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Subscription Price: U.S.: \$8.00. Canada: \$10.00 (US dollars). Other countries: \$11.00 a year.

Subscription is for one year (four issues). Unless otherwise stated, it starts from the current issue. However, new subscribers are advised to start by the spring issue to get the full benefit of the annual index which appears at the end of the year.

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Change of address requires six weeks notice.

SUBSCRIPTION AND BUSINESS ADDRESS:

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P.O. Box 714
E. Brunswick, NJ 08816

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:

Coptic Church Review
P.O. Box 1113
Lebanon, PA 17042

COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

Volume 15, Number 3. Fall 1994

- *SAINT ATHANASIUS' CHRISTOLOGY*
- *ENIGMA OF THE COPTIC MARTYRS AT FAYYUM*



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P.O. Box 714, E. Brunswick, NJ 08816

Editorial Address:
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P.O. Box 1113, Lebanon, PA 17042

Subscription Price (1 Year)
U.S.A. \$8.00
Canada \$10.00 (U.S. dollars)
Overseas \$11.00

Articles are indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*; book reviews are indexed in *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*. Both indexes are published by the American Theological Library Association, Chicago, available online through BRS Information Technologies (Latham, New York) and DIALOG Information Services (Palo Alto, California).

Abstracts of articles appear in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, Myerstown, PA 17067.

COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

A Quarterly of Contemporary Patristic Studies
ISSN 0273-3269

Volume 15, Number 3 Fall 1994

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We are happy to introduce this issue with the article *St. Athanasius: Father of Orthodoxy or Stoic Philosopher?*, which fills a critical need in correcting the misconception of many Western scholars on the subject of Christ's human soul in St. Athanasius' Christology. The author, *Father Philip Tolbert* is an Orthodox Priest residing in San Francisco, California.

In *The Enigma About the Coptic Mummies of Naqlûn*, the Rev. Dr. Otto F. A. Meinardus takes us along an extensive historical and archaeological investigation that started with the discovery in 1991 in an old Coptic monastery in the Upper Egyptian Province Fayyûm of three caskets containing Coptic mummies that carried obvious signs of torture and fatal injuries. Dr. Meinardus lived in Egypt from 1956 to 1968 when he was Professor of Philosophy at the American University in Cairo and has visited it frequently since then. He has written extensively on the Coptic Church and other Oriental Orthodox Churches. He is a member of the German Archaeological Society and a fellow of the Institute of Coptic Studies in Cairo.

Who are the Aramean Syrians by *Touma al-Khoury* was a paper originally delivered in the Sixth International Congress for Syrian Studies on September 2, 1992 in the University of Cambridge, England. This paper offers new insights upon the Syrian people and literature and their impact on religion and history since the earliest biblical times until now. Mr. Khoury is a Lebanese writer and member of the Syrian Orthodox Church at Hackensack, N.J.

Professor Boulos A. Ayad, who teaches Archaeology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, has new remarks to add to our understanding of *The Flood of Noah*. Comparing certain aspects in the flood story to a statement in an old Aramaic manuscript Dr. Ayad reaches the conclusion that a local flood would be more consistent with the biblical story rather than a universal one.

Editor

Acknowledgement

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ST. ATHANASIUS: FATHER OF ORTHODOXY OR STOIC PHILOSOPHER?

Fr. Philip Tolbert

"Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was Incarnate . . . and became man."

Prologue

The genesis of this study lies in what was perhaps a rather naive reading some years ago of St. Athanasius' *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*--for all its simplicity and brevity, an almost unparalleled masterpiece of Christian doctrine. Addressing himself therein to a certain Marcarius, whom he styles a "true lover of Christ," St. Athanasius says:

We must take a step further in the faith of our holy religion, and consider also the Word's becoming man and His divine Appearing in our midst. That mystery the Jews traduce, the Greeks deride, but we adore¹

There, among other things, we encounter the thought that humanity, originally created by God out of nothing, having since transgressed the commandment of God, was in danger not only of corruption, death and the torments of Hell, but of falling once again into complete non-existence:

For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again.²

This is no sentimental expression of faith along the lines of St. Augustine's "Felix culpa!" On the contrary, this is reality with sharp edges starkly revealed. As a flash of lightning, it suddenly pierces the comforting veil of our mundane illusions about life. What did such a statement imply concerning human nature? And what did it imply concerning the nature of the God Who, having created humanity, also came to save us after our most unhappy fall?

The riveting image of a humanity poised between existence and non-existence would not go unexamined. For all its antiquity, it is an extremely provocative and contemporary image. The doctrine of salvation which permeates the works of St.

Athanasius is equally striking and compelling. The manner in which St. Athanasius characterizes the dilemma of God and humanity in relation to the consequences of sin, combined with his astounding resolution of that dilemma, is a powerful witness to the saving work of Christ and to the Apostolic kerygma.

Athanasius is without doubt the theologian par excellence of the consubstantiality of the ontological Trinity. His defense of Trinitarian theology in the face of the Arian onslaught -- theological and political -- earned him the respect and praise of later Fathers, among them the three Cappadocians who labored to build upon the foundation he had laid. They came to refer to him as "pillar of the Church" and "Father of Orthodoxy." His influence upon his own times was so great that, as J. Quasten remarks, "the history of dogma in the fourth century is identical with the history of his life."³

Contemporary Athanasian Problematics

It is also within this realm however, that the most serious challenges of current Athanasian problematics arise: the root problem being styled Christological and the fruit soteriological. Surprising as it may be to those who look to St. Athanasius as a hero of the faith, in some quarters of current scholarship, St. Athanasius is being accused of or at least suspected of being a "crypto-Apollinarian" to coin the term. These problems may be summarized briefly as follows:

1. Does St. Athanasius' stress upon the divinity of Christ betray a lack of interest in His humanity? More precisely, does St. Athanasius deny a full humanity to Christ, allowing a humanity of the flesh only but not of the soul?
2. Can there be a true theosis in the theology of St. Athanasius if the answer to the Christological question posed above is in the affirmative?

It shall be our task in what follows to review the evidence, pro and con, especially as it relates to any supposed Stoic influence upon Athanasian Christology which might be construed to justify the charges of Apollinarianism.

Admissible and Inadmissible Evidence

Aloys Grillmeier in the first volume of his monumental work, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, devotes a great deal of space to the exposition of what is known as the Logos/sarx Christology often attributed to the Alexandrine Fathers. It is within this schematic that Athanasius first comes to be suspected, then accused and, to Grillmeier's satisfaction, finally convicted of ascribing no human soul to Christ.

Two things must occur before such a position can be asserted. First the authenticity of the Athanasian authorship of the *Contra Apollinarius* must be denied. Secondly, certain statements in the *Tomos ad Antiochenos* and *Epistula ad Epictetum* must be interpreted differently than in the past to exclude a reading in

favor of a human soul. Having dispensed with these possible textual witnesses to Athanasius's position, this school arrives at his "conviction" mostly based upon an *argumentum e silentio*. Tracing the history of this school, Grillmeier summarizes the argument following M. Richard's analysis of *Contra Arianos* III:35-7:

The Arian texts excerpted and criticized in *Contra Arianos* III in fact presuppose that the Logos took the place of the soul. Any modern theologian, says Richard, would begin by criticizing this framework, particularly where the Arian "Christ" is said to be neither God nor man, but a middle being of unique character. Athanasius takes a different attitude. Not once in the course of his long criticism does he accuse his opponents of having forgotten the human soul of the Lord. He does not accuse them of having made Christ into a special type of being, but simply of having made Him into an ordinary man. This shows that from an anthropological point of view, his view of the problem is completely different from ours. He had no quarrel with his opponents here. Nor does he ever resort to the expedience of giving Christ a human soul in order to solve the great difficulties raised by the Arians. So he knows nothing of one. His Christ is only Logos and sarx.⁴

Before going on, we must point out a simple fallacy in this chain of reasoning. The fallacy is in the sentence "He does not accuse them of having made Christ into a special type of being, but simply of having made Him into an ordinary man." Despite the reference to *Contra Arianos* III, no specific textual evidence is made for this assertion. One can only wonder if those making the assertion are reading the same text as the rest of us. After all, it was not Nestorius whom Athanasius was opposing. In nearly every section of the *Contra Arianos*, Athanasius is objecting to the Arians' making of Christ a special type of being; in fact making Christ a created divinity, a second god, a first among creatures, a being created before time and by which all other things were created, divine only by a special participation in the God head. Therefore, while it is true that he does not "resort to the expedience of giving Christ a human soul," it is simply false that he does not object to the Arians' "having made Christ into a special type of being."⁵

Grillmeier himself, while agreeing with Richard's conclusion, is uncomfortable with this *argumentum e silentio*; and rightly so, for it can also be used in reverse to claim that what was not stated cannot be proven to have been held. Andrew Louth elucidates some of the problems with this approach and offers several sound reasons for Athanasius' silence on this point, arriving at the conclusion that we cannot know with any certainty what he actually believed.⁶

Despite the weakness of Richard's argument, Grillmeier is unwilling to concede the point. Instead he uses Richard's assessment as supporting evidence for his

own argument, one built upon what he feels to be positive proof. Grillmeier's Apollinarian reading of Athanasius is based upon the assumption that his concept of the Logos is essentially a Stoic one. While acknowledging that the Logos as understood by St. Athanasius is not identical with the Stoic concept of the world-soul (because of its transcendence), "Athanasius has taken over," he claims,

the Stoic concept of the world as a body, as *soma*, and has admitted the Logos, which unlike the Stoa he understands as personal, as it were in the place of the soul. Now the human, rational soul is the most perfect copy of the Logos within the earthly, corporeal creation. It fulfills towards the body the function which the Logos has in the cosmos. It is a Logos in microcosm, and therefore also a way to him and to the Father...Athanasius' view might be put in these words: Where the original itself appears with all its power, the copy, with its secondary and derived power, must at least surrender its function, even if it does not give place altogether.⁷

Here we detect a rhetorical "sleight of hand." The key ideas which Grillmeier sees as Stoic evidence in Athanasius -- the Logos as the creator of the world, its life, its ordering principle, its sustaining power -- can readily be traced to the Semitic cosmology present in biblical sources that predate the period of Hellenistic influence.⁸ However, rather than simply dismiss Grillmeier as one whose zeal outruns his knowledge, let us examine his theory more closely.

For Grillmeier's theory to be true we must find that Athanasius's teaching coincides with Stoic teaching to a high degree in the following areas: cosmogony, physics (esp. in terms of cosmology) and theology. To state the problem more precisely in question form: Is there sufficient agreement between Stoic and Athanasian understandings of the origin and nature of the world (cosmos, inclusive of anthropos) and of the nature of God (theos, logos and pneuma) and in particular, of the relationship of Logos to Cosmos (and psyche to anthropos) to conclude that Athanasius's understanding of the Logos is essentially Stoic?

Cosmogony

In both *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius explicitly teaches creation out of nothing. For him, God's act of creation is distinct from the human act; human beings create or fashion things out of already existing matter. God's act of creation brings things out of nothingness or non-being into being. To do less than this would be to make God dependant upon a separately existing principle of matter for His act of creation. Furthermore, creation is for God an act of will not of necessity. This is why for Athanasius, Father is a higher and more appropriate title for God than Creator--He is Father by nature and Creator by will.⁹

In contrast to this, Stoic teaching is that God (Logos) and matter are co-eternal and co-equal principles. Logos as the active principle gives order to a pre-existing, unqualified matter (the passive principle) giving rise to the Cosmos (the material universe ordered by divine reason). In this sense only can Logos be considered the source of the Cosmos: not in its substantial existence but in its essential orderliness and intelligibility. (Apropos of this, Stoics frequently refer to Logos as "Craftsman" rather than "Creator", a title which Athanasius strongly rejects in the opening sections of *De Incarnatione*.) Furthermore, it is the nature of Logos so to act upon pre-existent matter; Logos, although rational and sentient, acts according to nature and by necessity in ordering Cosmos. The act is deterministic not volitional.¹⁰

Physics / Cosmology

A central axiom of Stoic physics is that only bodies are truly existent. The Logos of Stoicism, as a truly existent thing, is therefore corporeal, as are human souls. Just as the soul of a human being does not extend beyond the physical limits of the flesh, the Logos does not extend beyond the limits of the Cosmos. Therefore both Cosmos and Logos are limited. Beyond is only the Void, an incorporeal thing which has no real existence. Logos and Cosmos are in fact co-extensive and complimentary aspects of the one, real, self-sufficient universe. At times Stoic philosophers will use the terms Logos and Cosmos interchangeably to refer to the same reality. Since neither cosmic reason nor unqualified matter can be destroyed, they are also co-eternal, and although the soul of a human being may temporarily exist without sarx, Logos does not exist separately from matter at any time.¹¹

By contrast, Athanasius in numerous places refers to the incorporeal and infinite nature of God and of the Logos.¹² For Athanasius, the Logos exists beyond and outside of the Cosmos while at the same time permeating and sustaining it. God's existence is not only separate from that of the Cosmos, but is of an entirely different order of being. God alone is self-sufficient being, the world is utterly dependant upon the Logos for its existence, its sustenance and its continuance. The Cosmos has a beginning and an end for Athanasius, unlike the Logos Who is eternal.

Theology / Anthropology

Strictly speaking, theology is a branch of physics in Stoicism. As we have already seen, Logos is corporeal. It is the motive, rational, sentient, ruling and organizing aspect of Cosmos. While Cosmos is the substance of Logos, Logos is the nature of Cosmos. Logos is to psyche as Cosmos is to sarx. Further, Logos is to Cosmos as psyche is to sarx.

With one exception (and that a qualified one), Athanasius will agree with none of these principles. Logos is incorporeal. Although he agrees that it is the Logos

who provides Cosmos with order and sustenance (and psyche with rationality), the nature of Cosmos is not identical with Logos, nor is the Cosmos identical with the substance of Logos. Cosmos is created, Logos is uncreated. Psyche is therefore not to Logos as sarx is to Cosmos, nor is psyche to sarx as Logos is to Cosmos.

The Stoic teaching is that the individual logos of a human being, the "ruling part" of its soul, is a part of the Logos of the Cosmos. Human logoi and the cosmic Logos are related as part to whole--they are one in essence and in nature.

For Athanasius, the human soul is made in the image of God and partakes of the rationality of the Logos. They are however, of both different essences and different natures. The human partakes of the divine by participation (through grace), not by nature.

The magnitude of all this disagreement can lead to only one conclusion: Grillmeier's assertion of a Stoic Logos in Athanasius is untenable. It simply does not stand up under textual scrutiny. Breaking this link in Grillmeier's reasoning destroys the logical necessity that Athanasius would automatically, like a good Stoic, see the Logos as replacing or doing away with the need for a rational soul in the Incarnate Christ.

Logos/Sarx Inadequacy

Grillmeier also finds support for his argument in Athanasius' response to the Arians concerning the human weaknesses ascribed by Scripture to Christ: his fear, his ignorance of certain events, his hunger, and his suffering on the cross. Once again, the criticism is that Athanasius could easily have refuted the Arians by saying these things occurred in Christ's human soul not in His divinity. As Grillmeier sees it, since Athanasius cannot deny the scriptures but does not affirm a human soul, instead he often implies that these experiences were feigned or at least somehow mitigated, and therefore:

As a result we have Athanasius' remarkable procedure of making the "flesh" of Christ the physical subject of experiences which normally have their place in the soul. He can speak of an "ignorance of the flesh" in which the term "sarx" clearly begs the whole question.¹³

Once again we have a complete misreading of Athanasius. It is true that

Athanasius does make statements concerning Christ's suffering such as, "These affections were not proper to the nature of the Logos, insofar as he was Logos, but the Logos was in the flesh which suffered such."¹⁴ However, this statement only presents a problem if we accept the Logos/sarx restriction. Grillmeier has nowhere established that Athanasius uses sarx as a precise term meaning flesh only as distinct from the possibility that he uses it in some other more flexible manner, for example as a sort of shorthand for a full humanity. In fact, there is good cause to believe the latter, as Athanasius himself indicates in *Contra Arianos* III:30:

Since the Word of God, by whom all things came to be, endured to become also Son of man, and humbled Himself, taking a servant's form, therefore to the Jews the cross of Christ is a scandal, but to us Christ is "God's power" and "God's wisdom"; for "the Word," as John says, "became flesh" (it being the custom of Scripture to call man by the name of "flesh" as it says by Joel the prophet "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh;" and as Daniel said to Astyages, "I do not worship idols made with hands but the Living God, who hath created the heaven and the earth and hath sovereignty over all flesh;" for both he and Joel call mankind flesh.)¹⁵

Using this textual clue from St. Athanasius as to how he himself understands his own terminology, we come to a very different reading of the text just cited by Grillmeier as containing an absurdity, i.e., confusing sarx and psyche. Rather, the absurd position is to think that Athanasius interprets the passages from Daniel and Joel as referring only to the flesh of humans and not to whole human beings, souls included. St. Athanasius does answer the Arians that although the Logos cannot suffer human weaknesses in Himself as God, having assumed human flesh, as *man* (that is, as wholly human) He can. In substance and according to his own use of the terms, he has said the very thing he is accused of omitting. There is no inconsistency, let alone absurdity, in this, "for both he [St. Athanasius] and Joel call mankind flesh."

To conclude our disagreement with Grillmeier and the Logos/sarx characterization of St. Athanasius' theology, we shall briefly mention the conclusion of two scholars who have also found this view deficient.

Charles Twombly, having completed a point-counterpoint consideration of Grillmeier with the work of T.F. Torrance (who focuses on the sacerdotal and recapitulative aspects of salvation in Christ) concludes:

The mark of a good theory is that it makes the best sense of the known evidence. From that standpoint, it seems to me that Torrance offers an explanation for elements in Athanasius that Grillmeier's approach fails to account for. By focusing on Christ's role as vicarious representative of human kind he throws light on the character of Christ's humanity. Grillmeier, by focusing more narrowly on the issue of a human soul, seems to miss the fruitful implications arising out of the larger theme. Perhaps he represents the danger of someone who forces a rather rigid (and perhaps alien) scheme on another's thought, without letting that thought suggest the categories by which it might best be understood.¹⁶

George Dragas, in an excellent piece of original work based on a linguistic analysis of St. Athanasius' use of the terms sarx, anthropos, soma and their deriva-

tives used in conjunction with the term Logos, especially in relation to the verbs utilized, arrives at a number of highly insightful conclusions. Among them he demonstrates that St. Athanasius uses the term *anthropos* as frequently or more so and with a greater precision than he does *sarx* and hence cannot be made to fit the Logos/*sarx* as distinct from the Logos/*anthropos* schematic. On the particular point at issue he says:

The exposition of Christology in the History of Dogma has tended to generalize and schematize the particularities of the Patristic mind and language, perhaps because it has, since the nineteenth century been governed by the presuppositions of an idealist philosophy and a historicist epistemology. The Logos/*sarx* framework has been such a generalization which, applied rigidly, resulted in the grave neglect of the *anthropic* (my term) aspect of Athanasius' Christology. The consequence was the fabrication of a number of theological "problems" and their projection into the history of the doctrinal controversies of the early patristic era. As an example, I may mention the so-called "apollinarianism" of Athanasius which appeared with the rise of the nineteenth century History of Dogma and which never before, not even in the time of Athanasius, was posed in that way. Generally speaking the question of the human soul in Christ was examined in the History of Dogma, if I may be allowed the word, illegitimately.¹⁷

Dragas' "bottom-line" conclusion is that far from being a "crypto-Apollinarian", St. Athanasius' Christology provides a way out of the Apollinarian and Nestorian dilemmas and was in fact the Christology "refined by Cyril, which prevails at Chalcedon and reaches further refinements in the proto-Byzantine era."¹⁸

Summary and Conclusion

Grillmeier's Logos/*sarx* characterization of St. Athanasius is a gross misreading. Rather than a straightforward reading of St. Athanasius to see what theology actually arises, he begins with a conceptual overlay into which St. Athanasius is made to fit. Likewise, his accusation of a Stoic and hence Apollinarian Christology is superficial and without substance. Our main concern has been to demonstrate the inaccuracy of this characterization and the inappropriateness of this accusation.

St. Athanasius' concern throughout the Arian Controversy was soteriological as well as Christological, having a pastoral as well as a doctrinal motivation which may be summarized thusly: Belief in a false Christ does not save; and the corollary statement: Baptism performed in the name of a false Christ is void. The ontological discontinuity between God as Creator and man as creature is bridged in the

person of Christ, who while being of one essence with the Father, was incarnate, assuming human nature and becoming a man. The entire life of the Incarnate Word of God worked salvation for us, destroying both sin and death (by removing the condemnation brought about by the Fall), and by a bestowing of the Holy Spirit, opening the way to personal participation in the Divine nature (theosis)--the true goal and perfection of humanity created in the image and likeness of God. This participation involves, in addition to a personal receiving of the Holy Spirit through baptismal waters and sacramental grace, a striving to keep the commandments like St. Antony which results in God taking up His abode in us during this life-time and our dwelling with Him in eternity.

Despite the many challenges encountered above, we are compelled to conclude that St. Athanasius has justified our interest in his dynamic and striking portrayal of salvation in Christ. We find here a fully operative and satisfying doctrine of salvation, one which is clearly and solidly in the full Tradition of the Church. St. Athanasius' teaching is not a primitive deviation nor a theological dead-end such as a Stoic Logos or Apollinarian Christology would imply, but rather is wholly at one with the seamless garment of Truth as taught by Christ and His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Notes

1. *The Incarnation of the Word of God: Being the Treatise of St. Athanasius*, trans. by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (New York, 1946), p.25. (D.I. 1:1)
2. *ibid.*, p.29f. (D.I. 4:4)
3. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 3, (Utrecht, 1950), p.66.
4. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. I, (Atlanta, 1975), p.309f.
5. The pivotal point at issue in the Arian controversy was not what sort of *humanity* Christ had assumed, but precisely what sort of Christ had become man. That he had become man was not at issue here, therefore it was not essential to the defense of Orthodoxy *in this controversy* to focus on what sort of manhood was assumed. It is a myopic intellectual climate that faults Athanasius for not defending the "full humanity" given the principle at issue in the Arian controversy when it is viewed *in situ*.
It is noteworthy that the accusation of Apollinarianism arises from the same intellectual milieu which gave us the search for the historical (that is human) Jesus. The driving force behind this milieu is an emotional and psychological need which has its own reasons for wanting a human Christ perhaps more than it does a divine one. The Orthodox truth of the Church is to see these two in balance, not in opposition or as somehow mutually exclusive.
6. Andrew Louth, "Athanasius' Understanding of the Humanity of Christ", in *Studia Patristica*, 16:2, (1975), p.309-318.
7. Grillmeier, p.311.
8. Ironically, certain scholars have seen Semitic influence in Stoicism. See R.D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean*, (New York, 1910) pp. 20-22, for a brief discussion of the similarities of certain Old Testament passages which stress the immediate agency of God in natural processes and His manifest presence in the world with Stoic notions of divine immanence and omnipresence.
9. D.I. 1:4-3:3, Archibald Robertson, trans., *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 4, (London, 1891, reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 36-37.

10. For Stoic references on cosmogony see A.A. Long & D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Cambridge, 1987), p. 268f.
11. Compare these representative quotes taken from Long and Sedley, p. 272, with those from Athanasius in Note 12 below:
"Zeno also differed from [Platonists and Peripatetics] in thinking that it was totally impossible that something incorporeal...should be the agent of anything, and that only a body was capable of acting or of being acted upon." (Cicero, *Academica* 1:39)
"He [Cleanthes] also says: no incorporeal interacts with a body, and no body with an incorporeal, but one body interacts with another body." (Nemesius 78,7)
"They [the Stoics] think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts and that which is acted upon. That which is acted upon is unqualified substance, i.e. matter, that which acts is the reason [logos] in it, i.e. god...The principles are also bodies...." (Diogenes Laertius 7.134)
12. St. Athanasius himself speaks against Grillmeier's idea of the Cosmos as the body of the Logos in *De Incarnatione* 1:3 where he specifically says that when the Logos desired a body He had to borrow it from humankind, for a body was foreign to His nature:
"You must understand why it is that the Word of the Father, so great and so high, has been manifested in bodily form. He has not assumed a body as proper to His own nature, far from it, for as the Word He is without body. He has been manifested in a human body for this reason only, out of the love and goodness of His Father, for the salvation of us men." (Religious of C.S.M.V., p.26)
Elsewhere he adds, "For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes to our realm..." (D.I. 8:1, Robertson, p. 40). Therefore, despite Athanasius' agreement that the Logos is the creator, the life, etc. of the world, by his own testimony he denies the Logos a body other than that which he assumed in becoming a man.
13. Grillmeier, p.315.
14. *Contra Arianos* III:55, as quoted by Alwyn Pettersen, "Did Athanasius Deny Christ's Fear?" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 39(1986), p.327. See also the companion piece by the same author, "The Courage of Christ in the Theology of Athanasius", pp.363-377 in 40(1987) of the same journal.
15. Robertson, p. 410.
16. Charles Twombly, "The Nature of Christ's Humanity: A Study in Athanasius", in *Patristic and Byzantine Review*, 8:3, (1989), p.240f.
17. George Dragas, "A Neglected Aspect of Athanasius' Christology", in *Studia Patristica*, 16:3, (1985), p.281f.
18. Dragas, p.294.

THE ENIGMA ABOUT THE COPTIC MUMMIES OF NAQLÛN

Otto F.A. Meinardus, Ph.D.

The purpose of this brief essay is an attempt to throw some light upon the thorny problems of identification and dating of those Coptic mummies which were discovered in the summer of 1991 within the immediate vicinity of the monastery of St. Gabriel (Dair Malak Ghobrîâl), Naqlûn, in the oasis of Fayyûm. This presentation is divided into three chapters. 1. The discovery of Coptic mummies in the Dair Malak Ghobrîâl. 2. A brief account of the history of the Dair Malak Ghobrîâl. 3. About the identification and dating of the Coptic mummies.

1. The Discovery of the Coptic mummies in the Dair Malak Ghobrîâl

The Monastery of St. Gabriel, also known as the Dair Abû Khashab, is situated on the south-eastern border of the Fayyûm Oasis near Ez.Qalâmshah.¹ During the summer months of 1991 the Coptic Diocese of the Fayyûm was engaged in the restoration and extension projects of the traditional pilgrimage centre of Dair Malak Ghobrîâl, Naqlûn.² At the same time the Egyptian Antiquities Organization (EAO) and the Polish Center of Archeology in Cairo excavated in the proximity of the Dair Malak Ghobrîâl, studying especially layout and architecture of the early Christian laura of Naqlûn.³ In the course of the excavations carried out by the inspectors of the Islamic and Coptic section of the EAO, three caskets with each four mummies were discovered and unearthed about 150m south-west of the monastery compound.⁴ Interestingly enough, so far there has been no report about the discovery and translation of the mummies! Without much effort, the three caskets were transferred to the Church of St. Gabriel within the monastery. They were placed in the southern aisle of the nave. The mummies were covered with new white linen sheets. Moreover, the mummies were photographed for a seven-page-folder with twelve colored pictures to be sold for local pilgrims at the monastery kiosk. On account of the obvious marks of torture the church declared them to be martyrs of the Christian faith.

2. A brief Account of the history of the Dair Malak Ghobrîâl

Our knowledge of the historical development of the monastic life in and around the Oasis of the Fayyûm is rather limited, especially if we compare it with the rich history of such prominent monastic centres as Nitria, Cellia, Scetis

or the Eastern Desert. And yet, there are sufficient data available, which, if joined together, help us to establish a rough historical outline for our understanding of the Dair Malak Ghobrîâl. By the middle of the 3rd century, Christianity was well established in the Fayyûm. Eusebius mentioned a certain Bishop Nepos of the Fayyûm, who in the first half of the 3rd century was well known for his millennial interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.⁵ During the Diocletian persecution, the Christian community in the Fayyûm was as much affected as those Christians living in the other regions of Egypt, and the Synaxaria commemorate the names of several Fayyûm martyrs. Among these, there were two couples of Medinet al-Fayyûm, Theophilus and Patricia,⁶ and Bartholemew and his wife⁷. With regard to Naqlûn, we know of the name of at least one monk, who “settled in the mountain south of the Fayyûm”. Abba Kâw, a monk of a cell near his native city of Bimâi,⁸ suffered martyrdom during the Diocletian persecution. Compelled to worship the idols, Abba Kâw not only defied the order, but also broke the idol in two. He was tortured and taken to al-Bahnasa, and finally imprisoned at Ansanâ (Antinoë) where he was executed. Some five to eight hundred Christians suffered martyrdom with him. His body was translated to his cell at Bimâi, where a church was erected in his honor⁹. Another desert father of the Fayyûm was Abba Stephen Falâsî, who was known as a fighter “seeking after the manner of the saints who were in the desert”¹⁰.

After twenty years of anchoritic life, St. Antony the Great is said to have gone to the Fayyûm, where he made monks of many of the Christian brethren, who were there, confirming them in the Law of God¹¹. By the beginning of the 4th century, monasticism in the Fayyûm was as much developed as in the Nile Valley and in other centres.

The foundation of the Monastery of St. Gabriel is intimately connected with the fantastic Coptic story of Aûr or Aurâ, the illegitimate son of the queen’s daughter and Abrâshît the magician¹². Throughout this story, the Angel Gabriel appears as the guardian and guide of Aûr, who finally was led to the Mountain of Naqlûn, where he built a church in honor of St. Gabriel. Later, the small church of sun-dried bricks was replaced with a more pretentious one of baked bricks. The new church was consecrated by Abba Isaac, Bishop of the Fayyûm, who also ordained Aûr to the priesthood. On the death of the bishop, the people of the Fayyûm requested the patriarch to consecrate Aûr to be their bishop. The request was granted, but Aûr returned to the Mountain of Naqlûn.

The consecration of the Church of St. Gabriel is commemorated by the Coptic and Ethiopian churches on the 26th of Baû’nâh and the 26th of Sanê respectively. An unsupported statement by B.T.A. Evetts mentions that Bishop Aûr of the Naqlûn Monastery lived in the beginning of the 4th century¹³.

From the 4th to the 7th century, the Monastery of Naqlûn appears as the

leading monastic centre in the Fayyûm, and it is in this period, therefore, that we must place the translation of the relics of Abba Kâw from his native city of Bimâi to the Monastery of Naqlûn. With the emergence of the Monastery of al-Qalamûn¹⁴ under the dynamic leadership of St. Samuel, the Monastery of Naqlûn was pushed gradually but steadily into the background. Thus, from the middle of the 7th century onwards, the Monastery of al-Qalamûn began to surpass the Monastery of Naqlûn in importance and position. We know little about the history of the Monastery of Naqlûn after the time of St. Samuel. A reference to this monastery is found in a letter written by a certain deacon Macrobius to Macarius, another deacon, who seems to have been left alone at Naqlûn¹⁵. Abbot suggests that since the Monastery of Naqlûn was deserted except for Macrobius, and reference to building or rebuilding is made in the letter, the document may well be assigned to the post-Hâkim period of restoration, i.e. the first part of the 11th century¹⁶.

Abû’l-Makarim’s report (13th century) speaks of two churches, the church of St. Michael and the church of St. Gabriel. “It is said that the mountain called Naqlûn is that which contained the place where Jacob, son of Issac, son of Abraham, enjoyed the shade, and worshiped; and sacrifices were offered to God in the days of Joseph, the son of Jacob, when Joseph superintended the building of the Fayyûm and the Hajar al-Lahûn”¹⁷. The Ethiopian Synaxarium informs us that “at the present day” the body of Abba Kâw is at the Monastery of Naqlûn. This means that between the latter part of the 12th century and the beginning of the 15th century the Monastery of Naqlûn was not just one of several monasteries in the Fayyûm but also contained the relics of one of the foremost martyrs of the Oasis¹⁸. By the middle of the 15th century, however, the importance of the monastery had declined. Al-Maqrizî omits any reference to the Church of St. Michael, and merely speaks of the Monastery of al-Khashabah or the Monastery of the Angel Gabriel, which stands under a hollow in the mountain. This hollow is known among them by the name of Jacob’s shade... The water for this monastery is drawn from the canal of al-Manhî, and it lies below the Monastery of Sadmant¹⁹. At the festival celebrated in this monastery, the Christians of the Fayyûm and other places assemble²⁰.

On the 19th of August 1672 Johann Michael Wansleben visited the Fayyûm and found the Monastery of Naqlûn almost completely ruined, though its two churches (presumably SS. Michael and Gabriel) seem to have been still standing. The Church of St. Gabriel he described as being very beautiful, all painted within with pictures of the stories of the Holy Scriptures, and having the nave supported by slender columns of several stone drums each²¹.

In the beginning of this century, probably during the episcopacy of Anbâ Abrââm of the Fayyûm (d. 1914), the church was rebuilt and redecorated. The remains of the ancient wall-paintings were covered with a coat of oil-paint and

the wooden roof was restored. In the winter of 1927-28 Johann Georg, Duke of Saxony, visited the Monastery of Naqlûn and provided us with the first account after the rebuilding of the church. "The entrance is through a donkey-stable...thus one enters a very interesting church belonging to the 7th century...the lecturn may date to the 13th century. Of special interest is also the wooden ceiling"²².

Today the monastery is occupied and being served by two monks, Abûnâ Yoel al-Bishoî and Abûnâ 'Adb al-Masîh al-Bûlî. Regular divine services are held for the Christians of the region. At the time of the annual *mûlid* in honor of St. Gabriel large numbers of Coptic pilgrims from the Fayyûm and Beni Suef assemble at the Monastery of Naqlûn and inhabit the many dwelling-places around the church. Since 1991 the team of the Polish Center of Archeology in Cairo has restored the medieval wall-paintings in the Church of St. Gabriel.

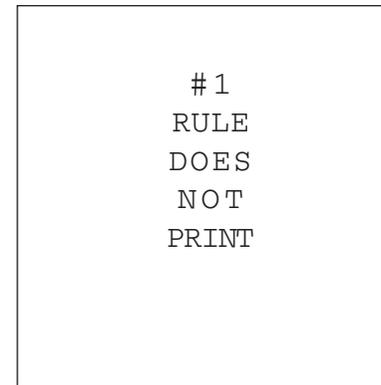
3. About the identification and dating of the Coptic mummies

The problems pertaining to the tragic and violent circumstances, the identity of the assassinated persons and the date of the massacre have led to different conclusions. At this stage, various data shall be presented with the understanding that they constitute merely a preliminary report.

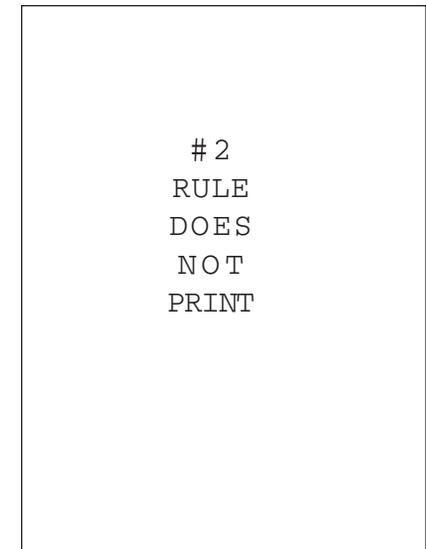
Since 1986 members of the Polish Center of Archaeology in Cairo under the director of Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski have been engaged in archaeological research around the region of Dair Malak Ghobrîâl, Naqlûn. It is noteworthy that the Polish Excavation and Research Reports of the period 1988-1991 make no mention of the discovery of the mummies²³. In a letter addressed to me Professor Godlewski refers to the tombs south of the monastery and adds "the tombs (were) excavated in the area to the south of the modern monastery by (the) inspector of (the) EAO (Egyptian Archaeological Organization) from Fayum. (They were) similar to these from (the) 19th century, but of course could be earlier. For me clear indications of the dating of these tombs are not existing... In my opinion the found corpses by the inspector of EAO are rather modern, may be they are of secular persons buried close to the monastery rather than the bodies of monks"²⁴. The tombs south-west of Dair Malak Ghobrîâl were exposed by Mr. Hisham Hussain Mohammed Ahmed and Mr. Mohammed Ahmed 'Abd al-Halim, inspectors of the Islamic and Coptic section of the EAO of the Fayyûm.

Professor Godlewski's statement regarding the dating of the mummies agrees with my own impressions, namely that they may well have been victims of a massacre carried out in the 18th or 19th century.

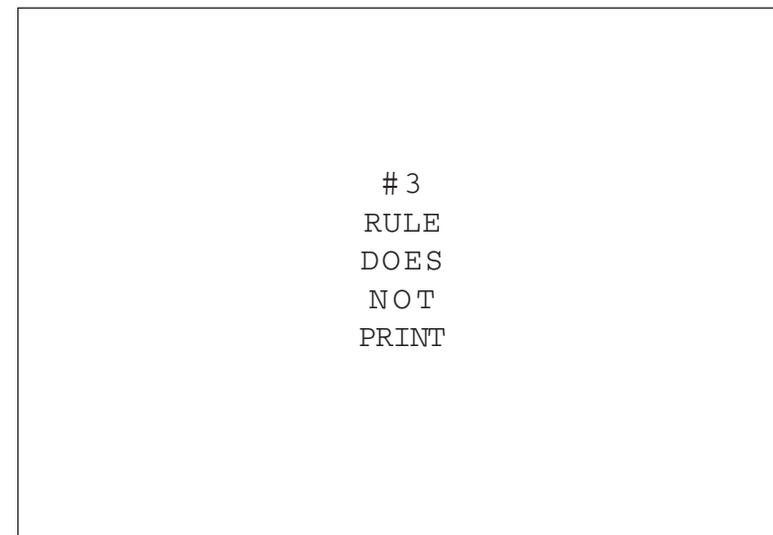
For this assumption I suggest the politically unstable weeks and months in October/November 1798. Witnesses report about marauding, looting and plundering groups of Mamelukes in this particular region. These may have massa-



Monastery of Archangel Gabriel at
Neqlûn



Head of a strangulated child from
the mummies of Naqlûn



Marks of chains on the hands of a victim

cred the Christian fellahin who had sought refuge within the monastery-compound. At this time, the monastery was partly destroyed and probably deserted. It served merely as pilgrimage-center for annual *mawâlid*. Under these circumstances the monastic buildings, situated in the desert only a few kilometers from the fertile land, could have been an ideal place of refuge to escape the extortions, confiscations and plunderings of the strolling gangs of Mamelukes.

Following the battle of Sidmant al-Gebel on October 7, 1798, the victorious French forces under General Louis C.-A. Desaix de Veygoux withdrew to al-Lahûn, about 10 km east of Dair Malak Ghobrîâl²⁵. Later they camped in the north-eastern section of the Fayyûm, in the villages of Seila, Sirsina, al-Rôda and al-Rubiyat, east of Sinnûris²⁶. This means that the French troops never approached the vicinity of Dair Malak Ghobrîâl, neither prior nor following the battle of Sidmant al-Gebel.

The fact that looting and marauding Mamelukes terrorized, plundered and killed the fellahin is sufficiently documented²⁷. These actions were merely referred to as “organizing”, and villagers were exposed to severe extortions and taxations (*mirî*). The presence of Mameluke bands in the proximity of Naqlûn is mentioned in the report by General Desaix²⁸. The manner in which these Mamelukes dealt with the villagers, especially the Copts, is described by Vivant Denon, who was an eyewitness: “South of Mînya, the Mamelukes demanded from the Copts one hundred camels. Because they were unable to satisfy their demands, sixty Copts were killed. The Christians were so angered that they killed eight Mamelukes²⁹.”

Should one accept the provisional dating of Professor Godlewski and my own impressions and perceptions about the mummies, the massacre of Naqlûn may well have occurred during the chaotic situations in the region during the days of October/November 1798.

On December 29, 1991 I visited the Dair Malak Ghobrîâl where I met with Abûnâ Yoel al-Bishoî and ‘Abd al- Masîh al-Bûlî. With a sense of absolute certainty Abûnâ Yoel explained that the mummies were Coptic martyrs. In or around the 13th century they were killed by the Muslims after having suffered severe acts of violence and torture as can be seen from the way they were killed. Some of them were strangled to death, others were killed with an axe or hatchet. In order to verify these data Abûnâ Yoel gave me a 10 x 15 cm dark-green linen fragment of a garment which belonged to one of the mummies for a sindological examination in Europe. In the spring of 1992 I submitted the linen sample to the Institute for Radiocarbon - dating of Lower Saxony in Hanover for a carbon-14 test. The result was a date between 1260 and 1385³⁰.

In a letter dated February 10, 1992, Anbâ Abra’am, Bishop of Fayyûm, wrote to me: “the relics of the martyrs in Dair al-Malak Ghobrîâl, Naqlûn, were analyzed and they proved to go back to the 12th century”³¹. This information

was sent to me several months prior to receipt of the results of the radiocarbon examination. Upon my questioning, Dr. Gawdat Gabra, Director of the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo, assured me that he had been unable to receive a reasonable and scientific reply to his inquiries about the so-called martyrs of Naqlûn. He denied that a scientific testing of the mummies had been carried out³².

Should we accept the dates of the sindological examination of the linen fragments for the massacre of Naqlûn, namely the period between 1260 and 1385, several violent situations could be suggested³³. During the above mentioned period Egypt was ruled by 25 Bahri-Mameluke Sultans³⁴. At the same time, twelve Coptic Patriarchs occupied the throne of St. Mark³⁵. During these years the life of the Christians was largely determined by political and economic insecurity as well as by periodic raids and the destruction of churches³⁶. Al-Maqrizî records the severe persecutions of the Christians in 1320/21 by the Bahri-Mameluke al-Malik an-Nasir Muhammed during the patriarchate of John IX (1320-1327). More than 55 churches and monasteries were destroyed and many Christians suffered martyrdom³⁷. Therefore, the massacre of Naqlûn may have been part of the general wave of persecutions by an-Nasir Muhammed.

At the same time, there were also situations of unrest and agitations which were limited to the region of the Fayyûm. Thus we read of tumults and outbreaks of violence against the people of the Fayyûm from Yuhanna ibn Wahib ibn Yuhanna ibn Yahya ibn Bulus during the patriarchate of Anbâ Kîrillus III ibn Laqlaq (1235-1243)³⁸. Worse still were in 1302 the threatening invasions of the Bedawi tribes in Upper Egypt and those of the Bektash in the Fayyûm. Stanley Lane-Poole wrote: “The country-side became the scene of horrible massacres, and the corpses poisoned the air”. The Christians were to adopt again the blue turbans and the Jews the yellow, and neither were permitted to ride horse or mule³⁹.

According to our present state of information two possible dates for the massacre of Naqlûn have been advanced: The last years of the 18th century and the beginning of the 14th century. Whereas Professor Godlewski considered the victims of the massacre to be secular persons, Anbâ Abra’am of the Fayyûm and the monks of the Monastery of St. Gabriel view them to be martyrs for the Christian faith.

Notes

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2. Information from Abûnâ Yoel al-Bishoî about the work at Dair Malak Ghobrîâl (Dec. 29, 1991).
3. Godlewski, W., “Polish Excavations at Naqlûn 1988-1989” in Kodlinski (ed.) *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean (PAM)* 1988-1989. Warsaw, 1990, 29-34 *Ibid.*, “Dair el-Naqlun, 1990, *PAM II*, 1991, 48-53. *Ibid.*, “Archaeological Research in Naqlun in 1991”, *PAM III*, 1992, 49-58.
4. Godlewski, *PAM III*, 1992, 49.
5. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, VII, 24.

6. Budge, E.A.W., *The Book of Saints of the Ethiopian Church*. Cambridge, 1928, I, 263.
7. Budge, E.A.W., *op. cit.*, I, 167.
8. Bimaï was near Medinet al-Fayyûm, cf. Amélineau, E., *La géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque Copte*. Paris, 1893, 101.
9. Amélineau, E. *Les actes des martyrs de l'église Copte*. Paris, 1890, 69-71. Budge, E.A.E., *op. cit.*, II, 559.
10. Budge, E.A. W., *op. cit.*, II, 563.
11. Synax., *Patr. Orient.* XI, 663. Budge, E.A.W., *op. cit.*, II, 533.
12. The Coptic version of this story is translated by Budge, E.A.W., *Egyptian Tales and Romances*. London, 1931, 12, 29, 247-263. The Arabic version is translated by Amélineau, E., *Contes et romans de l'Égypte Chrétienne*. Paris, 1888, I, 109-143.
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14. Meinardus, Otto F.A., *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts*. Cairo, 1989, 144 ff.
15. Crum, W.E., *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*. London, 1905, 281, No. 590. This manuscript is updated.
16. Abbott, N., *op. cit.*, 47.
17. Evetts, B.T.A., *op. cit.*, 205-206.
18. Budge, E.A.W., *The Book of Saints, etc.*, II, 559.
19. Meinardus, O., *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern*. Cairo, 1977, 458.
20. Evetts, B.T.A., *Khitat of al-Makrizî*. Oxford, 1895, 313.
21. Vansleb, J.M., *Nouvelle Relation en forme de journal d'un voyage fait en Égypte en 1672 et 1673*. Paris, 1677, 274-275.
22. Johann Georg, *Neue Streifzüge durch die Kirchen und Klöster Agyptens*. Berlin, 1930, 19.
23. Cf. note 3.
24. Correspondence by Prof. Wlodzimierz Godlewski, National Museum, Warsaw, Jan. 1993.
25. La Jonquière, C.de, *L'Expédition en Égypte, 1798-1801*. Paris, 1901, III, iv, 193-228.
26. *Ibid.* 345.
27. *Ibid.* 347.
28. *Ibid.* 227.
29. Denon, Vivant, *Mit Napoleon in Ägypten, 1798-1799*. Tübingen, 1982, 176.
30. Correspondence: Prof. Dr. Mebus A. Geyh, Hannover, Labor Hv 18308.
31. Correspondence by the Secretary of Anbâ Abra'am, Medinet al-Fayyûm.
32. Personal visit to the Coptic Museum, Cairo, June 20, 1993.
33. Quatremère, M., *Mémoires Géographiques et Historiques sur l'Égypte*. Paris, 1811 II, 220-266. Lane-Poole, Stanley, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*. London, 1901, 311.
34. From az-Zâhir Baybars (1260-77) to Barqûq (1382-1388).
35. From John VII ibn Sa'id as-Shukarî (1262-93) to Matthew I (1378-1408).
36. Al-Masri, Iris, *The Story of the Copts*. Cairo, 1978, 409-411.
37. Evetts, B.T.A., *Khitat of al-Makrizî*. 329 f. Lane-Poole, St., *op. cit.*, 288.
38. Burmester, O.H.E. Khater, A., *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*. Cairo, 1974, IV, i, 7.
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WHO ARE THE ARAMEAN SYRIANS? A Biblical, Philosophical, Historical, Critical and Scientific Essay.

Touma al-Khoury

Syriac in the Bible

El, the “*El Eloh Israel*”, literally “God, the God of Israel”, as Genesis 33:20 states, is the first and foremost name of God in the Bible. And from *El*, are derived the first and foremost Syrian compound names: Michael (the humble of God) and Gabriel (the man of God) - since God created the angels, as “his servants” (Job 4:18, Psalm 104:4 and Hebrews 1:7). Then came Habel (the gift of God) and not Abel (Qabel, in Arabic for Cain), Bethel (the house of God), Amanuel (literally, “with us is God”) and not Emmanuel, etc., etc.

Eloh, the second Syrian name of God in the Bible, is pronounced Aloh or Aloho or Alaha in Aramaic Syriac; and Elah or Allah in Arabic.

Elohim, the Hebrew plural name of God in the Bible, points out, from cover to cover, as in the Christian view, to the One God in a Holy Trinity. And even though Genesis quotes, “Behold the man has become like one of us” (3:22) or, “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language” (11:7), it is not, far from it, a hint to an early polytheism. There is no polytheism in the Bible. Nor is it as Issac Asimov interprets such verses saying, “God might be viewed as using the royal “We” or as speaking to an angelic audience”.¹ For neither a royal “We” is employed by God in the Bible nor by Kings of ancient times; and no “angelic audience” can share or co-share in creation or decision or whatsoever with God.

The third Syrian name of God in the Bible is neither Jehovah nor purely and simply Yahveh, but rather *YAH* as it appears for the first time so clearly and irrefutably in the two following compound terms:

Yahveh: formed of “Yah” and the pronoun “hveh” is, (or “hweh” or “hwa” or “hu”), meaning literally in Exodus 6:3, “but my name Yah is”.

Halleluyah: formed of “hallel”, praise, and the pronoun “u”, ye, and “yah”, the Lord, meaning literally in Psalm 105:45, “Praise-ye-yah” or God. From *YAH* are derived the Syrian compound names such as Isaiyah, the power of God; and Zechariah, the priest or prophet of God, Barachiah and Tobijah, the blessed of God; and Jeremiah, the venerable of God, etc.

Also Moses says in Genesis, “ And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house... “but you will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac”. (24:2,4) Although Abraham himself, this “friend of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8), Khalil Allah in Arabic, was called Hebrew in the

land of Canaan (Genesis 14:13), he, however, was a “syrian” from the city of Nabor in Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:10). His grandson Jacob, or Israel (Genesis 32:28), was called a “Syrian ready to perish” (Deuteronomy 26:5) as King James version translates the word “Aramean” according to the Septuagint (3rd century B. C.). And thus all Abraham’s sons and scions were Syrians (Genesis 24-31) and their language was Syriac.

But because of living around a hundred years among their cousins the Canaanites (Genesis 10:1-6), the language of the Hebrew Israelites became, as a matter of fact, a farrago of Aramaic Syriac and Canaanite Syriac. Wherefore we see in the covenant made by Laban the Syrian (Genesis 28:5) and Jacob, as a “witness” between them, a heap of stones”, *Yeghar Sاهدutha* in Syriac as called by the former, and *galeed* by the latter (Genesis 31:44,47) also from the Syriac (*gal*, a “mound of stones”, and *waad*, a pact, or *Ahd*, a remembrance). And while the Israelites were in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years (Exodus 12:40), five of their cities, as says Isaiah, will “speak the language of Canaan” (19:18).

Canaan itself was the native Syrian name of Phoenicia, *Finiqi* in Syriac; derived most probably from *fenqita*, a writing-tablet or codex, because the Phoenician-Syrians were the first who created the Alphabet out of forms and phones of some specific Syrian names; they wrote on tablets, and taught the Greeks how to do so.

The most typical Syriac letter is the “N” pronounced “noon”, that means a fish, and looks like it once stretched or twisted almost in all its forms on the Semitic and Occidental Alphabets.

Most likely also, even the Greek term Syria, is derived from *Suraya*, the inhabitants of Tyre, *Sur* in Syriac, who were, the first to deal with the Greeks; and arguably, the first, with their compatriots of Sidon and Cyprus, to be called *Suraya*, in the sense of Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:20-26). The faith of the first Syro-Phoenician woman of Tyre whose daughter was healed by Jesus (Matthew 15:21 and Mark 7:26) may have aided the spread of the gospel.

According to St. Basil and St. Ephrem the Syrian, “Aramaic (itself) is a dialect of Syriac”.² (Therefore we have to call our language, “Aramaic Syriac” or simply “Syriac”, but, not at all “Syriac Aramaic”).

According to the Patriarch Afram Barsom chronicles, the Syriac language “did not change like the other languages that stemmed from it”.³ The remarkable statement of Sebastian Brock in this regard is perfectly in place: “The form of the Lord’s prayer used in Syriac Churches today is indeed not all that much different from the words that Jesus himself must have uttered in first-century Galilaean Aramaic-Syriac and Galilaean Aramaic would certainly have been comprehensible”.⁴

Syrians; First Fathers of Monotheism and Foremost Founders of Christianity.

The belief in one God, creator of the “heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1) and “all things visible and invisible” (Colossians 1:16) commenced with Adam and his close descendants who “began to call on the name of the Lord”(Genesis 4:26) and continued with Noah “who walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). Then, via Abraham the Syrian, monotheism was firstly resumed and somewhat resurrected: “And he believed the Lord: and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6; also Romans 4:5 and Galatians 3:6).

All the more, therefore, because of the very faith of the Syrian Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Afrahat calls Jacob “our father Jacob”)⁵, and the Syrian Matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel (Genesis 13 through 30), we can say that the Israelite Hebrew Syrians, and the Israelite Hebrew Jews are the same Semite people, having the self-same language and legacy alike. And consequently, they are the first fathers of monotheism, the doctrine that was later confirmed and asserted by Moses and the Prophets and by Christianity. Then well-nigh seven centuries after Christianity monotheism was proclaimed by Islam.

According to the flesh, Jesus himself was “a Jew” (John 4:9); an Israelite Jew, (Romans 9:5): and “the son of David, the son of Abraham”(Matthew 1:1) Jesus also proclaimed emphatically that “salvation is of the Jews.” (John 4:22)It can be concluded that the Syrian Hebrew Israelites and the Israelite Christian Jews are, in a sense, the foremost founders of Christianity as well.

Syrian Church: the early link between Judaism and Christianity

The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans that the Jews “As regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers” (Romans 11:28). He means by a very clear and fair inference, that the Jews are our “beloved enemies.” And thus again, the Jews become “Christianity’s big brothers” as Pope John Paul described them”.⁶

This intrinsic membership or eternal relationship between the Old and the New Covenants, that was preached, promulgated, and perpetuated by the first Apostles of Jesus themselves and their direct kins and heirs, the early Syrian converts, became the early and only tradition for the Universal Church, as the primary embodiment of the Judeo-Christian tradition has been later in the implementation of the Septuagint and the Syriac translation of the scriptures, the *Peshitta*. Hence, as an Orthodox Church, our Syrian Antiochian Church, imbibes through the Old and New Testament, both her spirituality and tradition, including her Liturgy and her ceremonial rituals.

Being so trustful in the oneness, uniqueness and continuity of the divine inspiration and prophecy, the innumerable testimonies from both the Old and the New Testaments are harmoniously intertwined in Ephrem’s text, so that you can hardly

discern the warp and woof in his subtle texture. No wonder that, as Kathleen E. McVee documents very correctly and accurately, Ephrem the Syrian “in his *Carmina Nisibena* and his *Hymns Against Julian*, shows himself to be a genuine heir to the Jewish prophetic tradition”⁷, and to have kinship “with the Jewish prophets”.⁸ Wherefore, up until now, it is mostly through Ephrem’s hymns and doxologies that the whole Syrian Orient lifts prayers, praises and thanksgivings to God. About Ephrem’s prodigious prolificacy, Jacob of Serugh says in one of his poems, “Ephrem is a large sea. His heart overflows with multiple poems that no one can number, and no limit can confine”.⁹ According to Sozomen, St. Ephrem wrote more than 30 myriad verses;¹⁰ or “three hundred thousand verses”¹¹ and according to Hayes, “Three million verses”.¹² Despite the unmatched abundance of his writing, ceaseless teaching, preaching, praying, fasting and helping the poor, Ephrem says at his death (in his noted Testament) that he spent his entire life in “vanities and sins”.

Historical prejudice against the Syrians

The ultimate irony however, is that Arthur Voobus claims, “The earliest bishops of Arbel bear Jewish names; Ishag Abraham, Noah, Abel. Only later we do find Syrian names”.¹³ But how can such typical Syrian names long before Judaism be Jewish names? Isn’t Voobus thereby stealing even our proper names? As Shakespeare says,

“But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed” (Othello: Act 3, Scene 3)

Some other scholars deny categorically even the existence of any other Syrian literature save the Christian one. Among these are Rubens Duval¹⁴, William Wright¹⁵, and Hans Lietman¹⁶. Even worse, the French Orientalist Louis Massignon, in the first session of the UNESCO held in Beirut-Lebanon (1946), labeled Syriac, Christ’s language, the language that assimilates the Bible and Mesopotamian and Greek culture, as being “the language of pain of the grave and the terrors of the Resurrection”. All this has been so detrimental to the Syrians as to disparage them for centuries:

Mesopotamia, the very native land of the Syrians was the Cradle of Civilization that influenced even the Greeks as they themselves assent. Rene Grousset de l’Academie Francaise writes, “Cependent les Grecs eux-memes se sont plu a se reconnaître les élèves des vieilles cultures de l’Egypte et de la Mesopotamie”.¹⁷

What is universally known is that the major part of the antique Syrian literature has been lost in the darkness of Ages, with only a remnant of it kept in dark museums and libraries. At the beginning of Christendom, the first converted Syrians in Mesopotamia, Syria and Phoenicia, burned their secular books lest their heathen impact plunge their scions in the snare of paganism”.¹⁸ Yet, unlike the Christians of the Middle Ages who, either hid or prohibited or burned in turn their Greco-Roman literature, the Syrians of the Orient Christianized the Hellenic culture even before the fifth

century. “Christianity, says Will Durant, was now (400) almost completely triumphant in the East”. As “the Eastern prelates were more learned and disputatious than those of the West”.¹⁹

Role of the Syrians in the civilization of Europe

Ernest Renan says, “The chain is a connected link from the Alexandrian School to the Syrians, and from the Syrians to the Arabs, and from the Arabs to the Christians of the Middle Ages”.²⁰

Thus, while Europe trembling under the horses’ hooves of hordes of Goths and Huns, rather while the Occident “ceased to exist for four centuries”²¹ as Rene Grousset says, the Syrian Orient again and almost alone, was the sole center of civilization. For the bastion of the Judeo-Christian theology, and the beacon of the Mesopotamian and Hellenic cultures were settled in hundreds of Syrian schools, seminaries, monasteries, convents, churches and even private homes.

The Influence of the Syrians on the Arabs

The influence of the Syrians upon their kins, the Arabs, was so tremendous that it changed, somehow, their entire life, belief and behavior. For it is through the Syrians’ translation, teachings, commentaries, compositions and countless creations of technical Arabic terms, terminologies, expressions, new ways of thinking that the Arabic literature and language under the reign of the Abbassids (780-1258) took off their bedouin cloak and put on the Baghdadian royal robe. Thereafter, and especially between the 19th and 20th centuries, it is through the Syrian Christian scholars and luminaries in the Middle East, of different denominations, such as the Orthodox, Maronites, Chaldeans, Catholics and Protestants, that the Arabic language and literature reached the climax of their modernization.

The Syrians Nowadays

Because of continuous persecution and by forced conversion following the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the Arab Conquest (7th century) “the Syrian Churches became separated from the “mainstream” Church of the Greco-Latin world during the fifth and sixth centuries”.²² The Syrians themselves were subdued and subjugated, and Arabic was substituted for Syriac.

William Wright put it half rightly, “The more the Arabic language comes into use, the more the Syriac wanes and wastes away (that is right); the more Mohammedan literature flourishes the more purely Christian literature pines and dwindles (that is wrong).²³

And in consequence, the whole Syrian world succumbed gradually, with the result, as Arnold Toynby documents, that “in the new born Islamic societies, Arabic and Iranic arose out of the ruins of the dead Syrian world”.²⁴

However, the Syrians are now on the way of convalescence and revitalization, for the remnants of the "little flock", to whom Christ himself promised to give the Kingdom (Luke 12:32) are again in the south of India (Kerala), in the Middle East itself; and for the first time in their stormy history, in Europe, the Americas, Canada and Australia. The "half-dead" Syrian world is nowadays under the care of the Good Samaritan, that is the Civilized World. Our two primary Syrian and Rum Churches, are reunited in Christ by the blessed joint effort of our two paramount Patriarchs Hazim and Zakka I.

The final question now is what the future holds for the Syrians. In any case, if men, greedy men and warmongers in all generations, destroy and sack cities and civilizations, it is God alone and always the only maker of history.

Notes:

1. *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*. Avenel Books, New York, 1981 Volume One: The Old Testament p.18.
2. *A Compendious History of the World*. By Bar Hebraya. The Catholic Press. Beirut (Lebanon) (In Arabic under the title "Tarikh Mukhtassar al-Dual" "p.11)
3. *The Scattered Pearl* (First Printing) Homs (Syria) 1943. p. 16 (In Arabic)
4. *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*. Cistercian Publications. Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1982 (General Introduction, p. X)
5. *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*. (See 4 above) (Demonstration IV on Prayer pp. 5,9)
6. "Catholic Synod cites Judaism Role in Europe" by Alain Cowell - The New York Times International, Friday 29, 1991.
7. *Ephrem the Syrian (Hymns)*. Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah 1989, p. 23.
8. *Ibid*. p.36.
9. *Mar Afrem the Syrian, the Malfono of the Universal Church*. By Al Khouri Ishag Armaleh the Syrian. The Eagle Press. Beirut (lebanon), 1952. p.95 (In Arabic)
10. *Ibid*. p.179.
11. *St. Ephrem the Syrian Hymns on Paradise*. Introduced and translated by Sebastian Brock. (Introduction) p.16)
12. *Histoire d'Edesse*. by Hayes (In French)
13. *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient* - Louvain - Secretariat Du Corpus SCO Waversebaan 49, 1958. (Book One. p.17)
14. *Anciennes Literatures Chretiennes*, Vol. II: La Literature Syriaque. 3rd Edition. Paris. 1907. p.1.
15. *A Short History of Syriac Literature*. Amsterdam 1966.p.3
16. *A History of the Early Church*. Translated by Bertran Lee Woolf. Meridan Books. Vol. One. Second Printing October 1963. p.260.
17. *Bilan de l'Histoire*. Union Generale d'Editions 8, Paris 1964. p.15.
18. *The Scattered Pearl*. p.17 (See 3 above)
19. *The Story of Civilization*. The Age of Faith. pp.61, 63.
20. Renan (E) *De Philosophia peripateticia abud Syros*. p.9 in History of the Arabic Philosophy. by Hanna al-Fakhoury and Khali al-Jeorr. Beirut (Lebanon) p.5 (In Arabic).
21. *Bilan de l'Histoire*. p.30.) (See 17 above)
22. *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*. p.12. (See 5 above).
23. *A Short History of Syriac Literature* pp. 140, 141 (See 15 above).
24. *A Study of History*. Complete abridgment by D. C. Somorwell. Volumes VII-X 1957. New York & London pp. 191, 192.

DID THE FLOOD OF NOAH COVER ALL THE WORLD?

Boulos Ayad Ayad, Ph.D.

The Story of the Flood According to the Bible and Other Sources

The Lord decided to destroy man by a flood which was to cover the face of the ground, for man had become corrupted. But Noah was a pious person who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). God instructed Noah to build an ark and take with him upon it "seven pairs of all clean animals . . .; and a pair of the animals that are not clean . . .; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also" (Gen. 7:2-3). Noah obeyed the Lord, "and after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. . . ." (Gen. 7:10). Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives, all entered the ark, and "the Lord shut him in" (Gen. 7:16). The rains lasted forty days (Gen. 7:4), but the water spread "upon the earth a hundred and fifty days" (Gen. 7:24).

"At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated" (Gen. 8:3). Then the Ark rested upon the "Ararat Mountains". Noah sent a raven to find out whether the waters had receded from the face of the earth, but it returned to Noah who, after seven days more, sent forth a dove out of the Ark. When she returned with a plucked olive leaf, he recognized "that the waters had subsided from the earth" (Gen. 8:11). Another seven days had passed when Noah sent the dove again, but this time she did not return to the Ark. When the earth had dried, Noah disembarked with all his family and all the others who were with him in the Ark (Gen. 8:12-19). Noah offered burnt offerings of animals to the Lord who was pleased by the odor and said that he would "never again curse the ground because of man" (Gen. 8:21).

The following is a summary of the stories of the flood that appeared in the different literatures of Mesopotamia.

The hero, Ut-napishtim, is secretly warned by the god Ea of the purpose of the other gods, particularly Enlil, to send a flood, and is told to build a ship. This he does, daubing it inside and out with bitumen, stocking it with provisions and bringing all his possessions and family, together with the animals and skilled craftsmen, into it. A tempest ensues for seven days, at the end of which time nothing but water can be seen. After twelve days the Ark grounds upon a mountain. Ut-napishtim sends out first a dove, then a swallow, but both return. Then he sends a raven which does not return inasmuch as the water has receded. Leaving the Ark the Babylonian makes a sacrifice of a sweet savor to delight the gods who hover like flies over it. They vow that there shall never again be such a flood, and Ut-

napishtim is taken away to live as one of them.¹

Even though there are similarities between the Biblical story of the flood and the Mesopotamian epoch, we can notice some differences between them, especially in their religious outlooks.

In "Genesis" the Flood is not caused by mere chance or the whim of capricious, brawling gods. It is brought about by the One God in whose hands even a natural catastrophe is a means of moral judgment. In the biblical story alone is a relation between the Flood and the moral order of our world clearly drawn. To the Israelite writers the telling of the story has become an opportunity of demonstrating and illustrating the righteousness of God. In other words, they have purged it of the base theology that pervades the Babylonian and other stories, and have made it a fit vehicle for the monotheistic and ethical demands of Israelite religion.²

II. The Problem within the Story

A. The Term: The Face of the Ground (Earth): in the Bible and Other Sources

This term, "face of the ground," appears in the story of Noah several times worded as upon the earth, on the earth, the earth, of every creeping thing of the ground (earth), on the face of the whole earth, upon the face of all the earth, upon the face of the ground (earth), from the face of the ground (earth), from the earth, above the earth, over the earth, face of the ground (earth), from off the earth, on the ground (earth), and on the face of the waters (Gen. 6, 7, 8). It is impossible to interpret from the two expressions "on the face of the whole earth" and the term "the face of the waters" that the flood covered all the world and that the Ark moved on the face of the waters throughout the oceans of the world

The Bible mentions too in the story of Noah that "the windows of heavens were opened" (Gen. 7:11). It is very difficult to consider that these windows were opened upon all the world; and the rain was falling universally.

A marriage contract, dated about 441 B.C. and in the Aramaic language, cites the following: "Tomorrow or another day (if) Ashor should die and there is no child male or female belonging to him by Miphtahiah his wife, Miphtahiah has a right to the house of Ashor, his goods and his chattels and all that he has on the face of the earth, all of it."³

Ashor, judging by his name, was an Egyptian. He married Miphtahiah, a Jewish woman from Aswan. I doubt that when this married couple used the expression "on the face of the earth," they meant it to indicate "on every place in the world, or on the globe".

B. The Animals and Birds in the Ark

It was impossible for Noah to gather and take with him all the creatures of the

world in seven days before the flood "seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth. For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth" (Gen. 7:2-4). Noah listened to the words of the Lord and "did all that the Lord had commanded" (Gen. 7:5).

C. The Size of the Ark

The size of the Ark was limited to house the food of Noah, his family, and all the creatures of the world. "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark and finish it to cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks" (Gen. 6:14-16). "Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them [creatures]" (Gen. 6:21).

The idea that Noah took food for himself and all the other animals of the world into the Ark is unlikely for the Ark was not large enough to store sufficient food for all kinds of creatures.

III. Conclusion

Archaeologists have excavated many different places in the Middle East - Iraq, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Asia Minor, and Arabia - and have not discovered evidence of one flood that covered every place in the Middle East or all the world during the time of Noah or in ancient times. Even in Iraq (Mesopotamia), where Noah lived, many floods occurred in different periods, but no flood has covered all of Iraq at one time.⁴

The Bible never mentions that the flood covered all the world, or all the globe, or all the six continents. This is an interpretation by readers of the Bible of the expression "upon all the face of the earth." They misinterpret this expression and such other expressions as "on the face of the waters" and "the windows of the heavens were opened."

I believe that there was no flood that covered all the globe, the six continents or all the world, but that the flood was "upon the face of all the earth"; "on the face of the waters"; "the windows of heavens were opened"; "all the high mountains under the whole heave were covered" (Gen. 7:19); "all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died" (Gen. 7:21-22). All of this happened in the area where Noah lived.

Likewise, the size of the Ark might have been sufficient to house Noah's family, all the creatures, birds, and their food that came from the area where Noah was

living but not all the creatures and their food in all the world.

In the marriage contract of Ashor and Miphtahiah, the term "on the face of the earth" was not used to mean every place in the world or on the globe. This is especially significant because this was a legal document written in the Province of Aswan, Egypt. The contract was accepted only by the Aswan court or other Egyptian courts and was not accepted by courts outside of Egypt, because the laws of each country were different. Thus, the terms used in this document were limited to Egypt.

Notes

1. John Bright. "Has Archaeology Found Evidence of the Flood." *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, 1. Edited by G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman, Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1961, pp. 38-39.
2. Ibid., p. 40.
3. A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1923; No. 15:17-20.
4. John Bright, op. cit., pp. 33-37.

BOOK REVIEWS

Settings of Silver : An Introduction to Judaism

By Rabbi Stephen Wyler. Mahwah, NJ. Paulist Press, 1989. Pp 397. \$10.95 (Paper)

This book which is written by a pulpit rabbi and comes from a Catholic publisher satisfies the need of many. Judaism has changed much throughout history, and is changing, and this book is a mine of information for all the aspects of Jewish social, cultural, religious, and political life.

In Part One, the author defines what is a Jew and discusses the main Jewish beliefs at present. In Part Two he describes Jewish worship and feasts, with details on the origin of each feast, and how it is celebrated in different lands.

Part Three follows the Jewish history from biblical times. In chapter after chapter the reader will find answers to many questions: How the Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Essenes, and Zealots) present in the New Testament times started, and how they disappeared; how the Temple religion of the Jews gave way to the rabbinic Judaism we now see; the origin of the Talmud and its relation to the Torah; how the Jews lived in different areas of the diaspora and their fate; and information about Jewish literature, philosophy, and mysticism.

Part Four, Judaism in the Modern Age, deals with the Jews in the last two centuries. There are separate chapters for the three current movements (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism); the holocaust and the Christians' response to it; Zionism and the state of Israel; and Jews in America.

The book is concluded with a 13-page glossary of Jewish terms, a bibliography for further reading, and an alphabetical index. It will fill a gap in every library and no reader will ever regret getting it or the time he spends in it, whether for a course in comparative religion, or as an aid in Scripture study, or just for general knowledge.

Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament.

Edited by Horst Baltz and Gerhard Schneider, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans. Volume 1, 1990. pp. 463. \$44.99 (hardcover). Volume 2, 1991: pp. 555 \$44.99 (hardcover). Volume 3, 1993. pp.566 \$44.99 (hardcover)

The translation of this valuable study aid to the New Testament from German is now complete. It contains the full information the student needs for every Greek New Testament word (including proper names): its grammar, definition, usage in

the different contexts and most New Testament occurrences. The book is a combination of a Greek New Testament dictionary, a word study and a theological dictionary. Moreover it probes deeply into the different meanings of the word, its theological significance and the problems of interpreting the texts. Significant words are treated in longer articles which include extended bibliography, background in the Old Testament and in Hellenistic literature, historical background for persons and places, and treatment of exegetical problems. Volume 3 has an index of the English key words in all three volumes, thus making the whole work accessible even to those who know little or no Greek. The book was intended to be an exegetical dictionary, and has succeeded in being so. Hence, we recommend it not only to scholars but also to preachers, pastors and anyone who takes the word of God seriously in his spiritual life.

Coptologia: Journal of Coptic Thought and Orthodox Spirituality. Volume XIII

Edited by F. M. Ishak, Ph. D. (P.O. Box 235, Don Mills Postal Station, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada, M3C 2S2), 1993. pp.144. \$10.00 (US) \$11.00 (Canada)

The last volume of *Coptologia* starts with the address of H. H. Pope Sheouda III on the occasion of the arrival to Egypt in 1991 of the Relics of the Theban Martyrs Sts. Cassius and Florentius.¹ The issue contains eight articles on the ecumenical movement which discuss from different angles, the present status of the dialogues for Christian unity. Among the other articles, one by Bishop Gregorious, Coptic Bishop for Higher Theological studies, on *The Unity of God*, and two historical and well researched papers by the German Coptic scholar, the Rev. Dr. Otto Meinardus - *Recent Development in Coptic Hagiology* and *The Historic Coptic Churches of Cairo*.

Note:

1. For detailed description of the translation of these relics see *Coptic Church Review*, Summer 1993: 13:49.

SPECIAL NOTICE

The Way of Silent Love: Carthusian Novice Conferences

By A Carthusian. Translated by an Anglican Solitary. Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. London 1993 pp. 131 (UK price seven pounds ninety-five pence).

This book previously reviewed in CCR (Winter 1993) is published in the US and Canada by Cistercian Publications. Price \$8.95.

