are the shortest way for leading those unbelievers to Christ.

The second attitude was love and compassion toward the unbelievers. This line was adopted by the older spiritual fathers who knew the deceptive power of devil on minds of the unbelievers. Those fathers trusted in the power of the Holy Spirit Who can change the lives and thinking of the unbelievers. They used the sword of the Spirit through love when they dealt with the unbelievers but before that they prayed for long time to prepare their hearers' hearts to accept the coming King. The last group succeeded to change a big number of unbelievers to Christianity.

The following story provides a vivid example of how the mature Fathers attracted the unbelievers to believe in Christ:

A monk inhabited one side of the desert of Egypt. Not far from him was a Manichean (a Manichean was an adherent of a religious system from the third to fifth century that represented Satan as coeternal with God). Who, on his way to another man of this same group of heretics, was overtaken by the darkness in the very same spot where the saint lived.

He hesitated to knock at the saint's door to pass the night there, for he was known to the monk and expected rejection. But at last, yielding to necessity, he knocked. The old saint gladly received him, allowed him to pray, offered him food and then showed him where to lie.

The pagan reflected during the night and was astounded by the monk's behavior who showed no defiance towards him. "This truly is a man of God," said he. Having awakened in the morning, he knelt at the monk's feet thus saying, "Since to-day and henceforward I am Orthodox, I will never depart from you." And so he remained with him (Farag 1964:103).

So the monk in the story could draw the pagan to Christ through the genuine love and Christian hospitality.

4.4.1 The Fathers used even the pagan habits to lead pagans to Christ.

Once, there were pagans living near Abba Apollo in all that region, and neighbouring villages in particular practised the idolatrous worship of demons. There was a huge temple in one of the villages which housed a very famous idol, though in reality this image was nothing but a wooden statue.

The priests, together with the people, worked themselves up into a Bacchic frenzy, carried the idol in a procession through the villages, no doubt performing the ceremony to ensure the flooding of the Nile. It so happened that, on one such occasion, St. Apollo passed by that place with a few of the brothers. As soon as he saw the crowd passing in a frenzy through the countryside as if possessed by devils, he bent his knees and prayed to the Savior, and all the pagans at once stopped in their tracks.

Although they pushed one another, no one was able to advance any further from that spot. All day they roasted in the hot sun, at a loss for how to explain what had happened to them. Then their priests said that there was a Christian in their territory who dwelt in the desert. He was the cause of this. They were referring to Abba Apollo.

When this was conveyed to him, the man of God came down to them as quickly as he could, and having prayed, loosed the bonds of them all. As a body they all rushed towards him, committing themselves fully to belief in the Savior of the universe and the God who works miracles, and at once set fire to the idol. When he had catechized them all, he handed them over to the Christian congregations. Many of them entered monasteries. As a result, there is no longer anybody in his district who may be termed a pagan (Russell 1980:73f).

St. Apollo used the authoritative prayer to convince those pagans about the power of Christianity, so it was easy for them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Also it was easier

for St. Apollo to speak to God, about the pagans, than to speak to the pagans about God and his method was successful because they could recognize the true God without any effort save the Saint's prayers. St. Apollo also discovered that these people were unconscious of the presence of God, due to the influence of the demons, so he prayed and God freed them from their darkness to know and return to the true God.

The paganism of the Egyptian villages existed all around the monks. Part of their rejection of the villages was their rejection of the paganism interwoven into the life on the land. The conversion of the pagans was, if not a major concern, at least something which they would do if they could. The pagan temples were always there, and in Oxyrhynchus they changed them into monasteries.

The pagans represented their own recent past--to be forsaken and left behind, not to be explored or reasoned with. St. Macarius once slept in a deserted pagan temple at Terenuthis and dreamed of demons inhabiting the mummies he found there; but it was the same Macarius who led a pagan priest to Christ by seeing him as a man to be treated with consideration rather than an enemy to be attacked (Russell 1980:18).

Some Fathers were interested in direct preaching to the pagans, like Abbot Copres who told Rufinus some wonderful stories about his ministry to the pagans,

Once Abba Copres was passing by a temple where some pagans were sacrificing to their idols. He said to them, "If having minds yourselves, you still offer sacrifice to what is mindless, you will then be less endowed with minds than these idols." Judging that he had spoken well, they immediately believed in the Savior and followed him.

Another time the same saint had a garden in the countryside nearby, for the sake of the brethren who used to come to him. It was cultivated by a certain poor man. Now one of the pagans broke into it to steal vegetables. When he had taken some he went home. For three hours he tried to cook them, but they remained in the pot just as he had picked them, without the water even getting warm.

Then coming back to his senses, the man gathered up the vegetables and brought them to him, begging the monk to forgive him his transgression and asking to become a Christian. And that is precisely what happened. Just at that time there were some brothers visiting the monk, and the vegetables which had been brought were exactly what was needed for them. After

partaking of them the monk thanked God for having given him a double joy: both the salvation of the man and the refreshment of the brothers (Russell 1980:87).

Rufinus spoke about Oxyryhnchus which was full of pagan temples, but now all changed to monasteries and churches. The city eventually had ten thousand monks, twenty thousand nuns and no pagans in it (Russell 1980:66).



**The ancient well in St. Macarius Monastery
beside it places for reserving water**

4.5 Missionary service (Khedmah)

The work of Coptic monks took many forms, but all of these were motivated by a deep love towards God and people.

First: They accepted the sinners in deep love. White(1973:70) said, "They used to say concerning Abba Macarius the Great that he became, as it is written, a God upon earth. For even as it is God who covers the sins of the world, so became Abba Macarius in cloaking transgression, as though seeing not what he saw, and hearing not what he heard."

It chanced that a certain brother in a monastery fell into disgrace. While the others were upbraiding him, he made his way to the Abbot Antony. The brethren followed him, wishful to bring him back, and began to cover him with reproaches. He meantime denying that he had committed that fault.

Now the Abbot Paphnutius was there and he told the brethren in assembly a parable that they never heard. "I saw," said he, "On the bank of the river a man sunk to his knees in the mud; and some came up with outstretched hands to pull him out, and sank him up to the neck"

Then said the blessed Antony of the blessed Paphnutius, "Behold a man who can verily heal the soul." The brethren, cut to the heart by his discourse, did penance and restored to the community the brother who had gone from it (Waddell 1957:144).

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, 'If I see my brother committing a sin, is it right to conceal it?' The old man said to him, 'At the very moment when we hide our brother's fault, God hides our own and at the moment when we reveal our brother's fault, God reveals ours too' (Ward 1975:147).

A brother who had sinned was turned out of the church by the priest; Abba Bissarion got up and went with him, saying, "I, too, am a sinner" (Ward 1975:35).

One day a brother sinned in a monastery. There was an anchorite in the district who had not gone out for a long time. The Abba of the monastery went to see him and to give him the news that the brother had sinned. The anchorite said, 'Drive him away.' So the brother left the monastery, went into a cave and wept there. It happened that some brothers went to see Abba Poemen and they heard the brother weeping.

They entered, found him in a great misery and invited him to see the old man. He refused saying, 'I am going to die here.' When they reached Abba Poemen's cell they told him about the brother. He exhorted them, and sent them away saying, 'Say to him, Abba Poemen sends

for you.' The brother came. Seeing he was in such distress, Abba Poemen stood up, embraced him, was kind to him and invited him to eat.

Abba Poemen sent one of the brethren to the anchorite, saying, 'For many years I have desired to see you, having heard of you. But because of our lethargy, we have not yet met. Now, however, if God wills it and you have the time, give yourself the trouble of coming here, and we will see one another.' The old man had never left his cell but when he heard this he said, 'If God had not inspired the old man, he would not have sent someone to summon me.' So he got up and went to see Poemen.

They embraced one another with joy and sat down. Abba Poemen said to him, 'Two men dwelt in one place and someone belonging to each of them died; the first one, leaving his own dead, went to weep over the other's. Hearing these words, the anchorite was filled with compunction, remembered what he had done and said, 'Poemen, you have gone up to heaven and I have gone down to the earth' (Ward 1975:139).

The Fathers did not only accept the sinner, but they also refused to condemn him thus giving him a chance to repent. One of the old men said, "If you shall see any man sinning, cast not the blame on him, but on him that fights with him, saying, "Woe is me, for here is this man conquered against his will, even as I: and do you weep and seek the comforting of God, for we all are deceived" (Waddell 1957:145).

We can find the same idea in a similar story about Abba Pior:

There was at that time a meeting at Scetis about a brother who had sinned. The Fathers spoke, but Abba Pior kept silence. Later, he got up and went out. He took a sack, filled it with sand and carried it on his shoulder. He put a little sand also into a small bag which he carried in front of him.

When the Fathers asked him what this meant he said, 'In this sack which contains much sand, are my sins which are many. I have put them behind me so as not to be troubled about them and so as not to repent. Here are the little sins of my brother which are in front of me and I spent my time judging them. This is not right, I ought rather to carry my sins in front of me and concern myself with them, begging God to forgive me for them.' The Fathers stood up and said, 'Truly, this is the way of salvation' (Ward 1975:167f.).

Fathers used different ways to help people to repent, like Abba Amoun who used the serpents, as Rufinus told us:

Abba Amoun was often visited by robbers, who stole his bread and provisions. One day he went out into the desert and summoned two large serpents. He ordered them to remain in front of his hermitage and guard the door. When the murderers came up in their usual way and saw the prodigy, their jaws dropped open with astonishment and they fell on their faces. When the abbot came out, he found them unable to speak and almost unconscious.

Then raising them up he chided them, saying, ‘Do you see how much more ferocious you are than the wild beasts? These, thanks to God, obey our wishes. But you have neither feared God nor respected the piety of Christians. He brought them into his cell, prepared a table for them and exhorted them to change their way of life. They repented at once and went away much better men than they had been before (Russell 1980:81).

There was also an interesting story about Abba Theon who led robbers to the repentance through his forgiveness and love:

Some robbers had come at night from some distance away to attack Abba Theon. They thought that they would find a considerable sum of gold hoarded by him, and intended to kill him. Abba Theon prayed, and they remained at the door, rooted to the spot, until daybreak. When the crowd came to him in the morning, because he was a man of healing the sick, and proposed to burn these men alive.

The Abba was forced to speak a single sentence to them, as he practiced silence for thirty years, “Let them go unharmed; if you do not, my gift of healing will leave me.” They obeyed, for they did not dare to contradict him. The robbers at once entered the neighboring monasteries, and with the help of the monks changed their way of life and repented of their crimes (Russell 1980:68).

In the beginning of St. Moses’ repentance, he encouraged other companions in his band to repent by different means. The following story is an example of that:

Four robbers not knowing who he was fell upon St. Moses the Black in his cell. He tied them all together like a package, put them on his back like a bundle of straw, and took them to the church of the brethren. “Since I may not hurt anyone,” he said, “What do you want me to do with these?”

The robbers confessed and knew that he was Moses, the onetime notorious and well-known robber. They glorified God and spurned the world because of his conversion. For they reasoned

thus: "If he who was such a strong and powerful thief fears God, why should we put off our own salvation?" (Meyer 1964:68).

Other monks used miracles to lead others to the faith in Christ, like Abba Apollonius who was a monk and a deacon. Abba Apollonius was fond of encouraging the confessors during the time of persecution and he succeeded in preparing many of them for martyrdom.

Abba Apollonius was arrested and thrown into prison. The lowest riff-raff among the pagans came to him and taunted him with angry words and blasphemies. One of these was a flute player, a man famous for his debaucheries. He came to insult him, calling him impious, an impostor and a charlatan, a man hated by everyone and deserving a speedy death.

Apollonius said to him, "May the Lord have mercy on you, my friend, and not count anything you have said as a sin." When he heard these words, that flute player, who was called Philemon, began to be tortured inwardly, having been pierced by compunction by what the saint had said. At once he rushed to the tribunal and presented himself to the judge.

Moreover, he said to him in front of all the people, "You are acting unjustly, judge, in punishing innocent men who love God. The Christians neither do anything wrong nor speak any evil; on the contrary they even bless their enemies".

While he was saying this, the judge thought at first that he was joking and being sarcastic. But when he saw that he was serious, he said to him, "You have gone mad sir, you have suddenly taken leave of your senses." But the flute player said, "I am not mad, you unjust judge; I am a Christian." The judge, together with the crowd, tried to dissuade him with flattery.

But when he saw that he would not change his mind, he subjected him to every kind of torture. He also had Apollonius seized and, enveloping him in a mass of torments, tortured him as an impostor. But Apollonius said to him, "I have prayed that you too, judge, and all who are here with you may follow this fraudulent religion of mine." On hearing this, the judge ordered both of them to be burnt alive in front of all the people.

When the flames were licking round them as the judge looked on, the blessed Apollonius cried out to God in the hearing of all the people and the judge, "Deliver not to the wild beasts, Master, my soul that confesses you" (Psalm 74.19) but show yourself clearly to us. At this point a cloud like a luminous dewy mist descended and enveloped the men, extinguishing the fire. The crowd and the judge were astounded and cried out, "There is one God, the God of the Christians (Russell 1980:103).

The Lord promised Abba Apollo that he will use him to banish idols. When he was fifteen years old, he withdrew from the world and spent forty years in the desert, scrupulously practicing every virtue. Then he seemed to hear the voice of God saying to him, "Apollo, Apollo, through you I will destroy the wisdom of the wise men of Egypt, and I will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent pagans (Isaiah 29:14).

And together with these you will also destroy the wise men of Babylon for me, you will banish all worship of demons. Now make your way to the inhabited region, for you will bear me "A peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). After that he asked the Lord to remove from him the sin of pride and the Lord freed him from it. Again a voice came to him saying, "Go, for whatever you ask you will receive from God" As soon as he heard this he set off for the inhabited region. This saint used many miracles to lead the pagans to Christianity (Russell 1980:70f).

One of the Fathers accepted to be sold as a slave to lead others to the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Palladius said:

There was Abba Sarapion who practiced the greatest poverty and was highly literate, that accounts for his knowing the Sacred Scriptures by heart. Even with this great poverty and meditation upon the scriptures he could not remain quiet in his cell. It was not that he was distracted by material things; he wandered about the world and successfully perfected this virtue, for that was his nature.

For there are differences in natures, but not in substances. The fathers used to tell how Abba Sarapion took an ascetic for a companion and sold himself to some Greek actors in one of the towns for twenty coins.

He wrapped up the coins and kept them on himself. He stayed with the actors who had bought him for a long time, until he had made them Christians. He then withdrew from the theater, taking nothing but bread and water. Nor did his mouth ever cease from discussing the scriptures.

After some time the actor was seized with compassion, then the actress, then their whole family. It was said that for as long as they did not recognize him, he would even wash the feet of both of them. In any case, both were baptized and gave up performing on the stage.

They led a holy and pious life. They had the highest respect for him and told him, "Come, brother, let us set you free, since you freed us from our shameful slavery". He said to them, "Since God worked grace in your souls and saved you, I may tell you the secrets of my

business. I had compassion on your souls. I am a free man, and an Egyptian ascetic, and I sold myself for your sakes so that you might be saved.

Now since God brought this about and your souls have been saved through my debasement, take your money so that I may go and help others". They entreated him and gave their assurance that, "We will have you as our own father and master - only stay with us!" Still they could not persuade him. Then they told him, "Give the money to the poor, for it is our first pledge for salvation, but at least visit us once a year (Meyer 1964:105f).

When St. Antony was in his solitude he was so concerned about the salvation of people that he prayed to see the place of the saved and the unsaved ones (Meyer 1964:76). That filled his heart with enthusiasm to save people from the destination of the unsaved.

Some Fathers led sinners to repentance through the story of their life even after their departure. Pope Shenouda III (1992:31) said, "St. Augustine was touched deeply by the life of St. Antony which led him to repentance and the holy life" (My translation).

Here in this point we should mention the role which was played by the life of the fathers as a practical book of mission. The *Life of St. Antony* by St. Athanasius had a wide effect all over the world. It was like a guidance to the holy life and communion with God. It is known that his unique life was a blessing for thousands.

The same with the stories of the Coptic Fathers which were written by Palladius, Rufinus, St. Jerome, John Cassian and others. I believe that this great spiritual heritage of the Fathers has had a deep effect over the people in the whole history. The formative role that Coptic monasticism played in the origins and shape of all other forms of Christian monasticism is ample evidence of the depth and integrity of this movement. May the piety and love of those humble men and women of the Egyptian desert inspire and challenge us today to fulfill the same Christian mission for the coming of God's Kingdom.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study I asked whether the Coptic monks had any sense of mission. In the past four chapters it has become abundantly clear that they had. In fact, they have an important contribution to make to the renewal of the mission of the Christian Church today, not only the Coptic Orthodox Church, but the whole ecumenical Body of Christ. Let me briefly summarise their unique contribution to conclude this study.

5.1 A COPTIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

5.1.1 Spirituality in mission

The *heart* of the mission of the monks was their deep spirituality. As I have pointed out in chapter 3, what made their message attractive to people was the depth of their devotion and the quality of their life. The Fathers had presented new ideals about life, eternity and how to be happy. They were challenging ideals, because the Fathers were pioneers in setting them. The credibility of the monks was based on this, because they did not only believe and preach these high spiritual ideals, but succeeded by and large to put them into daily practice.

The Bible took its proper place in their lives as the power of inspiration. As “heavenly creatures” the monks proved that people shall not live by bread alone, but by God’s word. It was this “saturation” of the monks’ lives with the Bible message that brought about the disciplined and transparently attractive lives which represent the deepest basis of their mission. Monks were not seen as gloomy men obsessed with their own asceticism, but as those who are more alive and approachable because they were shining with the new life of the Lord. The Fathers attempted to change the earth into heaven through their praises. The Fathers carried out various heroic actions through their faith in the Almighty God and their miracles led many to Christianity.

The *burden* of their mission was to attack evil in the life of the people. The Fathers were faced with the power of demons in the life of the people, and attacked the demons through the power of the cross. They believed that the devil was a weak defeated enemy. The Fathers experienced the constant presence of the Lord which eliminates the work and power of the demons. They got authority over the demons and through prayers and the sign of the cross they could cast them out. Many people would therefore consult them or call in their help when tormented by demons.

5.1.2 Centripetal and centrifugal

As I have pointed out, the mission of the Coptic monks was primarily centripetal, but there was also a significant “outreaching” dimension to their life and work. An interesting question that could be researched in future is the relationship between these two dimensions of monastic mission. Was the fact that they attracted people to themselves intentional or was it an almost unintentional side-effect of their deep devotion? Allied to this are the related questions: how did they understand the Kingdom of God and salvation? Did all of them indeed leave the world *for the sake of the world?*

I believe when St. Antony began his movement, it was search for a deep and more quiet fellowship with the Lord, but later on when God’s love filled his heart he could not keep this treasure to himself. He was honest when he said, “My life is with my brother.” In the mean time there were other Fathers who were burdened with love towards people from the beginning, therefore their prayers and spiritual struggle were for the benefit of the people. In both cases, people were attracted by this new form of spirituality. Some went to see monks out of curiosity, others were looking for new life with the Lord.

5.1.3 Servants of humanity

What was the connection between the different aspects of their social mission? The aim of the monk’s life was not asceticism, but God. The way to God was charity, so the Fathers’ lives were full of stories showing love towards all people, love to the brothers, to unbelievers and even love to their enemies. It is amazing how Coptic monks identified with their community and tried hard to make the life of the people easier and more blessed.

The work of monks produced the fruits of charity and this was the concern of the monks and those who visited them. The Fathers loved the poor and they felt when they gave to the poor they gave to the Lord Himself. Through their voluntary poverty they experienced the pangs of hunger and thirst, which made them natural allies of the suffering people. The eschatological feeling of eternity freed them from the money temptation.

The Fathers also felt that they were sent by the Lord to wash the feet of humanity. The Fathers helped people in the normal aspects of life, they made the desert blossom with many agricultural projects--gardens of vegetables for the monks and their visitors. Green plants to be given to the poor. The Fathers also prayed for the annual flooding of the Nile. As the people felt the love of the monks , their concern and prayers for them, so they trusted them as people of God, in the work of reconciliation. Certainly, the fathers were peacemakers in the society.

Through their intimate fellowship with the Lord, the monks healed the sick people, sometimes through prayer and also through direct medical help. Motivated by God's love, the Fathers healed people from diseases and the power of the demons.

Monasteries were opened to the oppressed people and some of the leaders of Coptic monasticism devoted their efforts to defend justice.

The fathers also believed that they were defenders of faith, therefore they faced the heresies with great courage. Some of them sacrificed their lives as martyrs to preserve the Orthodox faith.

The Fathers' hearts were burdened with love toward the unbelievers. They prayed and preached to lead people to Christ. The Fathers loved the sinners and accepted them with deep tenderness. Some Fathers left their monasteries in search for the lost sheep. Others sold themselves as slaves to save the sinners, certainly the fathers embraced humanity to lead them back to the beloved savior.

5.2 PRIORITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.2.1 The origins of Coptic monasticism

As I have stated in chapter 2, the origins of Coptic monasticism are complex. It is clear that biblical notions of discipleship and holiness played a key role in this, but there were also numerous other factors at work. It can give rise to interesting missiological insights if the rise of Coptic monasticism could be studied as a contextualised form of Christian discipleship in Egypt, starting with the third and fourth centuries.

5.2.2 The further development of Coptic monasticism

In this study I have limited myself to the formative period of Coptic monasticism in the fourth and fifth centuries. It will be important to trace the ongoing development of monasticism in Egypt, to see how it unfolded as integral component of Coptic Christianity. Another aspect of this question will be to ask what influence the dominant Islamic presence in Egypt since the seventh century had on Coptic monasticism, especially its “outreaching” dimension as I have discussed it in chapter 4.

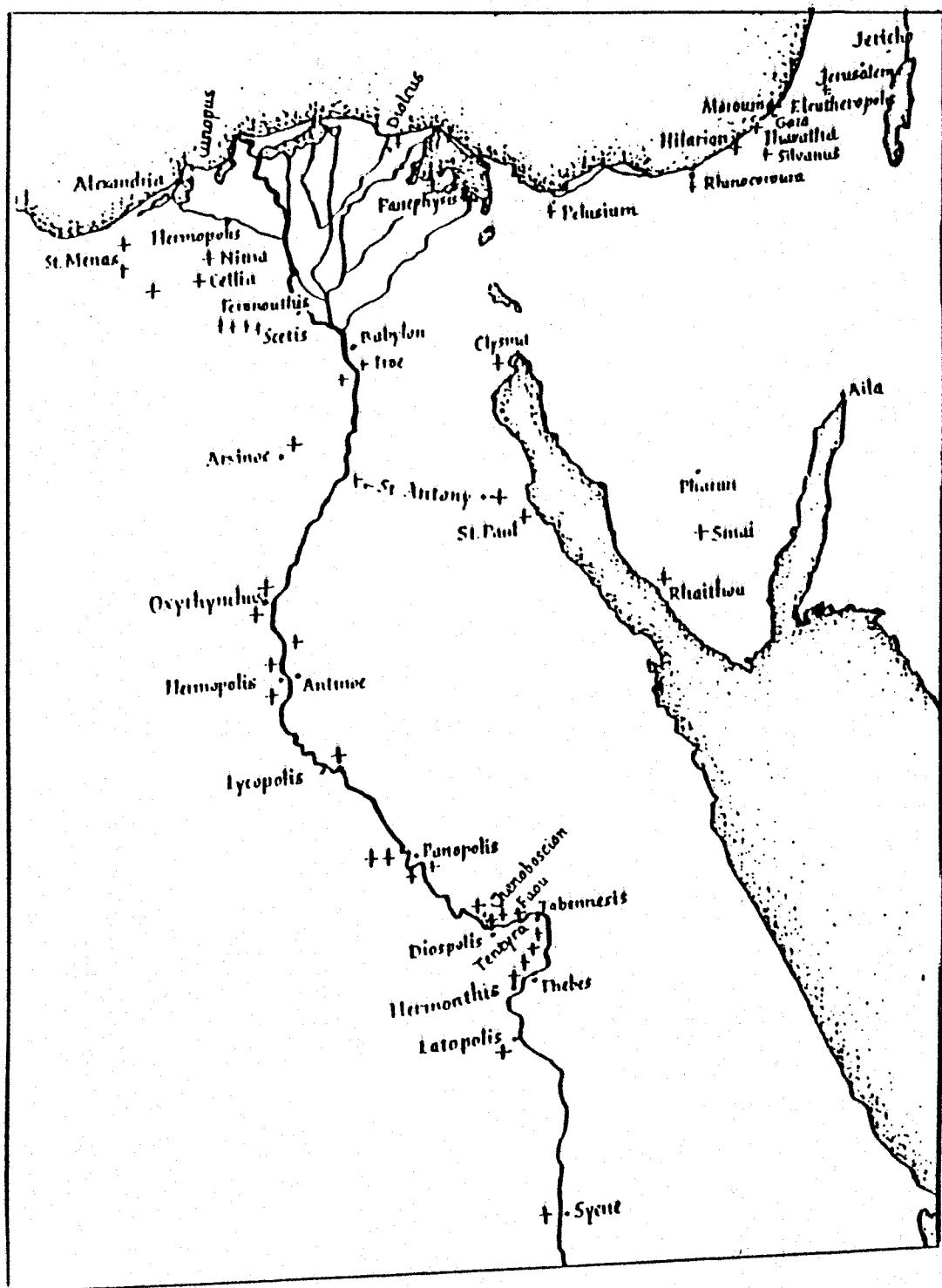
5.2.3 The role of women in Coptic monasticism

Another question which should be pursued further in missiological research is the special role of Coptic nuns in the development of monasticism and the special ministries of these nuns in Egyptian society. Did they operate in the shadow of the monks or was there a definite and unique contribution which they made to the social and spiritual mission of Christian monasticism in Egypt?

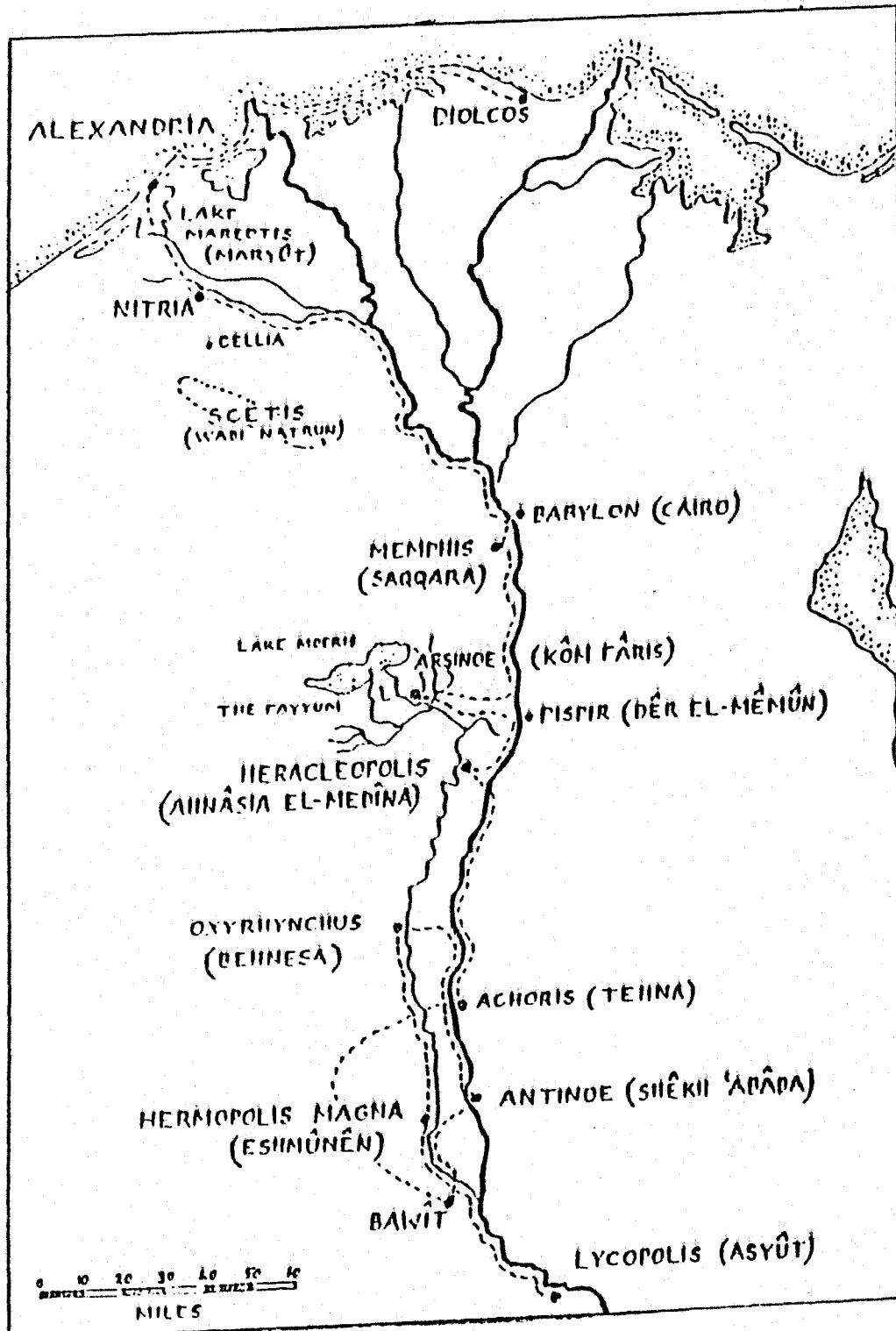
5.2.4 Implications for the present life of the Coptic Orthodox Church

Finally, the implication of this study for the life of the Coptic Orthodox Church needs to be explored further. If it is true that there is a rich missionary heritage in the Coptic tradition, what difference should this make to the way the Coptic Orthodox Church understands its own identity today and develops its ministries and structures, not only in Egypt but also in Coptic Diaspora across the world? May it be possible that the Coptic Orthodox Church

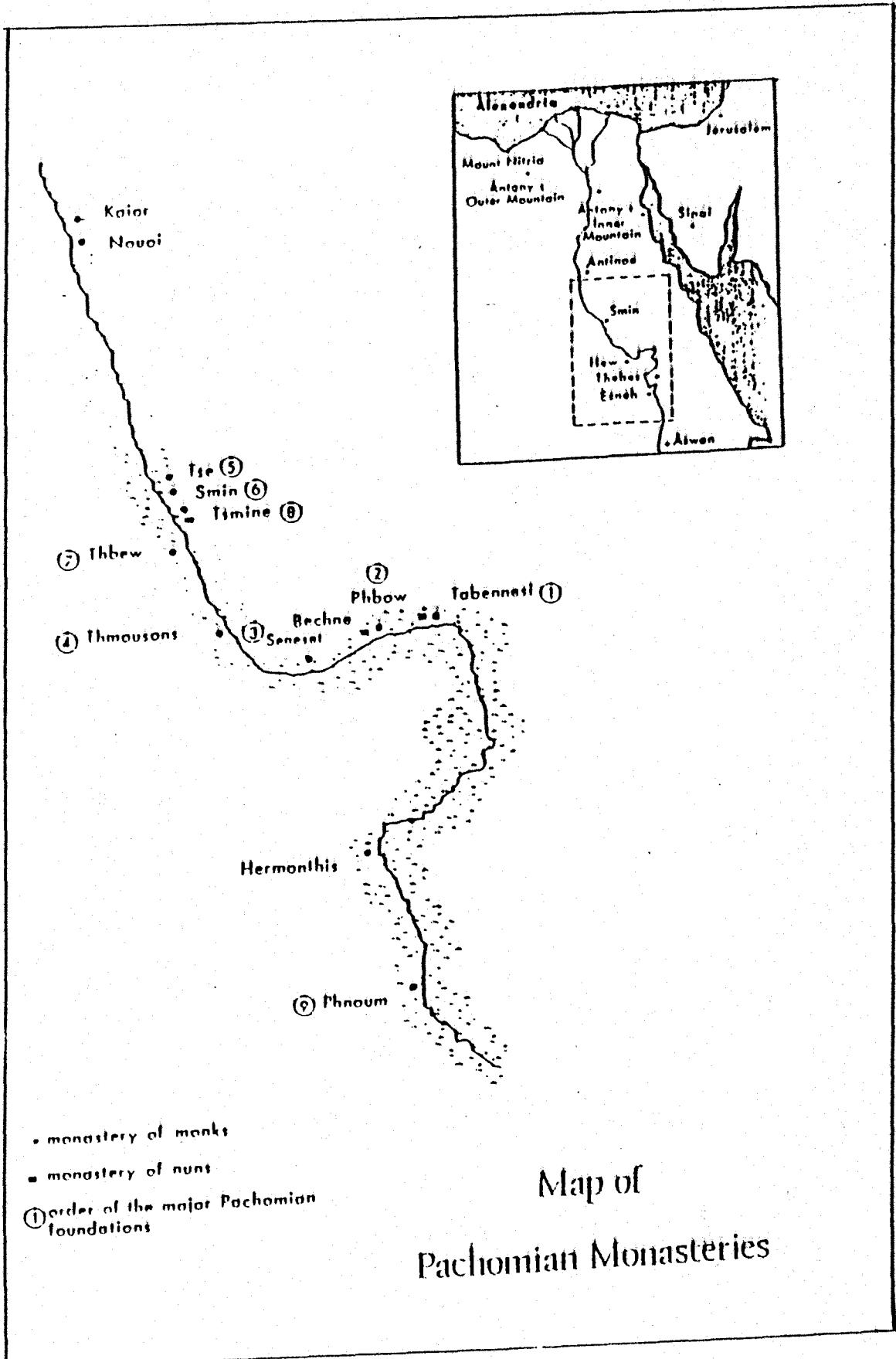
could begin to see itself in a new way as a missionary entity, having responsibilities beyond its own borders, on the rest of African continent and in every other continent? If it does, it becomes very important that it remains true to the vision of non-aggressive and humble service as embodied in the lives of the early Coptic monks I have analysed it in this study.



From Chitty (1966)



From Russell (1980)



Map of
Pachomian Monasteries

From Velleux (1980)

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