Spring 2014 Volume 13 No.2

MIGHTY MAGAZINE ARROWS

Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth

From Trepidation *to* Glorification



Painting of St. Peter by Peter Paul Rubens c. AD 1600

"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth"

Psalm 127:4

MIGHTY ARROWS MAGAZINE

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In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

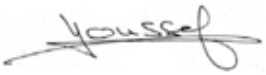
My Beloved,

Our Lord Jesus Christ prepared us to be courageous, hopeful, cheerful, and resilient by saying, *"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). In this Spring Edition of the Mighty Arrows Magazine, our focus is on moving from trepidation to glorification.

The crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ was terrifying for many, but His holy resurrection moved us to glorification. The prophet Joel comforts us with insight by these great and assuring words, *"Let the weak say, 'I am strong'"* (Joel 3:10). This seems like a strange paradox. From where does this strength come? It comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we pour out our hearts during the Holy Week of the Holy Pascha, saying, "The Lord is my strength and my praise and has become to me a sacred salvation." Indeed, all glory, honor, and thankfulness are befittingly due unto Him.

May the Lord bless your lives as witnesses of His glory by living with a positive attitude and a content heart, in all circumstances, especially during challenging times.

God bless you,



Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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The Myth of Passionate Love



Love 102

By James Helmy

In a book titled *The Road Less Traveled*, the author tells the story of a young, intelligent, artistic, "Bohemian" couple who had a four-year marriage marked by almost daily screaming, dish-throwing, and face-clawing quarrels, along with frequent infidelity and monthly separations. The author, a licensed psychologist, counseled them and worked to lead them to the realization that the only path to success in their marriage would be to increase their self-discipline and to tighten the reins on their frenzied emotions—that is, to create a more stable and less disorderly relationship. "But you want to take the passion out of our relationship," they complained to him, and they soon quit therapy. Three years later, it was told him that their daily conflict and outbursts continued unmitigated. Their marriage continued in a pitiful state of chaos while their individual lives remained as unproductive as ever.

This article's title might have initially put off the reader: "The myth of passionate love? But that's what I've been waiting for my whole life! I've already spent my entire youth striving for self-control. I fast. I pray. I avoid dating. I've pledged myself to sexual abstinence. And now, once I'm safely in the martial relationship, you want to tell me to deny passion?" There is no doubt that "passion" plays a role in the love relationship, and it is not my aim to strip from the reader's mind or heart the delectable pleasure of the tingling emotions or heart palpitations that first accompany love. These are, as I hinted at in the first article, effective "snares" that God has placed within human nature to pull us into that lifelong and arduous–but rewarding–work called marriage. What I would like to make clear is that such "passion" is more the exception than the rule; that is, in a married couple's life, legitimate and satisfying passion comes only as the result and reward of long periods of sustained discipline.

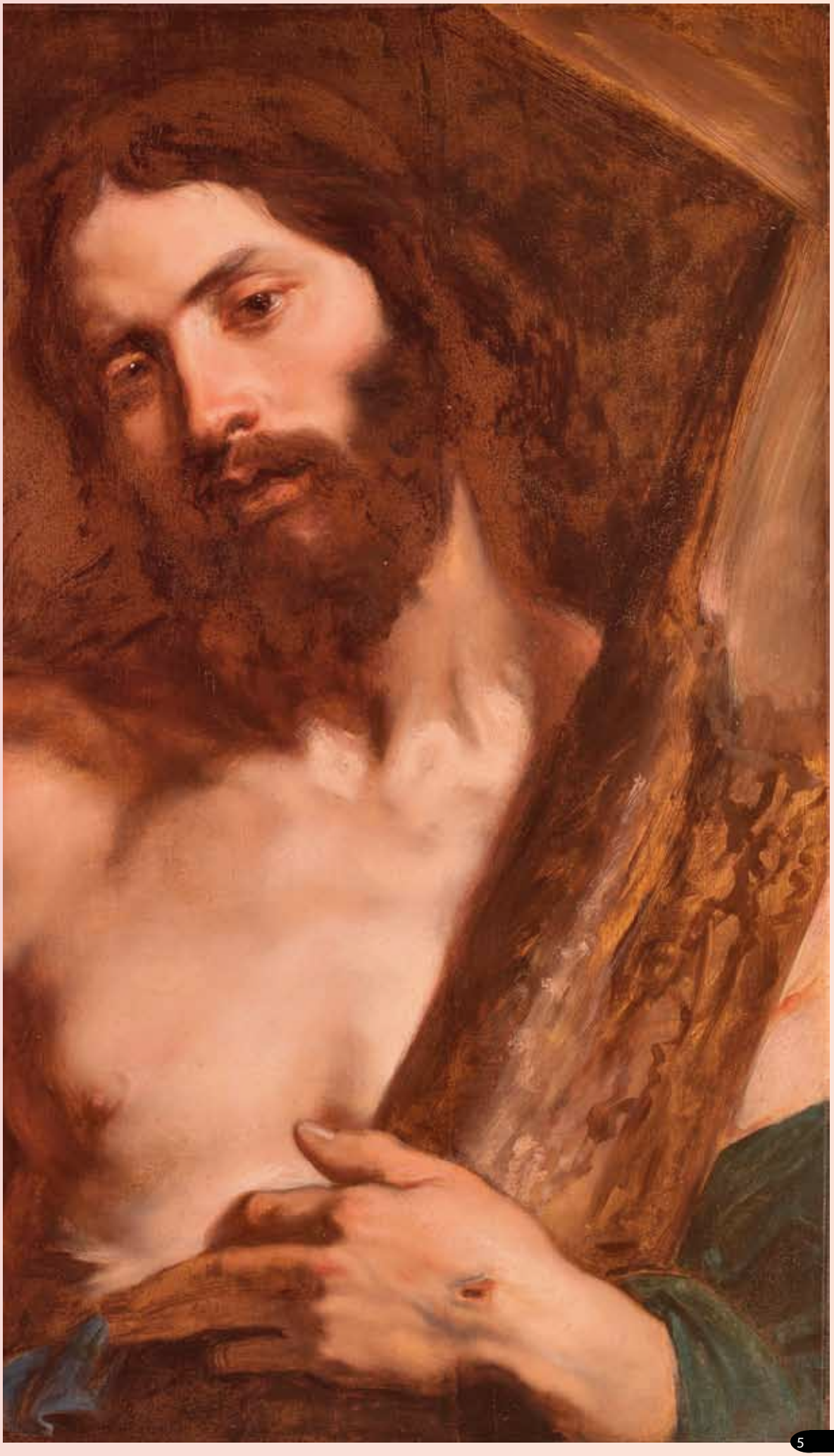
I cannot say everything that I want to say about discipline in this brief message, but the one point I would like to relay is that discipline is primarily an act of the will, and as such implies effort. When a succulent hamburger is placed in front of me while I'm hungry, it requires no effort to pick it up and devour it: I'm acting on instinct. But if I'm fasting, or trying to lose weight, or suffering from indigestion, then I must put forth effort to refuse the sandwich: I am thus acting by discipline. If I wake up early one Saturday morning and feel my body still gravitating toward my bed and have no reason to stay awake, I will succumb to the urge to sleep: I am acting on instinct. But if it's a Monday morning and I have a perilous final exam awaiting me, then no matter how stiff my legs feel or how heavily my eyelids may droop, I will summon all the effort demanded to get out of bed, dress myself, and drive to school: discipline is doing its good work in me. In both cases, the one act was effortless and trivial, while the other was significant and effortful.

The wise say that love is a product of effort and not of instinct. "Falling in love" is effortless. Emotional passion and everything that comes with it are merely an easy acquiescence to the nerve endings in our bodies. They are not things that we make happen but rather things that happen to us—that is, without the exercise of the will, and therefore without the aid of discipline. True love is therefore not born of such experiences. It does not necessarily follow that these things are bad in themselves. Rather, it indicates their impotence to create anything grand or wondrous or lasting in our lives. Any genuine lover will act with a sense of self-discipline and responsibility toward his mate. During our first few interactions with a special someone—sometimes even throughout the duration of an engagement period—we are acting on superficialities, we are creating a mere exterior, thin as an eggshell, to please the other person. But once the marriage is consummated, the eggshell is cracked and the interior of each person inevitably comes out.

I can hear an objection arising to this point: "But why impose all this stuff about discipline and self-control on us when we're young and free? I would really prefer life to be impulsive and unpredictable instead of enduring the dreary boredom of marriage." But are impulsiveness and instability a good alternative to boredom? Think of the Bohemian couple. In a way, their lives were very far from boring. Their relationship might even seem a bit fascinating and suspenseful, like an action movie, but it was a total failure. Their desperate attempts to keep up an artificial "passion" led them to behavior fitting only for unmanageable children. Modern art reflects their relationship: wild, arbitrary, unsystem-

atized colors splashed without concern for order. It's an art "liberated" from the old molds. But true love is more like a Rembrandt: soft, controlled hues deliberately placed on the canvas to produce a deep and meaningful message. I think much of our modern art will be despised by later ages, while Rembrandt will be cherished forever.

A young person who is contemplating the start of a relationship must think of love in such terms. 1 Corinthians 13 is the shortest but most powerful manual on love I've ever read. I return to it over and over again to remind myself what real love looks like, and so I believe should everyone who intends to lead a loving life. If we believe the popular message that love is about exchanging phone numbers or sharing a bed or being floored by the stunning looks of the other party, I'm afraid we will live perpetually in a state of discontent, bitterness, and irritation. Love must rise above and soar beyond these things. It must be determined. It must be committed. It must be enduring. It cannot be like a reed shaking in the wind, trembling when the slightest challenge arises, or breaking apart by selfishness or laziness. Do you want a passionate relationship with your mate? You have to earn it. Christ earned the love of the world by carrying His cross before we even knew Him.



Overcome Trepidation

By David W.T. Brattston



"Not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us." (2 Thessalonians 2:2)

Documents from the church's foundational period encourage Christians not to be fearful or worried. Among the more familiar are:

> Matthew 6:25: *"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"*
>
> Matthew 24:6: *"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled."*
>
> John 14:1: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."*
>
> and John 14:27: *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."*

This sentiment was reinforced in apostolic times, outside the present Holy Bible, in a letter from the church at Rome to the church at Corinth: "Let us give up vain and fruitless cares."[1] In the 190s A.D. the dean of Christianity's foremost school, Clement of Alexandria in Egypt, wrote that the proper Christian "is not disturbed by anything which happens; nor does he suspect those things which, through divine arrangement, take place for good."[2] On the subject of persons with money, he wrote that the Master "bids him banish from his soul his notions about wealth, his excitement and morbid feeling about it, the anxieties, which are the thorns of existence, which choke the seed of life."[3] Travelling Christians in the early third century routinely exhorted local believers "to please God in everything, and abound and go forward in good works, and be free from anxious care in everything, as is fit and right for the people of God."[4]

The same literature provides alternatives and remedies for fear. Matthew 6:25-33 reminds us that just as God provides the necessities of life and some of its luxuries to birds, flowers, and grass, so also he cares for every human being and will supply each with all the food, drink, and clothing we need. Verse 33 assures: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* About 200 A.D. a letter from a Christian exhorted his reader to trust Christ "and to esteem Him our Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counsellor, Healer, our Wisdom, Light, Honour, Glory, Power and Life, so that we should not be anxious concerning clothing and food."[5] First Peter 5:7 exhorts us to cast all our cares upon the Lord *"for He cares for you."* The letter from Rome to Corinth completes its above thought: "Let us give up vain and fruitless cares, and approach to the glorious and venerable rule of our holy calling. Let us attend to what is good, pleasing, and acceptable in the sight of Him who formed us."[6]

If you truly trust God for your needs and safety, you will clear away worries and fears. When you do this with full confidence in the divine, *"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*[7]

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[1] Schaff, P. (2007). Anti *Nicene Fathers: Volume I.* Wells: Cosimo, 18.
[2] Ibid, Vol II, 1106.
[3] Ibid, 1197.
[4] Ibid, Vol VIII, 97.
[5] Ibid, Vol I, 61.
[6] Ibid, Vol II, 18.
[7] Philippians 4:7.



St. Arianus

By Theopeste Kerelos

Our God the Forgiver
Doesn't reject any sinner
Even Arianus the governor.

Over Ansena he ruled,
And the Christians he tortured.
He had them slain and martyred.

God wanted Arianus to obey
And to cast his sins away
So He transformed his life in one day.

The story of Arianus' conversion
Began when Apollonius the musician
Confessed that he was Christian.

An arrow which was intended
For Apollonius to be executed
Hit Arianus's eye instead.

Apollonius' martyrdom
Lured Arianus to God's kingdom
According to divine wisdom.

The blood that the martyr shed
Healed the eye that was wounded
So Arianus humbly repented.

The penitent governor immediately
Destroyed his idols openly
And treated Christians kindly.

When news reached Diocletian
That Arianus had become Christian
He punished him for his actions.

The emperor tested Arianus
And saw his firm faithfulness
So he grew even more furious.

The saint was tortured harshly
Then locked mercilessly
Into a pit to die painfully.



Bust of Emperor Diocletian

By an angel he was delivered
From the pit and transported
Next to Diocletian's bed.

Upon seeing Arianus released
Diocletian's wrath increased
And his cruelty was unappeased.

The emperor without pity
Ordered that Arianus be
Thrown in a hair sack in the sea.

On the eighth of Baramhat
St. Arianus' spirit
Reached its heavenly target.

Our Lord the Almighty
Had a sea creature carry
St. Arianus' body.

God had told the saint before
That his body would be cared for
And sent to Alexandria's shore.

When the people of the city
Found St. Arianus' body
They received it joyfully.

The bodies of St. Arianus
Philemon and Apollonius
Were laid in the same place.

We thank our Good Savior
For offering honor
To any repentant sinner.

Let us take St. Arianus
As an example for us
To hurry and become righteous.

We see that the door of heaven
Always remains open
We just need to take action.

By Christine Massoud

Six Hundred and Thirteen 613 Commands!

Did you know that there are 613 commands in the first five books of the Old Testament? There were scribes tasked with categorizing these: God, prayer, punishment and restitution, marriage and divorce, property rights, dietary laws, vows and covenants, family relations, tithes, taxes, the temple, the sanctuary and sacred objects, sacrifices and offerings, purity and impurities, lepers, work days and the Sabbath, the ruling king and wars, etc. If you Google "613 commands," you would see numerous sites of references and divisions amongst the Jews on how these are to be categorized. The list is exhaustive. I could not even make it halfway, honestly. This responsibility did not fall on just anybody; it was reserved for the learned and the leaders. You might ask why anyone would take on this massive task. There are many explanations given: to rule from God's commands; to know the mind of God; to teach, correct, and rebuke those who stray; and to live by them. The leaders of the Jewish faith assigned this task for many reasons but the underlying need turned out to be to gain power from them over the people. Our Lord Jesus Christ saw that and rebuked them often. For example, "*Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?*"[1] You'd see as you looked over all these laws that one can't help but feel how unattainable they are. On this side of heaven we cannot do all that! So what then?

There was a scribe written about, in the Gospel according to St. Mark Chapter 12, who felt exactly that way. He had been learning and he knows the laws well. He was overwhelmed with the task of categorizing all these laws, of attempting to follow them, of working hard to achieve and to obey. So he finally asks Jesus, "*Which is the first commandment of all?*"[2] Lord, of all these 613 commands, these scrolls and scrolls, all these years and years of reading, studying, memorizing, working day in and day out to try to fulfill them, which, Lord, which is the most important to you? That's basically what he's asking. Why the most important? Did he believe that meeting one will negate all others? Did he want to fulfill the one that God valued the most? We don't know his motive but we could know ours. "What's the bottom line Lord?" Too truthful, maybe. I am very much the bottom line and highest ROI (return on investment) person. I have to see the finish line. I weigh out the sequence and sacrifices, looking for the quickest, and least effort-demanding way to get there. Are you?

So here's what our Lord tells us in return, *"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"*[3] Let's camp here for a second or two. First off, laws and commands imply authority and require obedience. Why would God's being one be a command for us? Simply to establish His authority. He is God, I am not. He is Lord, I am not. He is the creator, I am not. He is the Almighty, I am not. He is the potter, I am the clay. Isaiah tell us, *"Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; for shall the thing made say of him who made it, 'He did not make me'? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?"*[4] You see, before we even attempt to know what the laws are, we need to know who the law maker is. We also need to be clear on why we want to follow the laws. Is it to escape eternal damnation? What gain do we have?

Let's read on in verse 30, "*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*"[5] I always struggle with the saying "respect is earned." But if respect should be shown to those who don't earn it, can I will myself to respect? Same with love, can I will myself to love? How could love be a command? If love is a command, then I should be able to "force" my actions to show love. I could will this heart to love. I was given the capability to love. You were too. Love is not an emotion reflected in response to an action, it is a willing action! Would God ask for what we do not have or cannot fulfill? No, He asks for what He gave us: a heart, a soul, a mind, and strength. We control these. We manage our emotions! We choose to whom we give our hearts and to what we give control of our minds.

Jesus was not finished though, *"And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*[6] The second is also love-related and is also an action. Our Lord Jesus


Rembrandt 1659

Christ said, *"Do not think that I come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to destroy but to fulfill them."*[6] He is saying that the purpose of all the commands is to love God supremely and to love others greatly. How can we do that? Obedience. That is it. God wants "Right action from the right heart all the time!" God wants both: love, and action to show it. Obey God out of your love for Him. We all want the same in our relationships. We want someone who will help us, hang out with us, eat a meal with us, etc. We want them to do all that out of love, not forcibly, not grudgingly, and without resentment. Isn't that true? That is exactly what God wants too. We demonstrate our love for God through loving others. Loving actions are the reflection of our love for Him. He wants both, the right action and the right heart. No evil motives, no fake love, no shallow emotions, no masquerade. God wants genuine love for Him and others.

Let's continue to see what the scribe said. In verse 32 the man replied, *"'Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love your neighbor as oneself, is more important than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.'"*[7] The commands are means by which we love God supremely, not the other way around. Our Lord said of the law, *"The [insert any: Sabbath, prayer, fasting, tithe, liturgy, communion, etc.] was made for man, not man for [these]."*[8] Remember, right action from a right heart all the time. He spoke of prayer the same way, *"But when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place."*[9] Jesus is saying to the Pharisees to watch their rituals, and the reason they are doing them. He's saying the same to us, "Watch your motives. Come to me with a right heart, show it with a right action, and do that all the time." All 613 commands are encompassed in these, all of them. We cannot work to earn God's love. Right heart first in order to deliver right action while walking with Him all the time.

The scribe recognized what Jesus was saying. Jesus called him wise and saw he had answered correctly. *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."*[10] When we see that, we would not be far from God's kingdom. How can we fulfill this command? Who can? Who has? Our Lord Jesus Christ did. Everything He did was from a right heart, all the time. He did not hate while healing. He did not use His strength to save Himself. He obeyed. Notice that He said we won't be far when we do that, but we still won't be in the kingdom yet. When will we become like Him, right action from a right heart all the time? The Scripture tells us, *"But we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."*[11] So, not in the kingdom yet but we will get a lot closer obeying His command than not.

If you start looking at your heart, be honest with God and come clean saying, 'Lord, I can't but I want to.' I'm reminded of Psalm 130:3, "*If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?"* But you know who your one God is? *"But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."*[12] In Isaiah 30:18-19, hear what Isaiah said about our God, "*Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exulted, that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all who wait for Him! ...He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you."* He longs, He desires it, He wants our love, He wants to give love and blessings. You want to know the ROI? I want the one and only God to bestow blessings, love, and forgiveness on me here on earth, and I want to be like Jesus in eternity. I want that. I look forward to what God has in store for me and you when we obey. I want to know that, *"[My] ears shall hear a word behind [me], saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.' Whenever [I] turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left,"* Isaiah 30:21 personalized.

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[1] Mark 3:4.
[2] Mark 12:28.
[3] Mark 12:29.
[4] Isaiah 29:16.
[5] Mark 12:30.
[6] Mark 12:31.
[7] Matthew 5:17.
[8] Mark 12:32-33.
[9] Mark 2:27.
[10] Matthew 6:6.
[11] Mark 12:34.
[12] 1 John 3:2.
[13] Psalm 13:4.

The Joy of Working *with the Lord*

Part II

By Mariam Guirgis

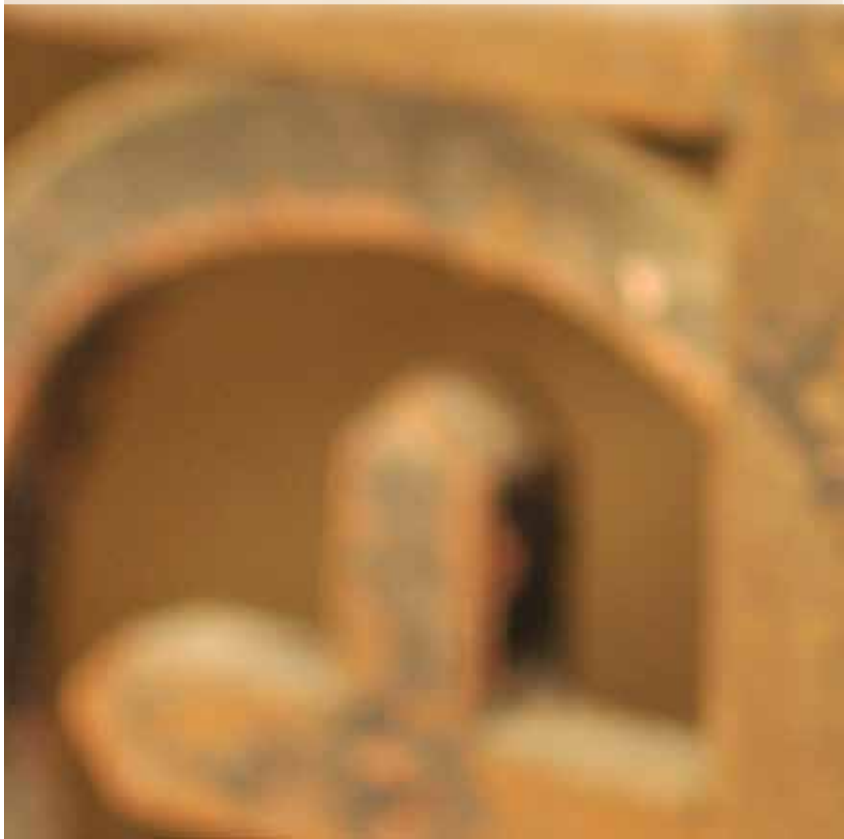
"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31)

In the last edition of Mighty Arrows, we saw how it became unfeasible for the small Coptic community, of which Uncle Saad was a member, to construct a church building on the property the church owned. Banks refused to extend construction loans to the church and efforts to collect donations from individuals also failed. After 33 months, the board members determined to drop the construction project.

The other alternative was to purchase a building and possibly remodel it to fit the Coptic Orthodox architecture. Two realtors were contacted and were told what the congregation needed. However, they proved ineffective. After a month and a half, board members felt tired and discouraged. They were ready to accept the status quo and continue praying in the rented space.

One day while in his office, Uncle Saad decided to give it one last try. He grabbed the local newspaper and found advertisements for different real estate agents. He randomly picked ten of them and started e-mailing each one. He gave each an idea of what his church was looking for and asked if the realtor could help them. Only a few agents responded to Uncle Saad's e-mails, and of those, only two unrelated agents continued to search diligently and communicate with Uncle Saad.

The two realtors brought several possibilities to the attention of the board members. In a period of about ten weeks, the congregation had viewed about 18 buildings. Some were church buildings, others were office suites, homes, and even warehouses. Board members thought that if the right building was found, it could be remodeled to fit their needs. After a while the two realtors seemed to have exhausted all possibilities in the market. They independently began



to propose the same buildings to the board members. This situation could potentially cause problems. The church had to decide to work with only one of the realtors. It was a difficult decision as to which one they should keep as their realtor. Uncle Saad chose the one who seemed to be the most passionate about her job and was diligent in her search.

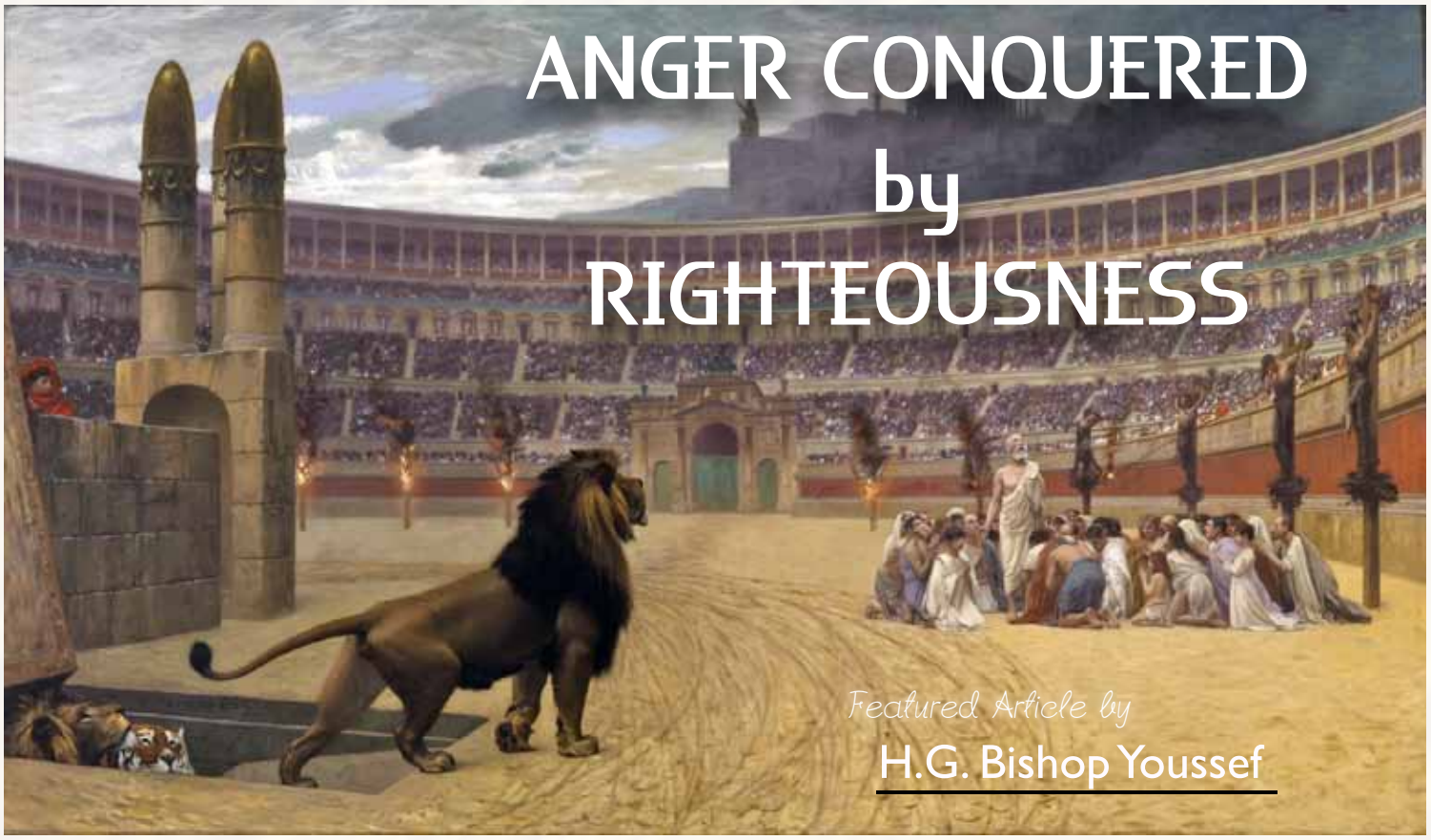
This lady realtor, which later Uncle Saad realized was actually God's choice, not his, met Uncle Saad's expectations. She continued to earnestly search for what the church needed. She continued communicating with Uncle Saad, letting him know that she had not forgotten about him and his church when there were no new listings in the market. A little while passed and the only results of the realtor's search were still properties that cost over a million dollars, which, of course, were out of the question. That was the point when Uncle Saad sat in his office and said, "There is no way." He started to believe that God does not want this congregation to purchase a building, possibly because they could not afford it financially. God did not want the congregation to get into a situation where they could not fulfill their financial obligations. So Uncle Saad was ready to give up until he heard that voice, loud and clear saying, "Do you think God will allow your labor to go in vain?" Uncle Saad did not know where the voice came from, but he found himself responding as if deep inside him he knew who it was. "But how? Where are we going to find this building? We have searched practically everywhere in town and in the surrounding cities. There is nothing available on the market that we have not looked at already. Where else can this longed-for building be found?" The voice went silent and so did Uncle Saad. He realized then that that voice was not a figment of his imagination, but rather it was the voice of God. And he realized that the voice was silent because of his own disbelief, for he immediately felt as if God wanted to tell him, *"O you of little faith."*[1] Uncle Saad was ashamed and knew then that he had to *"Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord."*[2]

To be continued...

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[1] Matthew 14:31.
[2] Exodus 14:13.





ANGER CONQUERED by RIGHTEOUSNESS

Featured Article by
H.G. Bishop Youssef

"*For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*" (James 1:20).

"*Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*" (James 3:18).

Introduction

The question frequently asked, "Is anger a sin?" finds its answer in St. Paul's words to the Ephesians, "*Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath.*"[1] Anger is a complex energy initiated by various attitudes such as impatience, unmet expectations, stress, and the like. It is an inevitable natural reaction to an undesirable situation. St. Paul did not say not to get angry, rather, he urged us not to sin. Sinning resides in the way anger is expressed, and in the length of time it is allowed to dwell in the heart. Inappropriate expression of anger will displease God; in time it will breed other types of undesirable sins. The Holy Bible is full of incidents where the negative emotion of anger found its way in the heart. These incidents exemplified anger as being one of two types: **justifiable** and **unjustifiable anger**. While the former leads to spiritual rewards and kingdom-related fruits, the latter leads to external violence and internal bitterness.

Justifiable Anger

This type of anger, referred to as "holy indignation," is represented in many incidents in the Holy Bible. In the Old Testament we read about God's holy indignation for His glory: "*My glory I will not give to another,*"[2] for His Ark of the Covenant: "*And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God,*"[3] and for His people: "*So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me."'*"[4]

Another example from the Old Testament is Moses' reaction to the Israelites' worship of the golden calf: "*So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.*"[5]

In the New Testament, we read about our Lord Jesus Christ's indignation for His Father's house: "*Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," but you have made it a "den of thieves."'*"[6]

Notice the difference between this genuinely induced sacred indignation, and the pretentious ego-driven one active in the chief priests and scribes. "*But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to*

the Son of David!' they were indignant, and said to Him, 'do you hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes. Have you never read, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise"?'"[7]

The difference resides in the motive. In the first incident, the motive is purely the love of God which should always be the driving force behind our actions, "*for the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.*"[8] In the second, the motive is obviously dictated by self-love.

Unjustifiable Anger

This type of anger (rather, tree of anger), usually born from a seed of rejection, has its roots well established in the ego, and its branches bear the fruits of many other iniquities. The first human being to manifest this type of anger was Cain. "*The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but He did not accept Cain and his gift. So, Cain became very angry and felt rejected.*"[9] God, in His goodness and mercy, had advised him to correct his act, and pick up the chance of repentance available with the subsequent acceptance by Him. However, instead of listening to God's advice, Cain succumbed to his feelings of anger and self-pity that eventually turned into envy of his brother's success. Exactly as, through His foreknowledge, God had warned him, Cain gave in to sin, his anger eventually developed into a thirst for his brother's blood, and he ended up killing Abel.[10] Another example is Saul's angry hatred for David. David and Saul started out as two very good and close friends. However, jealousy and personal interests turned that beautiful relationship into a sad story, which extended to mar the relationship between the father Saul and his son Jonathan as well.[11]

Types of Unjustifiable Anger

1. **Wrath:** outbursts leading to hurting others with words or actions. Wrath is listed among many other sins that are outside the scope of imagination: "*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies.*"[12]

An example of this type of anger is that of the Jews against Christ because he had reminded them of God's undiscriminating love for all mankind: "*So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.*"[13]

2. **Bitterness, irritation, or boiling:** this type of anger usually leads to psychological and psychosomatic disturbances such as depression, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stomach ulcers. St. Paul provides healing and remedy from these physical and psychological ailments: "*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.*"[14]

Unmanaged Anger Leads to Several Sins

- "*An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.*"[15]
- "*For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife.*"[16]

How to Deal with Anger

1. **Confess** your sins before God, before yourself (take responsibility for your anger, do not blame it on others), and before your confession father.

2. **Know** the reason behind your anger. Is it the result of feeling oppressed, or are you just being inflexible and wanting to control people? Are you allowing life stresses to overtake you with impatience and despair? What do you think of the solution St. Paul offered after the hot argument between him and Barnabas concerning St. Mark: "*Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.' Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches*"?[17]

3. **Train** yourself to slow down your angry reactions: "*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*"[18] Do so by drawing the sign of the Cross on yourself, praying a short prayer, remembering how Christ tolerated patiently all guile, and pray for the person who is aggravating your feelings. Slowing your anger is like applying your car brakes to stop your car whenever there is danger. You need to have good brakes and good timing. In the same way, to stop your anger from hurting others, you need to have good methods to slow your anger, along with good timing. Do not wait until it is too late to slow down your anger.

4. **Remind** yourself that angry reactions might induce irrational thinking, and will not solve problems, rather, they might aggravate situations and complicate problems. Do not take any decision while you are upset or angry. Instead, think in a logical realistic manner. Also, angry reactions are not reactions to others' behavior, but they are reactions to your own interpretation of others' behavior. The fact that different people respond differently to the same behavior proves that our anger is a reflection of our speculations. Do not stick to one single interpretation that will upset you. If

you think rationally, you will find that there are many other true explanations for this same action which bothers you.

5. **Face** the problem courageously with a prayerful spirit, accept it, deal with it, and think of alternatives, repeating with David, "*I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons.*"[19]

6. **Change** the place where the strife has initiated. Such a step would help calm feelings down and assist in restoring logical and rational thinking needed to deal with the situation.

7. **Tell** yourself who you are in Christ: a new creation. Anger is not among the characteristics of one newly born who has received newness of life through Baptism: "*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new [man] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.*"[20] Remind yourself of Who dwells in you after having received baptism: "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*"[21]

8. **Teach** yourself how to deal with anger. You need to acquire three virtues: forgiveness, kindness, and tenderheartedness: "*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*"[22]

9. **Take** good care of your body (by giving it enough sleep, healthy food, and exercise), your soul (by being in a godly entertainment, relaxing, and laughing), and spirit (through spiritual exercises, repentance over sins, confession, a support system, and spiritual friendship).

10. **Communicate** correctly with your feelings and with the other people's feelings. Usually people express their negative feelings through one of four ways:

• **Expressiveness** which is the capability of clearly and respectfully expressing feelings without appealing to insults or derision. Expressiveness is highly recommended as a tool for getting rid of negative feelings.

• **Repressiveness** which is the act of controlling strong emotions and desires and not allowing them to be expressed so that they no longer seem to exist. Repression can cause depression, and many other psychological and subsequent health problems. Repression also can be turned around and utilized in a negative manner by ignoring the others, demeaning them and their behavior, and the like.

• **Controlling** one's feelings which will lead to control of external emotions, facial expressions, and hand movement. This is especially effective in the case of dealing with people who are less logical and unrealistic.

• **Exploding** which leads to abusing others verbally, physically, emotionally, and socially.

Conclusion

St. Paul's words to the Ephesians are taken from David's psalms in the Old Testament. David experienced anger like no one else: "*My eye is troubled because of anger.*"[23] Also, *"The enemy has persecuted my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead.*"[24] This enemy could very well be negative angry reactions leading to a series of other sins including hatred, despair, and thirst for blood, to mention a few. However, every time he experienced negative feelings, he would immediately realize how futile and detrimental those negative feelings of anger could be to his body, soul, and spirit, and so, remind himself that there was no other solution except in "*the righteousness which is from God by faith.*"[25] *"Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.*"[26] Therefore, "*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him. For the help of His countenance.*"[27]

Let us put our faith in God and in our savior Jesus Christ through Whom "*my soul shall be joyful in the Lord; it shall rejoice in His salvation.*"[28] Let us think twice before losing our temper and giving in to Satan to defeat us through anger, for

"*The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*"[29]

"*Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*"[30]

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1 Ephesians 4:26.
2 Isaiah 42:8.
3 2 Samuel 6:6,7.
4 Exodus 10:3.
5 Exodus 32:19,20.
6 Mathew 21:12,13.
7 Mathew 21:15,16.
8 2 Corinthians 5:14.
9 Genesis 4:4-5.
10 Genesis 4:3-7.
11 1 Samuel 20:24-34.
12 Galatians 5:19,20.
13 Luke 4:28-30.
14 Ephesians 4:31.
15 Proverbs 29:22.
16 Proverbs 30:33.
17 Acts 15:36-41.
18 James 1:19.
19 Psalms 16:7.
20 Colossians 3:8,9.
21 Galatians 5:22-24.
22 Ephesians 4:31,32.
23 *Psalm 6:7.*
24 Psalm 143:3.
25 Philippians 3:9.
26 Psalm 4:5.
27 Psalm 42:5.
28 Psalm 35:9.
29 James 1:20.
30 James 3:18.

When the Clouds Darken

By Boulis Ibrahim



How often do we feel perplexed and our souls are troubled? How often do we note the restlessness of our bodies and the pangs of its desires? The adversary also *"walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*[1] Whether the waves of tribulations arise internally or arrive externally, practicing our faith and going through life is likened to sailing a boat in high seas. But exactly how do we handle these tribulations, to have our bodies calm down and our souls attain peace? How do we pass through the trepidation the world creates in us, possess our souls, and inherit the glorification that we have been promised?

"My God, my God why have You forsaken Me?"[2] The answers are always at the Passion of Christ. From the depth of agony that He experienced on the cross we see Christ not ceasing in the slightest to confide in His goodness and call upon the Father. The feeling and desire of obedience not only resided in His soul, but also was the nature of His will. We know that His soul was troubled and yet amidst the depths of its trouble His faith had not wavered. His soul was troubled so that ours, being free from trepidation, might obtain peace and quiet. There is tribulation in the world, and if this were all that there is we would be wretched indeed. But His resurrection was followed by living hope. By His resurrection He turned the losing hand to our favour and our wretchedness has changed forever. Now there is a path to victory, and a way to glory. In the risen Man, Jesus Christ, we have a living hope and with His sitting at the right hand of the Father we have the unwavering promise of glory.

But we have work to do! To imitate Christ and inherit the promised glory, we require a particular attitude and quality of will. This quality is patience.

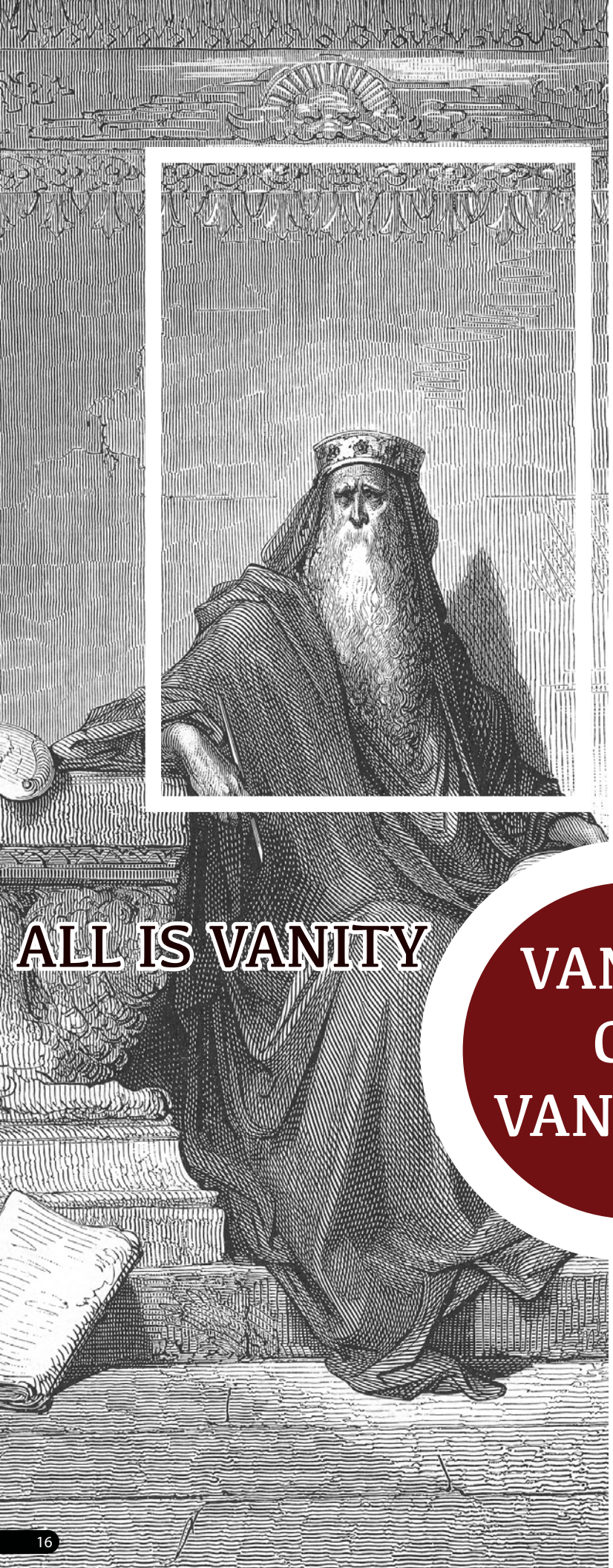
"By your patience possess your souls."[3] This divinely uttered word, 'patience' (original Greek: *hypomonē*), does not mean passive waiting, but steadfastness, constancy and endurance.[4] It describes a characteristic of a person who is not swerved from a deliberate purpose by even the greatest of trials and sufferings. Christ 'endured' the trials of the devil and the Jews, the betrayals of his disciples, and the unfaithfulness of those whom He had taught, healed, and strengthened. He endured the unleashing of the full force of divine justice on our sins, the price of which He, the sinless, was paying. He endured the pains of the passions and the agony of the cross. He endured death to release those who *"through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,"*[5] and endured descending into Hades to free those who resided in hope. He freed them and us from the tyranny of sin and from death everlasting. It was patient endurance in faith that underlay these deeds. *"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."*[6] Patience is a quality of the good land in which the seed of faith grows and bears much fruit.[7] In high seas, helmsmen turn their bows to face the waves lest their boats overturn. Patience is the determination to hold the helm steady in the face of adversity. In fact, patience is a quality of character acquired or procured through experiencing many a trial, and one that is attained by sustained perseverance and a conscious override of the trepidations faced in adversity.[8]

That is why the Lord also uttered the word 'possess'. In the original Greek *ktaomai, this word means to acquire, purchase, get, or procure a thing for one's self.*[9] It is a conscious decision of will and of one's own accord. The possession of our souls through patience is, therefore, a conscious action on our part to be steadfast in the face of adversity and to hold the helm steady with the boat's bow facing the waves for this is the best way to survive them. The experience would leave you a better seaman who would have 'possessed' the knowledge of the safety of his boat. Tribulations produce perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.[10] The Lord has provided the path and opened the way to glory through, in, and by Himself. Our part is to possess our souls through our patience in faith in Him. This is the synergy between the work of God and the work of man. Here is the work of faith mentioned in James 2:14-26 and the reason for our *"praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*[11] No one can sleep-walk into the Kingdom of Heaven, and entrance is granted only through tested genuineness of faith. Christ wants us to demonstrate the genuineness of our faith, because our free will is immensely valuable to Him. *"That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."*[12] *"Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."*[13] *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations."*[14]

Next time I see the clouds darken and the sea of my life get tempestuous and turbulent, it is time to lift up my face and rejoice, for the Lord is offering me a chance to 'possess my soul'.

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[1] 1 Peter 5:8.
[2] Matthew 27:46.
[3] Luke 21:19.
[4] Strong's G5281, Strong's Greek Lexicon or Thayer's Greek Lexicon (http://biblesuite.com/thayers.htm).
[5] Hebrews 2:14-15.
[6] Hebrews 2:18.
[7] Luke 8:15.
[8] Ibid. Strong's G2932.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Romans 5:3-4.
[11] 1 Peter 1:6-7.
[12] Hebrews 6:12.
[13] Revelations 14:12.
[14] Romans 5:3.



ALL IS VANITY

VANITY OF VANITIES

By Myriam Fahim



Every human being grapples with the fear of insignificance. The earliest manifestation of this is found in the egocentric toddler's cry of, "Mine!" The fear keeps on building into adolescence where the questions become, "Who am I? Why was I put on this earth? How do others feel about me?" Continuing well into adulthood, it translates to, "Am I successful enough? Have I achieved something worthwhile in my life?"

Humanity's quest for meaning is nothing new. King Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes beautifully addresses this issue. It talks about the futility of life without God. We are told, *"That which has*

been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun."[1]

King Solomon explains how worldly lusts, desires, and pleasures are *"vanity of vanities, all is vanity."*[2] He repeats the word "vanity" thirty-seven times in all, to convey to us that man cannot be satisfied or made happy by earthly things.[3] Interestingly, the word "vanity" in the Hebrew language means "a breath" or a "mist."[4] In other words, something insignificant.

Solomon goes on to prove this to us. He had the greatest human wisdom, but that was the cause of much sorrow for him.[5] He drank wine,[6] built himself magnificent structures,[7] had many servants,[8] acquired material wealth, and reveled.[9] Put in his own words, *"Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them."*[10] He worked hard to get where he was and he became very powerful. Nonetheless, in the end, he realized that it was all vanity.

It is ironic that thousands of years later, nothing has changed. Working hard, drinking, partying, and acquiring expensive "toys" are habits that are firmly embedded in North American culture. However, these pursuits are empty and do not bring significance to our lives. So what does? How do we become meaningful individuals?

King Solomon answers this question for us: *"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil."*[11] I submit, dear friends, that this is how a Christian person ought to possess his or her soul and find meaning in life.

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[1] Ecclesiastes 1:9.
[2] Ecc 1:2.
[3] Malaty, Fr. Tadros Yacoub. Ecclesiastes. St. George Coptic Orthodox Church Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt. 6.
[4] Ibid, 12.
[5] Ecclesiastes 1:18.
[6] Ecc 2:3.
[7] Ecc 2:4-6.
[8] Ecc 2:7.
[9] Ecc 2:8.
[10] Ecc 2:10.
[11] Ecc 12:13-14.



Release of the Spirit

A fresh translation from Arabic

By His Holiness Pope Shenouda III



Release from the Knowledge of Sin

If we talk about release of the spirit, then we run into this question: "From what is the spirit released?" We reply that the spirit, while on earth, struggles to be released of many things (to be discussed later), although, there is yet one—no matter how hard the spirit struggles to be released of on earth, I don't suppose it possible. Perhaps being released of this one thing is one of the delights we will enjoy in eternity. What is this? It is the release from the knowledge of sin.

When God created the first person, He created him simple, pure, and completely ignorant of sin, its details, and its identity. He was as such before he ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He was as innocent as a child, perhaps even more so. Therefore, when Eve was tempted by the serpent, she was unaware. The serpent lied to her and told her, *"You will not surely die… you will be like God."*[1] Eve was oblivious to such a thing as a lie; she did not doubt the serpent's truthfulness, because she had no knowledge of doubt. Adam and Eve knew only good—as for evil, they had no knowledge of it. Yet, when they ate of the tree, then they knew. Humanity acquired a new knowledge, the knowledge of sin. Rather, much more knowledge as well, which clouded that first natural purity, as Solomon the Sage put it, *"He who increases knowledge increases sorrow."*[2]

Perhaps Adam's first realization was that he is a man and that Eve is a woman, and so sexual thoughts crept into his mind, and then into his feelings. He realized that this is shameful, and so began to cover himself. Then, he learned fear, and began to hide behind the trees. With time, man began to know many sins. This knowledge settled into his mind, calling up against him spiritual wars at times. If he does not fall into one sin, then he falls into condemning others who fall into it. This forced humanity to live in the duality of good and evil, permitted and forbidden. When will the mind be released of this duality? When will the mind return to its purity? When will the mind be freed of the knowledge of evil? Whether knowledge acquired through the mind, or through experience and practice, when will it be freed of the "remembrance of vice bearing death?"[3]

I do not suppose this will ever happen on earth. It will occur in eternity. While *"being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand,"*[4] St. Paul told his disciple Timothy, *"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness."*[5] Finally, the human will be crowned with righteousness—righteousness that does not commit sin, righteousness that does

not know sin. He will be crowned with holiness, without which no one can see God. But, when will this be? St. Paul the apostle continues his words about the crown of righteousness: *"Which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."*[6]

With longing, the spirit races after this crown of righteousness. As for on earth, we sin every day, and each day we need to repent. There is no one without sin, even if his life was only one day. When will we be truly released of the knowledge of sin? Knowing none but God alone, and the light surrounding Him, having no darkness? This will be when we vomit out the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil that our fathers ate at that time. That is when we will be restored to our first rank. Rather, in eternity, we will be in a better condition than Adam was in Eden. Adam and Eve were in a state of righteousness, with the possibility of falling, but in eternity we will be crowned with righteousness-righteousness in which there is no possibility of falling. If we will be elevated to a better state than the one of the first human before the fall, we will at least liken him in innocence, purity, simplicity, and in not knowing sin.

We will forget sin, in all its shapes, details, and memories. Only the positive spiritual life will remain in our memories: loving God and meditating on His beautiful attributes, meditating on the heavenly, what no eye has seen or ear heard, nor has come into the heart of man. Thus, the spirit will have reached the pinnacle of its release. As for here on earth, the most the spirit can reach is the release from the authority of sin, matter, and the body, to live free, *"delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."*[7] Do you feel that your spirit has reached this liberty? This liberty is the release of the spirit… its release from every bond that hinders it from reaching God. How so...

Release to the Knowledge of God

I confess before You, O Lord, that my direction in writing needs to change. I shamefully confess before You that I have often spoken to people about virtue, and rarely have I spoken to them about You, while

> . . . Knowing You is not a subject of years or days, but its path is the entire eternity, endless eternity. If this is so in eternity, what then can we say about our ignorance on earth? Do we really know anything?

You should be all in all.

In order for me to speak about You, I need to know You. How can I know You, being a limited human being? How can I know You who are unlimited, incomprehensible, unsearchable, the unapproachable light, the one Whom man cannot see and live?

I tried to ask Your saints, who knew You, or knew about You a partial knowledge, so I approached St. Paul the Apostle, who ascended to the third heaven, and I asked him about You. He said that he heard and saw things "*which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*"[8] Likewise, John the Beloved, who saw an open door in heaven and glimpsed the throne of God, did not explain to us his vision except in symbols that cannot give the complete picture.

Sometimes I ask myself: "Is it arrogance of me to try to know You, while I remain ignorant of my own self, and ignorant of many human and material issues?" If I do not know the essence of my soul, how could I know the Creator of this soul? If I still do not know Your heaven and angels, how can I know Your divine essence?

All I know about You, is what You freely reveal to us. You do not reveal to us, except what our souls can handle, because, if You reveal to us more, our human nature will halt in awe of fascination, our minds will cease to understand, our linguistic vocabulary will fail to express, and we will confess that what we are seeing is unutterable.

I try, in knowing You, to come out from the scope of books, with all their depth, sometimes even coming beyond the limits of mental knowledge, to give my spirit freedom to launch out to where it greatly excels the mind, yet our human spirit is

limited-limited in its capabilities, talents, and knowledge. Furthermore, it suffers greatly from the cloudiness of this physical body.

We wonder, O Lord, will we know You in Your eternal kingdom? Will we see You then face to face, as Your servant St. Paul claimed? I find myself truly baffled by this phrase: "*Face to face.*"[9]

In the kingdom, despite the glorified resurrection, and the luminous spiritual bodies we will have, surely, we will remain–as we are–limited human beings. You will reveal to us a little something about Yourself that we did not know in the world; we will rejoice and be elated with this. Then You will gradually reveal to us a little more and more, as much as we can handle.

Perhaps You will reveal to us more, and each soul will cry out, lovesick, "*Enough! Enough!*"[10] You will continue to expand our hearts, expand our souls, to be able to understand You even more. You remain. Unlimited. We continue, as we are, limited. Despite our expansion, we remain limited, gaining only little knowledge of You.

Time passes in eternity, while we enjoy knowing You, we "*taste and see that the Lord is good,*"[11] continually discovering something new about You, feeding on this sweet satiating knowledge, yet we cannot know You altogether.

When then will we truly know You? Our Lord Jesus answers: "*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*"[12] Therefore, knowing You is not a subject of years or days, but its path is the entire eternity, endless eternity. If this is so in eternity, what then can we say about our ignorance on earth? Do we really know anything?

Therefore, I beg You, O great Creator, to pardon me if I speak to people about virtues more than I speak to them of You.

This is for two reasons. The first reason is that I do not know You. All I know is that I pray You to reveal to me something about Yourself, and what You reveal to me, that I will inform people about, so that they may experience a taste of the kingdom on earth. The second reason is that when I speak to them about virtues, I want them to prepare their hearts to know You. I want them to raise Vespers and Matins incense on the altar of this heart, until it deserves to have the divine mysteries offered on it.

We, of ourselves, do not know You. However, we want, through Your grace, to prepare ourselves to know You. This knowledge comes from You, in what You reveal to us, and not through our mental effort, not even through our spiritual effort. All our mental and spiritual efforts–though necessary–in truth, fall under the definition of prayer or begging, for the cloud to fill the house, for the fire to ignite in the bush, and for the Lord to reveal Himself. Then, the heart falls prostrate in reverence, and sings with thanksgiving, "[You] have given to me the learning of Your knowledge."[13]

This divine knowledge is the pearl of great price, for which the merchant sold all that he had and purchased.[14] Perhaps among the possessions he sold was the vast human intelligence we hoard in our minds which occupies all our time so that we are not free to know You. It prevents us from sitting with Mary at Your feet pouring into our hearts that living water, which quenches the thirsty, never to thirst again.

If only we would seek after this knowledge, seeking it with all our hearts, finding it within, deep within our depth, where You dwell, where Your holy temple abides, which was consecrated by You on the day of holy baptism.

It was 7 PM, and silence overshadowed the place, when my father the monk and I began kicking up desert sand, walking at times and stopping at others, meditating topics more excellent than to be penned down. We walked for a long time, unaware, or rather not caring to be aware, until we finally arrived at the monastery doorstep, so we sat down to discuss the release of the spirit…

To be continued…

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[1] Genesis 3:4-5.
[2] Ecclesiastes 1:18.
[3] H. G., & H. G. (2007). The Divine Liturgies: The Anaphoras of Saints Basil, Gregory, and Cyril (2nd Edition ed.). Dallas: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States. P. 176.
[4] 2 Timothy 4:6.
[5] 2 Timothy 4:8.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Romans 8:21.
[8] 2 Corinthians 12:4.
[9] 1 Corinthians 3:12.
[10] Proverbs 30:16.
[11] Psalm 34:8.
[12] John 17:3.
[13] H. G., & H. G. (2007). This is taken from the Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of St. Gregory, 272.
[14] Cf. Matthew 13:45-46.

PILLARS OF OUR TIME:

Ordinary People Serving in Extraordinary Ways

MAKING AN IMPACT



Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas

Patriarch of Antioch and all the East for the Syrian Orthodox

El-Keraza is the primary source for this article.

Born in Al Musil, Iraq on 4/21/1933, Senharib the son of Bashir Iwas and Hasiba Atto was adorned with the monastic schema on 6/6/1954, and given the name Zakka. Since 1955 he was appointed the personal secretary of Mar Ignatius Ephrem I. He was granted a scholarship to the Episcopalian Theological Seminary, and studied at New York University for two years. He was thereafter awarded an honorary doctorate. He was fluent in English, Old Hebrew, and of course Syrian. He was deputed to attend the Vatican II council in 1962 as an official observer, and in 1963 Mar Ignatius Yacoub III ordained him metropolitan of Al Musil, giving him the name Mar Soiorios Zakka, serving there until 1969. During his auspices in the diocese of Al Musil, a box containing the relics of St. Thomas in a church bearing this saint's name was discovered. In 1969 he was elected to the diocese of Bagdad and Basra for his superb activities.

After the departure of Mar Ignatius Yacoub III, on 7/11/1980 he was elected unanimously by the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church as his successor, and was enthroned on 9/14/1980, as Mar Ignatius Zakka Iwas I, the 122nd patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church. He was a president of both the Middle East Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches. He labored very energetically for his church, taking many political and national stances for his church and his nation, having good relations with many notable personalities, both Christian and Muslim. In him was found an excellent orator and writer. During his era many great productive accomplishments occurred.

There was a very deep spiritual friendship between Mar Ignatius Zakka Iwas I and His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, of whom he said in amazing humility, "His Holiness Pope Shenouda, God grant him health, he is perhaps twenty years my senior, and I don't know where he gets the energy to travel between Cairo and the monastery each week. I can't find that energy!" (Keep in mind as he said this, he was suffering from his kidneys, which eventually failed, and he underwent dialysis three times a week for years thereafter.) He loved Pope Shenouda III so much, despite his failing health, he came for His Holiness' funeral; and he loved the Coptic Orthodox Church enough to come again eight months later for His Holiness Pope Tawadros' Enthronement, despite his deteriorated health which was clearly evident to everyone who watched or attended the enthronement. This man was so very humble that when a meeting was scheduled with him, he would come promptly and wait for his attendees, as if it is he who came to see them, and not they who were coming to take his blessing. He is known for his open heart that encompassed any objectors, and for his very deep spirituality. On March 21, 2014 he finally rested in peace after a long struggle with illness. May he remember us before the throne of grace.



Gérard Jollain, Moses asks to see the glory of God, 1670

Show Me Your Glory (Exodus 32–34)

By Joseph Ghebrial

It could be argued that Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player who ever lived. If you asked 8 out of 10 kids in the 90's who their favorite athlete was, they would probably say, "Michael Jordan." Here he is now: enormously wealthy, maybe the most recognizable and liked face on the planet, and generally regarded as the best to have *ever* play. For 30 years, he's been king. But after all of this, Jordan still stated in one of his interviews to ESPN around his 50th birthday, "I would give up everything now to go back and play basketball," because he still doesn't feel like he's done enough, that he's truly proven himself and his critics, real or imaginary, wrong. Most people live anonymous lives, and when they grow old and die, any record of their existence is blown away. They are forgotten; some more slowly than others, but eventually it happens to most. Yet for the few people in each generation who reach the very pinnacle of fame and achievement: immortality, they come to believe in it. Even after Jordan is gone, he knows people will remember him. *Here lies the greatest basketball player of all time.* That's his epitaph. Yet he's still restless! He has a hunger that he cannot seem to satisfy.

We hunger in this world for something that nothing in this world seems to satisfy. We are far too easily pleased. You see, Isaiah 43:7 informs us that we were created for the glory of God. I think this means two things: first,

that our lives are meant to reflect back to God IN glory, and second, that our souls were created to be satisfied IN God's glory alone. But what is glory? All of us want to know that we matter, that we are valued and loved. We cannot live without this knowledge. But we humans tend to approach everything, even God, very pragmatically. We look at everything, and examine it with the question, "Will this make me happy? Will this let me know that I matter?" We imply that, if one thing does not make me happy or validate my worth, then I will find something else that will. Thus many addictions begin. When we truly encounter the glorious presence of God, it is so great that you won't have to question any more.

In Exodus Chapters 1-32, God had brought his people out of the land of Egypt (with a series of terrible plagues), enabled them to cross the Red Sea, made water come out of a rock, made bitter water sweet, and had now brought them to Mount Sinai on the way to the Promised Land. These people were to inherit the promises that God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These people had seen miracle after miracle; they knew God on a personal level. And now God has called Moses to come up the mountain to receive the law, telling the people that they will be His treasured possession.[1] Beautiful! But Moses was up on the mountain for a long time, and the people grew restless. With doubt and fear instilled in their hearts, they say to Aaron the High Priest, Moses' brother, in Exodus 32:1 to give them gods, and Aaron then does the unthinkable in Exodus 32:4! The people celebrate and sacrifice before this calf. Their immediate gratification is satisfied despite having heard the thunder, seen the lightning, felt the earthquake, and been told not to make gods of gold, just the other day! God says that He is going to consume the people and make a new nation out of Israel.

> "
> . . . when we really look at our hearts, there's a lie that creeps in, that there's something that we need besides God to make us happy.
> "

In a magnificent prayer, Moses reasons with God that if He destroys Israel, Egypt will mock Him–either as evil, inept, or weak. "Remember your promises," Moses says, "And do not do this thing." God, amazingly, relents. Moses comes down, breaks the tablets, and destroys the calf. Moses then goes back to make atonement *for the people*. Remember: these are a people who complained as he stood up against Egypt, telling him to back down. They coiled back in anger and fear at the Red Sea and again when they were thirsty, and again and again. Instead of reverting to God's previous plan and giving up by saying, "You know what God? Deal how You Will! Kill them. You're right, let's start over!" (these were people who *hated* Moses), Moses goes up to make atonement for them. Unyieldingly he knows what he's asking for here. Notice here that he brought no sacrifice with him to make atonement. Why? Because he was willing to substitute himself for them: "Forgive them their sins, Lord, please. And if not, blot me out of your book. Let me be damned in their place." Moses is not merely asking to die a physical death here, but for the just wrath due Israel here to fall on him instead of the people–the same people who have questioned Moses at every step. Wow! What love! Nothing but Moses' bold intercession could have saved the people. Moses' words mirror words that St. Paul says in Romans 9:3. St. Paul here (as Moses does) is saying, "God, if possible, I would endure hell so that these people could be saved." Have you ever loved anyone like that?

But God refuses Moses: *"Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book."*[2] God tells them to leave Sinai, that they will be led by an angel, but He will not go with them for they have made it obvious they do not want Him. Still though don't worry; God is going to give them everything He promised. This is exactly what most people want from God or any other religion. God says, "I'm going to give you a wonderful home, a great family, security, peace, love, and a happy life and you won't have to go through all the hard work of drawing near to me, examining your hearts, going to church, praying, and centering your lives on my will. I'll give you all the benefits of my promises–I'll give you heaven–just without me!" Most people, in their heart of hearts, would love this. They want God as available and helpful as needed. We may not quite be able to articulate it like this, but when we really look at our hearts, there's a lie that creeps in, that there's something

that we need besides God to make us happy. Most people go their whole lives looking for this. We think, "If I just got this degree or made this amount of money, or if I could just get this guy/girl to notice me, or if I just had control of my life or could achieve this, then I would be happy. Then I would know that I have worth." And here God offers the Israelites anything they could ever want, and what does the text say? They "heard this word as disastrous."

Moses is now telling God to keep all those riches if He does not come and BE with them. What good would a beautiful wife or loving husband or letters after our names or money or fame or peace or all the power in the world be if we do not have You? If your presence will not go with us, do not send us. We will not go. We see Moses's intimacy with God in His boldness as he manages to convince God: *"This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and* ***I know you by name."***[3] Moses is validated by God as someone He knows, respects, and, most importantly, loves. Again, God relents. But Moses would not take "yes" for an answer. He always wanted more of God. Blessed Moses, who had just again seen God of the universe directly answering his prayers, who had been on the mountain with him for 40 days, who had walked more closely with God than anyone else on the planet, is empowered even further. He wants more of God: Moses said, ***"Please show me your glory."***[4]

We see Moses beckoning with God for a blessing. God's responses make Moses bolder in his requests. And yet God grants as long as Moses asks. He gives liberally! Moses is encouraged to pray and not lose heart in light of God's unfailing goodness, because He is able to provide and bless immeasurably. He knew that God satisfies and that all of us were created to be satisfied in the glory of God alone. He *is* gracious! He is *holy*! He proclaimed that He is a God who is perfectly just *and* who forgives! He is love, faithfulness, mercy, grace, and justice personified. If His wisdom passes by, then your fear melts away, and if His mercy passes by, then your guilt is destroyed. Therefore, always pray.

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[1] Exodus 19:5-6.
[2] Ex 32:30-33.
[3] Ex 33:15-17.
[4] Ex 33:18.



Saint Barbara

By Mareya Naguib



Living in today's society may allow the sense of fear to creep into people's thoughts and lives. These days anything from natural disasters that occur around us, to persecutions that target our families in Egypt, can make our lives seem vulnerable. However, if we allow the sin of fear to consume us, we belittle God's power and protection. Fear results from a lack of faith and trust in God. When God created man, He did not intend for him to fear: "*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*"[1] St. Paul teaches us: "*For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*'"[2] Therefore, we need to take St. Paul's word to heart and live by it just like a great young saint named Barbara.

Around the third century, a nobleman named Dioscorus had a daughter named Barbara. He was not a Christian and therefore raised his only daughter to worship idols. Because of his great love for her, he built her a tower in which she would dwell until she was old enough for marriage. Her father also entrusted a maid to watch over her and to grant her all her wishes. Because Barbara was banned from seeing anyone outside her tower, she used to raise her eyes to the sky and contemplate its beauty. She was in great awe of its existence and concluded to herself that there must be a creator that began all this creation.

As she grew up, she questioned her maid about the creation of the earth, the sea, the sky and all the plants that surround her, but the woman would always avoid answering her questions. Barbara had no idea that her maid was Christian, until one day when Barbara was old enough, the woman decided to speak to her about Christ and quench her thirst for Him. She knew that if Dioscorus found out that she was Christian, she would be sentenced to death. However because she had great faith in Christ, she conquered the fear of death and was willing to bring Barbara's soul to Christ.

The maid knew the scholar Origen, and she informed him of Barbara and her desire to learn more about Christ. Origen went to the tower and taught Barbara the principles of Christianity and baptized her as well. When Barbara learned about the Holy Trinity, she ordered a third window carved in her bathroom wall and a Cross placed over the water basin. Her maid told her that if she did this, her father might kill her. However, St. Barbara did not fear death or her father because her love for Christ was much greater. When her father came to visit and saw the cross and the third window, he asked the reason behind all the changes. St. Barbara replied, "Don't you know, my father, that with the Holy Trinity everything is complete, and here are three windows in the name of the Holy Trinity. This sign is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, wherein was the salvation of the whole world. I ask you, O my dear father, to turn away from your error and worship the God Who created you."

When her father heard these words, he became very angry and drew his sword to kill her. She ran, and as he was chasing her, Barbara came to a huge rock that blocked her way. With great faith, she drew the sign of the cross over the rock, and the rock split and she was able to go through it and hide behind it. The rock then returned to its original form, to block her father from getting to her. The father went behind the rock and found her hiding in a cave. He then seized her and took her to Marcianus the governor. The governor tried to speak to her kindly to change her mind about Christ but her faith remained steadfast in the Lord. Because the governor was not able to convince her to deny Christ, he tortured her severely until he cut off her head, allowing her to receive the crown of martyrdom on Kiahk 8 (Dec 17th).

Her father perished shortly after her death. The water basin in her tower became a healing bath to any diseased person who washed in it. Because she did not fear death, God transformed her fear to glory. Her life teaches us courage, faith, and true love towards Christ. One should always remember, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or sword?*"[3] The answer should always be nothing! Christ is the only precious jewel that we should try to attain and we should not let the fears of the world hinder our journey towards Him.[4]

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[1] 2 Timothy 1:7.
[2] Hebrew 13:5-6.
[3] Romans 8:35.
[4] St. Barbara" Lives of Saints :: Synaxarium. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2014. http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/synexarion/.



Question & Answer

New SPRING 2014 Edition

GENERAL QUESTION

And its Answer

Q: On what basis and sources of information does our Church build her decisions concerning what types of food to abstain from during our fasts?

A: In the beginning God created man vegetarian. It is only after the flood that God allowed man to eat animals' meat.

In the Holy Book of Ezekiel, we read God's instructions to Ezekiel on what to eat and how much he can eat and drink during the fast God had commanded him to observe. All the ingredients were rationed vegetarian ingredients, (wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt); and drinking was also rationed (Ezek 4:9-12).

Fasting is a time of repentance, a time when we ask God to cleanse and purify us and make us return to the original image in which He created us. Thus to abstain from all animal products is a way to go back to what God had intended for us before sin came into the world.

Originally all the fasts were abstinence from all animal products; but to make it easier on the people, the Church decided to observe this restriction only on the fasts of Wednesdays and Fridays, in Nineveh's fast, Paramouns, and in the Holy Great Fast. During all the other fasts, seafood is allowed.

New SPRING 2014 Edition

BIBLE QUESTION

And its Answer

FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER CHAPTER 4

Q: Relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place. Explain.

A: Mordecai had confidence that relief and deliverance would come from another place was strongly asserting his faith in God and His promised protection of the Jewish people. All that happens in His world and would intervene with or without Esther.



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Bookshelf

Available for iOS devices, this app from the Coptic Diocese of the Southern U.S.A. allows you access to various books and works you would typically find on a coptic bookshelf, including

- The Might Arrows magazine,
- H.G. Bishop Youssef's latest books
- H.G. Bishop Youssef's commentaries on the Scripture
- And much more coming soon



Events & Activities

DIOCESE PROGRAMS

Family Ministry Program fmp.suscopts.org
(FMP) Summer Registration deadline: July 15, 2014

Lead Program
A program for learning Christian leadership principles.

St. Clement Christian Academy
This is a learning community dedicated to meeting the needs of each learner within its walls.

Theological Seminary Program tsp.suscopts.org
Program Registration deadline: June 15, 2014

Theological Seminary Program - Nashville
An Arabic theological program located in Nashville.

Theological Seminary Boarding Program - Abbey
A 2 year live-in program located at St. Mary and St. Moses Abbey.

H.O.P.E.
Social Services hope.suscopts.org
A social services program designed to help those in need.

St. Mark Festival Program
This is a spiritual competition among the Coptic Churches doing the same activity world-wide.

Archangel Raphael Ministry (ARM) | copticangel.org
A program designed specifically for individuals with special needs. ☥ Your generous donations will go directly into the program and convention. To help sponsor a child, family, or an activity at the annual Special Needs Convention, please contact: father_joachim@yahoo.com

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(SVRM) Professionals networking together to make a difference and provide resources to our Coptic community. To make a request or to volunteer as a consultant. www.suscopts.org/svrm/

DIOCESE EVENTS

Kids Camp | FL: June 8-11, 2014 | TX: June 24-26, 2014

Pre-Marital Retreat
GA: Jun 13-15, 2014 | TX: Nov 14-16, 2014 | FL: Jan 9-11, 2015

Sudan Mission Experience Trip 2014 | June 9-21, 2014

Summer High School Conventions
FL Girls: June 16-19, 2014 | FL Boys: June 25-28, 2014
TX Girls: June 15-18, 2014 | TX Boys: July 20-23, 2014

Her First Love Retreat | June 19-22, 2014

Middle School Camp | TX: June 27-29, 2014

2014 Pilgrimate - To the Balkans | July 14-26, 2014

Archangel Raphael Ministry A.R.M. Convention
July 23-27, 2014—St. Stephen Retreat Center

Evangelism & Apologetics Conference | Aug 1-3, 2014
CPAR Convention | Sept 18-21, 2014
Winter High School Girls Convention
FL: Dec 21-24, 2014
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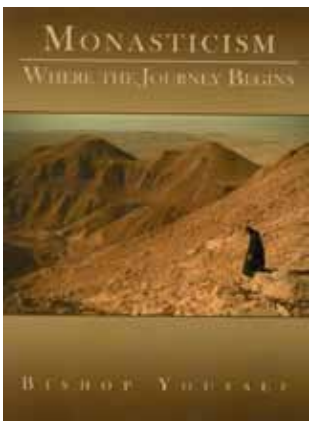
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March 2014

The Departure of the His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Thrice Blessed Memory

On behalf of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, our deepest condolences are extended to our brethren in the Syrian Orthodox Church on the loss of the beloved Patriarch, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas.

His Holiness was known to be a man of fervent love for the Lord Jesus Christ and faithfully served as the Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church and the 122nd Successor of St. Peter in the Apostolic See of Antioch for nearly thirty-four years. He was a well-educated man—wise, compassionate, and knowledgeable. His exemplary life in the priesthood and monasticism exceeded sixty-seven years of deep devotion and godly servitude.

The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt and throughout the diaspora will forever remember his sincere alliance and stalwart support, which mirrored the fathers of the unified early apostolic churches. We join in prayer and in honoring the blessed life of His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas who helped cultivate the legacy of Orthodoxy amidst a contemporary world of complexities and trepidation.

May his pious memory be eternal.

Bishop Youssef,

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States