

# MIGHTY MAGAZINE ARROWS



Life. God. Truth. For Coptic Youth

## Launch Out *Into the Deep*



“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth”

Psalm 127:4

# Contents

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

## My Beloved,

“Launch out into the deep” is an intimate message scaled to each one of us—strive and stretch beyond the mediocre comfort zone of lukewarm and shallow spirituality to experience a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with Christ. As you read this edition of the Mighty Arrows Magazine, you will recognize yourself on many occasions where slothfulness, complacency, arrogance, and foolishness interfered with nudging closer to Christ. Why are these barricades in your life? Remove the barriers and experience real freedom and a different kind of inner peace, contentment, trust, and an abundance of grace. Examine the voices that are currently dictating your pleasures in life and compare those to Christ’s calling. Can you hear Him? Can you distinguish His voice from the others? Are you willing to do things His way or are you satisfied to toil all night—fruitless? Finally, do you really mean it when you pray daily—and several times daily, “Thy will be done?” Perhaps some of the answers for you will be found in these pages here written by your fellow sojourners and servants. May this experience into your own deep sea transform you, invigorate you, inspire you, and initiate a deeper and better relationship between you and God.

God bless you,



Bishop Youssef  
BISHOP, COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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**MIGHTY ARROWS**  
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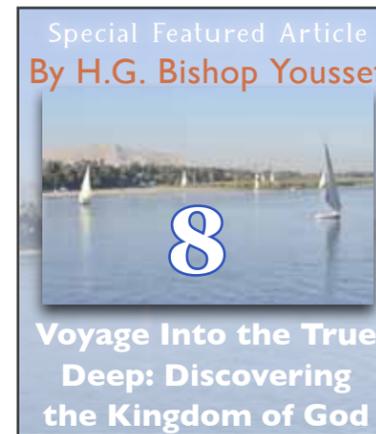
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# Love 104

Love is Circular

BY JAMES HELMY

*“He who loves his wife loves himself.”*<sup>1</sup> I cannot think of a more paradoxical verse in the Bible. We have been told repeatedly in every sermon we can remember that love must be wholly focused on the other without even a hint of self-interest. The Desert Fathers we read, who are usually so easy to misunderstand, teach that self-love is to be repulsed. Servants in church are fond of telling us not to think too highly of ourselves—and for good reason, as we do it a bit too much. But why does St. Paul use love for oneself as an incentive for loving one’s wife? Why is it so obvious to him, contrary to the rest of us, that in loving a wife, a husband is really looking after himself?

I was once invited to a dinner held by a certain married couple. While they were in the process of preparing the entrées, the gas tank for the grill malfunctioned. I arrived when the husband was out looking for another one. “Oh, my poor husband!” exclaimed the wife. “He had such a long, tiring day at work, and now he has to make another trip with the car to get a new tank. How I feel for him!” When the husband had returned, I was outside with him trying to install the new tank to the grill. He exclaimed, “Oh, my poor wife! She worked so hard the whole day preparing all this food, and now she has to deal with a grill that won’t start. How I feel for her!” It astonished me that each one was focused so compassionately on the lot of the other, on their beloved, as they forgot themselves. To me, the only witness of both scenes, the two beings seemed to enlarge and adorn themselves with grace at that moment.

We are in the habit of thinking that when something of value is

shared with another person, it is depleted from our account in order to increase *their*

account. When we were children, if we happened to have the maturity and kindness to share half of our meal with a hungry friend, we were conscious of the fact that we had sustained a fifty percent loss, but that he had gained an equal portion. It was viewed, in other words, as a *sacrifice*. When as adults we share the tithe of our money with churches and charities, we calculate it as a ten percent *reduction* of our finances, and not so much as an increase in any particular good. In short, when we *give* something away, it is really away that we give it, and it may be hard to imagine what good might come of it. This is, of course, due to the poverty of our spiritual vision.

Love is on a completely different level. It is a mysterious thing, where the more of it that is shared with another person, the more my own supply is increased. It’s a spiritual commodity that can only be depleted by never giving it away. Love shares the good with another, not by dividing with her, but by uniting myself with her so that the good is expanded and enjoyed together by two souls. The same good is enjoyed in its wholeness by two in one spirit, not halved and shared by two separate persons. For love is, in essence, an *extension* of one’s self. I cannot love another person at a distance. I must come close to that person, speak intimately with her, open my soul to her, and in doing so extend the boundaries that circumscribe *who I am* to also encompass the other person. When that happens, the love that was limited to just me is shared with her, and thus, doubled or maybe quadrupled.

It must be said that it is extremely hard to love some people. But in stubbornly refusing to offer them

... in loving a wife, a husband is really looking after himself ...

my love, I am unconsciously killing the love *inside of me*. How can a man love God whom

he has never seen, asks St. John, if he cannot love his brother whom he can see?<sup>2</sup> It’s an unanswerable question. I may bring my body to church, I may don the religious attitude, I may adopt a worshipping posture, I may say I am in God’s presence, and I may assume I’m doing my Christian duty. But when the service is over, and I run into my neighbor, or possibly my enemy, and look the other way in disgust, what have I achieved? Into what have I made myself? Not a Christian and certainly not a son of God—who is by nature a peacemaker, but instead a product of this world. The world makes a habit of recording offenses and leveling *accounts*, but Christ’s love far transcends all such debased thinking.

The beauty of marital love, which is not quite available in non-marital love, is that I am required to practice this expansion of myself day-in and day-out. I cannot avoid the other person. I cannot hide from their unlovable traits; and neither can they hide from mine. Our only two options are either to put forth the hard work into forgiving and loving, which in the end provides nourishment and growth for our souls, or else to take the easier but destructive route of separation, which can only make a soul squeal and shrivel in anguish. By loving her, by giving up my time and energy for her, I am actually benefitted and blessed beyond compare in the process. The more of my love I give to her, the more I receive back, and a harmonious cycle of ever-increasing love starts in motion.

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:28.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:20.

## Part IV

# The Joy of Working with the Lord

When the Lord says it will be done, it really will.

BY MARIAM GUIRGIS

In this last article of the series on *The Joy of Working with the Lord*, Uncle Saad wants to emphasize how he witnessed God working in the whole process of purchasing the church that God gifted to a small Coptic congregation in the Diocese of the Southern United States.

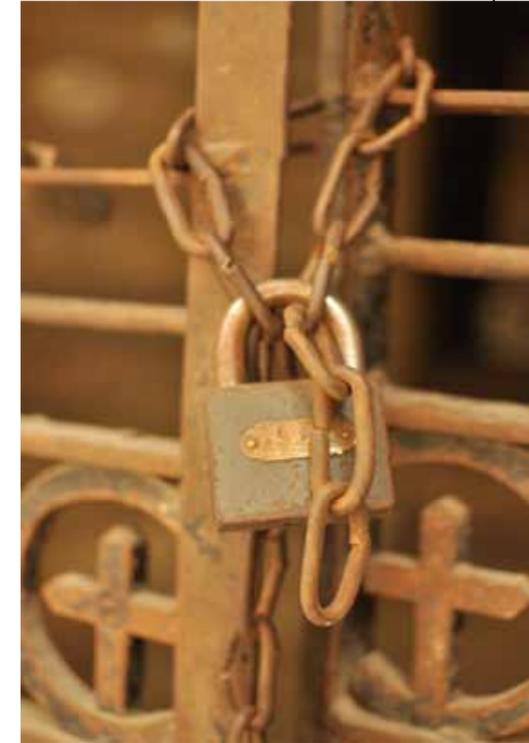
After the offer was accepted by the seller, the members had to think of ways to get the rest of the money to pay for the building. They contacted people they knew, but did not send out thousands of letters asking for donations, as they did when they had the construction project in mind. Miraculously, they received more money this time than they did before. One strange incident happened during that time, when the treasurer went to check the church’s mailbox. He found an envelope from someone he did not recognize, and who lived in a state that did not belong to the Diocese of the Southern United States. When he opened the envelope, he found a check for ten thousand dollars made out to their church. No one on the board, nor in the congregation, knew the person who sent that donation. They did not even know how this person knew about the need of this church; but Uncle Saad was watching, and he knew that it was God in action. So he sat back and decided to keep watching how smoothly the deficit would be covered—and sure enough, it was!

After the purchase was completed, the congregation immediately sang glorification to God for finally fulfilling their dream. Everyone felt it was a gift from God to them, and

everyone started serving with all their hearts. People started taking care of the unattended land around the building, cleaning the church, stripping down walls, and building an altar according to the Coptic Orthodox tradition. It was such a joy to witness and be part of working with oneness of heart.

It is worth noting that when the building was inspected, it was advised to change the roof of the structure within two years or so. That required another huge amount of money that the church would not have had by that time, but it was a problem of concern later down the road. Tornado season was just a few months after the purchase. Usually the area where the building was located did not suffer much during this season. However, in this particular year, that area was hit drastically by a tornado. People close to the church said that the tornado was right above the mountain where the building stands. The strong winds blew parts of the roof shingles and the board members knew they had to change the roof soon. Thank God, they had purchased property insurance when they bought the building and the insurance covered all the cost of changing the roof, except for a deductible. So the congregation not only got a beautiful building, large surrounding land, and very nice furniture for an unbelievable price, they also got a new roof that would last for twenty years or more by paying only a small fee—compared to the price of the new roof.

Uncle Saad bowed his head in awe of God’s work. From the banks denying



loan applications, to construction project failure, to choosing a realtor, to offer—acceptance, to working out the finances, to getting a new roof, Uncle Saad found no words to say to God. He vowed to tell the story of the birth of this church and to testify to God’s amazing grace, care, and leadership.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III used to encourage people in the diaspora to write the narratives of their churches and how God worked in those stories. Uncle Saad wanted to fulfill Pope Shenouda’s wish—and so he did.

To God be the glory, dominion, and wisdom, now and forevermore.



# Amma Syncletica of Alexandria

A life of Obedience, Chastity, and Poverty.

BY MAREYA NAGUIB

were mainly attained from her hardships and connection with Christ, rather than from reading spiritual books. One of her famous teachings deals with obedience. Amma Syncletica states, *“I think that for those living in a monastery, obedience is a greater virtue than asceticism, however perfect. Asceticism carries within it the danger of pride, but obedience has within it the promise of humility.”* She also reminds those who are starting their journey with God that it is not easy at the beginning, but if one perseveres, great joy awaits, for those who endure to the end shall be saved. *“In the beginning there are many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and afterwards, ineffable joy; so we must kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work.”*

To cast our nets into the deep to catch fish requires effort and hard work. However, it also requires the divine grace of God and His support. One should not give up easily. If you fall, get up and continue on the journey. His Grace Bishop Youssef says, *“Nothing worth having comes easy.”* Therefore, if you see heaven as something worth having, strive to keep vigil and work hard seeking Christ’s aid to help you throughout your journey. May we learn from Amma Syncletica the true life of struggle and perseverance.

## Bibliography

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**Many of us living in this world go from day to day with no growth in our spiritual lives.** We either feel lost, confused, or simply are unaware of our ailing soul that is pleading for God’s everlasting, fulfilling water. We live in a society that teaches us to always aim for more. There is never a period of satisfaction. Everything is changing rapidly and the world seeks us to be at its level—a new iPhone, new iPad, new house, new car, etc. It is a never ending list that slowly sinks our soul, letting us forget the most important thing in life. However, a beloved desert mother named Amma Syncletica was aware of the world’s loophole and chose to abandon everything so that she can unite with the One (Christ).

Amma Syncletica was alive during the third and fourth centuries in Alexandria, Egypt. She came from a rich family and held a high social status. Many approached her for marriage, but she refused them all in order to be Christ’s bride. She eventually decided to sell all that she had and fled her parents’ house. She cut her hair as a sign of consecration to God and moved to the family tomb outside of Alexandria where she began her monastic journey. Women disciples began to gather around her, which led to the development of a monastery, and Amma Syncletica became their spiritual mentor. With great asceticism and countless hours of vigils and prayers, this holy woman lived to the age of 80, leaving this life to live forever with her King in about 350 AD.

Her teachings to her fellow nuns were great spiritual pearls that

# Tossing the Fish Back

Thoughts about welcoming new “fish” into the church.

BY MYRIAM FAHIM



**L**iving in South Florida is great for fishing. I love to go to the pier with the kids and watch their excitement as they catch fish. Sometimes we catch big ones. Usually though, it is only the small fish that are biting. As these fish are not worth cleaning and cooking, the kids have a great time tossing them back and watching them swim away.

Every so often, I contemplate that we do the same to non-Coptic believers who join our churches. In the miracle of the great catch by the disciples, we are reminded that it is Christ who fills the net with souls.<sup>1</sup> Then these *fish* attend our churches and splash! Are sometimes tossed back by us into the sea of the world!

First, please allow me to avoid over-generalizing—some congregations do enjoy new *fish*. They make new believers feel like they really belong. Others may believe that they are welcoming. In reality, they are often not. It is worthwhile to dwell a little bit on this topic to raise our awareness as a group. Here are a few questions to help us decide if we are people who welcome or people who toss.

Do you speak to non-Coptic believers after a service or do you leave that to someone else?

If a visiting priest or bishop shows up and gives his sermon in Arabic, do you try and find someone to translate for the non-Arabic speakers or is that not your problem?

Do you comment on or stay away from someone whose physical appearance (skin/hair color, clothing, tattoos, piercings, dreadlocks, etc.) is different than yours or do you treat them like your Coptic friends?

Do you help new believers follow in the hymns and prayers or do you assume that they will figure it out themselves?

Are you culturally sensitive to others or do you expect them to become just like you?

When a non-Copt is around you, do you make jokes and references that they can understand or do you just say whatever comes to you?

Can non-Coptic believers be invited to your home or is that something you just reserve for Copts?

These questions are intended to be thought-provoking. However, the most important ones are not part of the above-mentioned list. They are as follows, “Is our Orthodox religion inextricably intermingled with our ethnic identity? If it is, should they be “unmingled” or will we lose something of ourselves in the process? If they remain as they are, will we be guilty of tossing some of the Lord’s fish back into the sea?”

More and more people are becoming interested in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Now is the time to examine ourselves and decide who we are, and who God wants us to be. Will we answer the Lord’s call, *“Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men,”*<sup>2</sup> or will we hinder Him?

<sup>1</sup> Malaty, Fr. Tadros, *The Gospel According to Saint Luke*, Google eBook, pp. 99-100. [http://books.google.com/books/about/The\\_Gospel\\_According\\_to\\_Saint\\_Luke.html?id=5n9y0sDl7voC](http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Gospel_According_to_Saint_Luke.html?id=5n9y0sDl7voC), consulted on September 8, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:10.



“Fasts and vigils, the study of Scripture, renouncing possessions and everything worldly are not in themselves perfection, as we have said; they are its tools. For perfection is not to be found in them; it is acquired through them. It is useless, therefore, to boast of our fasting, vigils, poverty, and reading of Scripture when we have not achieved the love of God and our fellow men. Whoever has achieved love has God within himself and his intellect is always with God.”

—St. John Cassian

**W**hat is the kingdom of God? Why do we want it? How can we get there? Who can take us there? Where can we find it? We are sojourners throughout life—pilgrims journeying through many crossroads. Until we first seek the kingdom of God, all that we obtain are but vanities—a shallow existence in a materialistic world that offers many instantaneous and frivolous pleasures, but no real contentment, no satisfaction, and no peace. God’s word does not just scratch the surface, but slices through the depth of one’s soul.

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.<sup>1</sup>*

The first discovery is in learning what it is? A kingdom is ruled by a monarchy. Ask yourself—who is ruling your life now? Who is in charge of your heart, your thoughts, your desires, and your dreams? Each person elects a different kind of monarchy to rule his life. Some choose work and become workaholics. Some are money-driven and may resort to unscrupulous means to obtain it. For others, it is an infatuation with an idol

or a group, such as fans of celebrities or athletic figures. Some choose themselves as their own self-appointed monarchs who rule via pride and ego. There are those, of course, who prefer to allow their social standings and prestige to be the dictators of their own kingdom. Though not many, there are some who diligently seek a real kingdom—a better kingdom than the best that the world can offer—the kingdom of God.

*Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.<sup>2</sup>*

The second discovery is in realizing how much we need the kingdom of God to fill the void in our lives. Without God, there is a real emptiness—a tangible, physical, emotional, and psychological void. We hear about many celebrities that have accumulated more accolades, riches, fans, and fame than could be imagined to bring any one person a measure of success and happiness. Yet, they are not comforted by any of these. Worldly success has no real spiritual value, and thus, it is not a unit

Boats on the Nile



# Voyage Into the True Deep: Discovering the Kingdom of God

Special featured article  
BY **HIS GRACE BISHOP YOUSSEF**

of measurement for the kingdom of God. Without God, all that there is in the world is but darkness and void. He is the light of the world, just as He told us from the beginning.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.<sup>3</sup>*

*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."<sup>4</sup>*

The third discovery is in finding the way and the right gate that leads to the kingdom of God. Christ provided a simple roadmap with two key landmarks: (1) He is the way, (2) Go through the narrow gate. It may sound simple, but being a true Christian is not meant to be easy. One must exert effort, unconditional love of friends and foes, forgiveness, long-suffering, self-control, and emptying out of oneself. Without a doubt, Christianity is the most charitable religion in the world. Christians have contributed to more altruistic deeds and humanitarian organizations than any other faith. Nevertheless, it is the most attacked and persecuted of all beliefs. A conservative lifestyle, modest clothing, chastity, monogamous marriages, honesty, and thoughtful speech have become ostracized in today's modern society that carelessly seeks immorality as the monarch to rule from within each

person. That is not the Christian way. Christians refuse to respond to evil with evil.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."<sup>5</sup>*

*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.<sup>6</sup>*

The fourth discovery is in developing a genuine relationship with God. Thus, He will reveal Himself in this growing relationship with you. He wants to surround you with His love, angels, saints, and people here on earth that also love Him and will be good company for you. He waits to see you awaken each morning and to grant you sleep without anxiety every night. He stands, kneels, and sits with you everyday when you reach out to Him in prayer, or when you just think about Him, and even when He is far from your thoughts and the day's demands overwhelm you. Give Him your time. He redeemed your life and gave you His. From the beginning, people have desired to see the face of God. So, for a while, He revealed Himself in mystical ways. Finally, His great love could no longer bear it. He bowed the heavens, came down, and hid His glory in fragile human flesh so that we may see Him, touch Him, walk with Him, weep with Him, rejoice with Him, die with Him, rise with Him, and live with Him eternally. He does not even desire your sacrifices, but only praise from you is sufficient for Him. Unite with Him in the Holy Eucharist and know how much you are loved.

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight,*

*and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.<sup>7</sup>*

*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.<sup>8</sup>*

The fifth discovery is in looking in the right place. Your heart is the deepest of the deep—so deep that many people do not really know themselves, but God knows you very well.<sup>9</sup> Look deep into your heart—into your own soul if you can, when you pray, when you think, when you deal with others, when you sit alone, when you dream, when you repent, when you are happy, and when you are sad. The less the clutter is to which you are clinging, the more vibrant and vivid the kingdom of God will ultimately appear to you—then you will surely find it.

*The kingdom of God is within you.<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:12.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:31-34.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:1-4.

<sup>4</sup> John 8:12.

<sup>5</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 7:13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 12:1-3.

<sup>8</sup> John 15:13.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 139.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 17:21.

# Taming the Tongue

Gossip and rumors in church are destructive.

BY RANYA BOTROS

**The church is a house of prayer. We all should be attending church for the same reasons—to find comfort and healing of our sins.**

When we attend church, we are participating in the heavenly, spiritual prayers and sacraments that nourish our souls. "It is written, *My house shall be called a house of prayer.*"<sup>1</sup>

As Christians, we have no business spreading rumors or gossiping about others, especially in church. Gossiping hurts others, ruins people's reputation, and may turn people away from church. "My lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit."<sup>2</sup>

Is it necessary to spread rumors about who's getting engaged in church or not? Who will benefit from the spread of invalid rumors about others? If people are ready to announce things in church, they will. If not, why should we make announcements on their behalf if we were not asked to deliver the message? Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church. It should be treated with reverence, as it is a Holy Mystery. When we start to spread rumors about others with respect to marriage, we are in essence diminishing the importance of this mysterious and blessed Sacrament. We begin to treat it like any other trivial subject or topic and use it to hurt others.

*"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh."<sup>3</sup>*

Whether it is about marriage, employment, or anything else, we should not participate in gossiping or spreading rumors. If we do, we have to be prepared to accept the consequences of engaging in such sin. We will lose friends and turn people away from church. This is the complete opposite of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Think before you speak: am I edifying people by my words, or am I creating a stumbling block for my brothers and sisters? "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body."<sup>4</sup>

Let us call sin what it is. When we gossip and spread rumors about others, we are sinning against Christ and our neighbor. Some may say gossiping is part of many cultures, including the Egyptian culture. Just because it may be part of our culture, does not mean we have the right to engage in this behavior. We are forgetting that our faith rises above and transcends culture. It is indeed a sin to engage in this behavior; so let us not hide behind culture or anything else to justify ourselves.



All of us should put forth the effort to respect other people's privacy. We have no right to interfere in other people's affairs, unless we are truly aiming to provide assistance. "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters."<sup>5</sup>

When you go to church, ask yourself this: "Am I going to church to be with Christ and find healing, or am I going to cause offenses and hurt people? Do I want Satan to cause divisions, or do I want my brothers and sisters to be united in one Body of Christ?" Life is too short. If we are going to waste our time here on earth causing problems, we will have to answer for our behavior in front of our Lord on Judgment Day. "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it on the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."<sup>6</sup>

Let us tame our tongues so as not to offend anyone. Do not fall into the devil's trap by allowing him to fool you into thinking there is absolutely nothing wrong with tarnishing people's reputations or hurting others by your words. That is simply far from the truth. Put yourself in other people's shoes. Would you like someone to gossip or spread rumors about you? If not, then don't do it to others. "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."<sup>7</sup> Let us not turn people away from our Father's house by creating a negative environment in church. We should all rejoice and be glad to be in church. All of us should strive to create a healthy environment in church because it is our connection to the heavenly Supernatural and Divine. "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 21:13.

<sup>2</sup> Job 27:4.

<sup>3</sup> James 3:6-12.

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 18:6-7.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 4:15.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 12:36-37.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 7:12.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 122:1.

# From Rags to Riches

The secret of abundance and the reason for scarcity.

BY BOULIS IBRAHIM



*"Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing..."*<sup>1</sup> Many situations in our lives remind us of this verse. There is so much demand on our time in this fast-paced modern era in which we live. A nine-to-five job is often effectively an eight-to-eight one. In large cities, a considerable proportion of waking time is spent in commuting. Some families' main source of income is their own business, which could be a supermarket or a petrol station that they have to run 12/7 or even 24/7. Families, especially those with young children, are often so busy working every day from when they wake up to their bedtime. Weekends also may offer no respite since one may need to do the family shopping; drive children to a music school or a club; run errands; chase garages, insurance companies, and workmen to fix faulty equipment, cars, or property; arrange birthday parties or weddings; entertain guests; or a myriad of other possible chores. In some countries and communities people may be in a much worse situation where they have to walk for hours just to see a doctor. There is much toil in life.

Toil, however, can either bring forth fruits or be in vain. Did you ever pass through a period of time when you felt you *toiled all night* with no avail? Did you ever feel that you worked extremely hard to achieve an award, a certificate, a recognition, a promotion, or a status, and yet achieved much less? Did you invest much time and effort in enhancing your business, shop, or supermarket without the anticipated success materializing? Did you work longer hours and exert your mind to increase efficiency, productivity, profitability and every other measure of performance with no particular success? Did you study hard at school, college, university, or for professional examinations, and no matter what advice you followed, or how hard you tried, you were rewarded with no more than mediocre grades? Did you toil all night and catch nothing? That is what the fisherman Simon Peter felt.

Not knowing or seeing an obvious reason for the blockage to development or the scarcity of outcome is perplexing and frustrating. Fishing was Simon's job and livelihood. He had been working for nearly twelve hours with no results to show at the end of it. It wasn't a case of him not trying hard enough, or going about it the wrong way. He did what any of us would do: use common sense and knowledge, specific expertise, proper equipment, and follow the rules of the job. He had a boat, a net, at least two assistants, and partners with their own boat. He also set out to fish at night, which is the normal time of day to fish. He and his partners must have also tried all the net-casting techniques and fish-shoaling spots on the lake that they knew. Not only did he do everything right, but he did all that he could do. Yet he still caught nothing.

Have you faced such a situation in your life? Did you try all you can to get or achieve something that is fundamental to your living, such as education, family, or career, and yet your efforts were fruitless? Did you feel despondent, frustrated, and helpless as you realized your hard work was in vain? Is there an aspect of your life that is just not right, or not improving no matter what you do? If so, then Simon Peter was in your shoes. He *toiled all night and caught nothing*. Feeling despondent, Simon

enacted normal human logic and usual human expectations when he said those words.

*"Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch,"*<sup>2</sup> the Lord commanded. Simon must have thought: "But Lord, with all due respect, it is morning time now and fishing is a night activity. Besides, we are tired and we have tried all shoaling spots all night." The Lord's command defied human logic and job norms. Nevertheless, out of respect to this Teacher who used his boat to teach the masses on the shore, Simon saw no harm in trying and said, *"Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."*<sup>3</sup> The abundant result was beyond Simon's wildest dreams. Not only did his net catch fish, but he and his partners kept letting down their nets and pulling large catches until their boats started to sink. Simon and his partners never experienced this pinnacle of achievement at their line of work. Their greatest aspiration was perhaps a catch of twenty or thirty large fish. But to catch enough for two boats to start to sink, must have been at least half-quarter a ton of fish for each boat (roughly the weight of three men). They, then, realized that there is more to this Teacher than meets the eye, and more to His words than mere letters.

If you have been trying with all human wisdom, common sense, work ethics, and job norms but have not experienced a pinnacle of achievement in your career or line of work, or have not been rewarded with abundance for your efforts, dedication, and hard work, then it could be that the Word of God is missing from your life. Perhaps He is calling you for something else. If you are facing particular difficulties in any worthy aspect of your life, then it may be that the Lord is trying to tell you something. Perhaps there is a sin blocking your progress, a particular thorn to which He wants to attract your attention, or perhaps a specific attitude, relationship, or act that has *"hidden His face from you."*<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the problem is not with the *boat*, the *net*, or the *partners*, but whether all of these are put in the service of the Word of God and His command.

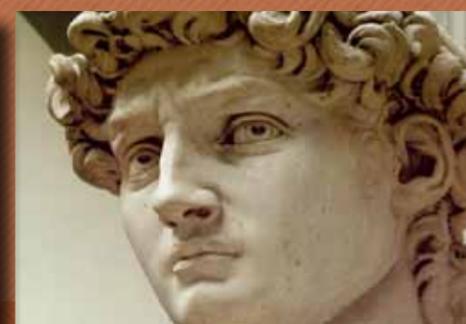
Finally, seeing what miracle of abundance happens by the Lord's words, Simon and his partners, James and John the sons of Zebedee, forsook all and followed Him. I wonder whether after such an achievement I would have enough love, dedication, and courage to *forsake all and follow Him*, as they did.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 5:5.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 59:2.



## Spiritual Depth

Spiritual strife of all kinds takes on the same trend.

BY THEOPESTE KERELOS

Most of the notable leaders of the people of God, both in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the saints, are remembered most for their virtues and their great deeds of nobility for the Lord's sake. However, one tends to overlook how those people attained their virtues and how God prepared them for the tasks set before them. God's trend for preparing His chosen ones is simple though: He guides them into the depth where He nourishes them with the virtues and qualities they need.

Take Abraham for example. God did not just appear to him in a vision and tell him that He would bless and multiply his descendants. Rather, God first commanded him to leave his kinsmen and go to a far country. Then, when God desired to take Abraham spiritually deeper, He left him without a son. When He did finally grant Abraham a son, He asked him to offer that son as a sacrifice. Only when Abraham passed all of these tests and reach the level of spirituality that God had planned for him did God promise him that He would bless and multiply his descendants and that *"In [his] seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."*<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, God did not see it fit to set Moses as the deliverer of the children of Israel until he had spent forty years as a shepherd, away from the luxurious life he had lived as the son of pharaoh's daughter. When God desired to reveal the Ten Commandments to Moses and the children of Israel, He withdrew Moses into seclusion for forty days before handing him the two tablets.

In the same manner, God allowed David to attain deeper levels of spirituality as he was fleeing from Saul. After leading him to the spiritual depth He intended for him, God finally established King David on his throne.

Likewise, our Lord Christ trained His disciples intensely until they reached the spiritual depth needed to spread the word of God to the world. He allowed them to witness the miracles He performed. Moreover, as mentioned in the Gospel according to St. Luke Chapters 9 and 10, He allowed the twelve disciples, and then seventy others, to go preaching while He was still on

earth so that they would gain experience under His supervision. He also explained matters to His disciples openly, instead of the parables with which He spoke with others. Our Lord Christ ensured that His apostles reached the spirituality they needed in order to found the Christian church, deeply rooted in the faith and in the love of Christ.

This church, the Lord's vineyard, brought forth countless fruits who, after much strife, were deemed worthy of inheriting eternal life. Among those is St. Anthony the Great. In order to win his eternal reward, St. Anthony sold his possessions and went into the wilderness where he endured all manner of diabolic warfare and asceticism, growing *"from strength to strength,"*<sup>2</sup> in order to reach that high level of spirituality which allowed him, with God's help no doubt, to found monasticism for others to follow his example and seek the depth of the spiritual life.

Other examples of those who sought and reached the depths of spirituality are the anchorites, the first of whom was St. Paul. He, like St. Anthony, abandoned his earthly possessions in return for the everlasting wealth. As the fraction for the Great Fast witnesses to those anchorites, they *"dwelt in the mountains, deserts, and holes of the earth because of their great love for Christ the King."*

The same pattern of growing in spirituality is obvious in the lives of all the church fathers, ascetics, all levels of clergy, defenders of the faith, and so on. God led them step by step until they achieved their goals for the glory of God and attained the heavenly reward prepared for them before the foundation of the world.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 22:18.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 84:7.



"Saint Peter baptizing the Centurion Cornelius" oil on Canvas, Francesco Trevisani

**I**t was early in the morning. He got up. Well, I should say something woke him up. But as with the last few days, his unrest is understandable. He looked over to his wife, still asleep, peaceful and undisturbed, and then walked out onto the balcony. He could see the sun rising over the city.

god! Look at this!" he said to himself with outstretched arms as he thought of last night's dinner discussion with his legionnaires. The sunrise was majestic, colorful against the conflicting sky of clouds hiding the sun rays from the earth. He stood there admiring the creator's handy work. He knew in his heart that there must be a creator.

"Who are you?" He voiced his

question to the sky and then slowly gazed down towards the city. It was also beautiful but unlike the sky, the city was laid on a rigid grid, symmetrical, and monumental in its construction. "Obviously man-made," he said to himself. "What a contrast!"

Caesarea was an impressive town, a masterpiece in its own right. The administrative center of the Judean Province of the Roman Empire, built by Herod himself in honor of the Emperor, only a fortunate few, such as himself, were privileged enough to live and serve there under Pontius Pilate. He had served in the Roman Navy for years before becoming a centurion assigned in Caesarea. "As impressive as Herod's city was with its fortified walls and enormous harbor," the centurion thought, "surely it pales in comparison to the creator's handiwork, whoever He is."

Sighing, he took up the nearby scroll in his hands and read the news from the province in disappointment. No mention was made of the turmoil that has taken place. Not even a word about the Jews and their conflict over one of their own named Jesus. Nothing of the uprising, and later the fall of his followers. He shook his head and went back inside.

Cornelius distractedly proceeded through his Sabbath routine. He left his marital chamber to eat, exercise and bathe, then retired to his own private chambers. He called in one of his most favored and loyal soldiers to aid him in his private affairs. The soldier knew his task on this Sabbath would be like any other. He would read aloud the accounts settled this week, the weight of grain in the storehouses, and the count of the cattle and livestock. Cornelius would then dictate to him the portions divided up between his household, his servants, and what will be given out to the poor and needy. The young man knew the centurion was always generous, and that he had gained the respect and

appreciation of those around him, including the soldier himself, who was troubled to notice that his commander was a bit unsettled this Sabbath.

"May I ask what's on your mind, sire?" he inquired. Cornelius stiffened, but answered truthfully nonetheless, "Ever since I left the Italian Regiment and was moved here to Caesarea, my life has not turned out the way I thought. I am more conflicted and torn over my beliefs than I have ever experienced before. This city is full of every people, nation, and faith. How can one be sure of his own?" He did not raise his question expecting an answer but more of a silent prayer for the creator God to make him certain that He is the One and only. After continuing on to settle his affairs, Cornelius reclined on his chaise again. He was tired, exhausted not from the day's activities but from his mental search for a God, a God with the big G.

He dozed off and unexpectedly received the answer he was seeking. He had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God who called his name as if to wake him, saying, "*Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.*"<sup>1</sup>

With that, the angel was gone and Cornelius jumped up knowing full well what he saw was a vision from God and that he ought to do exactly what the angel had told him. "But Joppa is a two days' journey down the coast of the Mediterranean," he thought, confused. "Simon Peter is a Jewish name I believe. And Simon a tanner?" In the midst of his questioning, a thought came to him, "Just obey." And so he did. He called his attending soldier and two of his servants, told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

He then ran up to tell his wife about the vision and what God instructed him. The shock was evident on her face, but even then she kept her astonishment in her heart, whispering silent prayers for her husbands' men. Joppa is just

northwest of Jerusalem and she has heard all about what had taken place there. Pontius' wife couldn't stop telling the women all the details about this Jesus who performed miracles, said the most outlandish sayings, divided the house of Israel, and died at their hands by crucifixion. She also told her about her dream the night He was captured. She had warned Pilate not to have any dealings with Him because she knew He was innocent. Cornelius' wife had no idea why her husband would see an angel that would direct him to a Jew. She knew of their God and how He led his people out of Egypt through the Red Sea, how in the most unimaginable ways He has brought them victory over city after city till they reached their promised land and how now they awaited a king. The threat of a Jewish king may seem like a joke to the Roman Emperor but she dared not attempt to guess who it could be. Neither she nor Cornelius ate that day, they both prayed instead with expectant hearts for what God will reveal to them through this man Peter.

The next day, Cornelius got up early yet again. This time, however, he was filled with joy and peace. He couldn't wait to call onto his relatives and close friends. He sent out two more servants to gather them saying, "We're expecting a guest from God. Come see and learn for yourselves." He ordered the guest chambers prepared and the kitchen staff to make an elaborate dinner for everyone. Slowly, everyone started to trickle in. Their inquisitive eyes widened as they awaited the arrival of the man from Cornelius' vision. But calmly they waited.

After what seemed like hours, the door opened and the soldier walked in with the guest of honor. The room went silent. Cornelius fell at his feet in reverence but Peter made him get up saying, "*Stand up; I myself am also a man!*"<sup>2</sup> He then proceeded in, looking at the large crowd, he raised his voice to be heard and said, "*You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call*

*any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?*"<sup>3</sup>

Cornelius answered and told him about his vision three days earlier. Then Peter began to speak, "*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*"<sup>4</sup> Peter then spoke of Jesus Christ and how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit, His miracles, His crucifixion, death and resurrection. He also told them about His appearing to many witnesses who believed, His command to preach to everyone, and His appointment as judge of the living and the dead.

Everyone around the room was attentive and amazed. To some, what Peter was saying may sound foolish; a man rising from the dead, surviving torture and hanging on the cross, and a power that is unparalleled to anything they have ever seen or heard in the expansive reach of the Roman Empire.

And while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. And they all began to praise God and worship with one another.

God, the creator of all, showed us His great love for us, his creation. That's you and me, all tribes, tongues and nations. God's church is comprised of all these and He desires for all to be saved. Let's demonstrate God's heart toward everyone and not be quick to judge or exclude any who fear God. It's time for the church of Jesus Christ to unite and show one another, and the world, the love that we were commanded to live and the peace that is beyond all understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 10:4-6. <sup>3</sup> Acts 10:28-29.  
<sup>2</sup> Acts 10:26. <sup>4</sup> Acts 10:34-35.

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# Launching Into the Deep

BY JOSEPH GHEBRIAL

Jesus Christ clearly instructed Simon where to cast his nets to catch a bountiful harvest. His precise words were, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”<sup>1</sup> These words were guaranteed to yield their intended purpose with no room for error. However, prior to complying, Simon told Jesus Christ that he “toiled all night and caught nothing.”<sup>2</sup> Considering that Simon was still haunted from the experience of the previous night, which yielded nothing, you have to give him credit for uttering the following: “Nevertheless, at Your word, I will let down the nets.”<sup>3</sup> Simon was a fisherman and Jesus of Nazareth was a carpenter. Not only was Simon a fisherman, but he was probably a very skilled fisherman. We know that he was raised on the Sea of Galilee and that he knew those waters well, along with a few other men. Clearly, he also knew and understood fish. He knew their habits, their spawning beds, and their favorite feeding places. Simon knew that the best time to catch fish was during the night; and he had worked tirelessly through the night and still caught nothing.

I’m sure the command to “launch out into the deep and let down [his] nets for a catch” seemed so foolish to him at the time. Jesus Christ gave the disciples a similarly foolish command when He told them to find food for the multitude.<sup>4</sup> These encounters make me wonder: how many times do we think that God’s commands to us are foolish, irrational, or meaningless? We may not verbalize these thoughts, but deep in our hearts, we begin to doubt, concluding that the Master really does not understand the situation. We are the experts after all—who would know more about our lives than we do?

What is important to realize is that despite his doubts, Simon Peter’s faith shone through when he said “nevertheless at Your word **I will let down the net.**” His faith may have been small, but it was there, and that’s a lesson for each of us today. With faith, all things are possible. If we forget this, we fall into despair.

Hope may be dim, and the possibilities may seem utterly beyond all expectations, but we must not give up. Simon launched out. In all likelihood, he moved with casualness, not excitement, dragging his feet but still willing to obey the Master. And when he lowered his nets in obedience, he found so many fish that he needed to call for help! His reward was two boatloads of fish! This shows us that we need to stop making excuses and coming up with reasons for why the command we’ve been given seems foolish and instead start taking actions. Then, through the awesome powers of fervent prayers and living a life with executable faith, anything is “possible through Christ, who strengthens me.”<sup>5</sup> We must start living out our faith. It is not enough to say, “Yes, Lord, I’m sure there are fish somewhere in the lake.” Jesus wants us to



Where’s OUR Faith?

Raphael 1515

launch out. He wants us to put faith into action.

Reflectively, trying hard doesn’t always get the job done; Peter and his colleagues had “worked hard all night,” so no one can doubt their efforts. They simply were too shallow (spiritually), and all the efforts in the world would not have gotten them the catch for which they were hoping. Remember the parable of the wise and foolish builders? Both built a house; but when the storms came, only the wise man’s house was still standing. Why? Because, as Jesus said, he “dug deep and laid his foundation upon the rock.”<sup>6</sup> Doing things God’s way, no matter how uncomfortable or unusual, will result in the greatest blessings. Think about Naaman in 2 Kings 5 who wanted to be healed of his leprosy. He was reluctant to follow the words of the Prophet Elisha because he doubted that he could be healed by dipping himself in the muddy Jordan River. It was only when he humbled himself that he was healed. Jesus’ humanity had to have had this attitude for a very fleeting moment in the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”<sup>7</sup> Peter was a professional fisherman, yet his willingness to “let down the net” (that is, let down his pride) was what allowed him to obtain a great catch. If you want to be greatly blessed, then do things God’s way—get out of the shallow, and launch out into the deep! As Christians, we should never let the trials of toiling all night and catching nothing hinder today’s blessings. Regardless of how futile the past trials may have been, this is the season to give the Lord room aboard our situation—as we are all in the same boat. By doing so, there is never any cause for regret as depicted in Simon’s bountiful harvest through obedience, faith, and work **as instructed by Jesus Christ.**

<sup>1</sup> Luke 5:3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See Luke 9:13-16

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 4:13.

<sup>6</sup> See Luke 6:48.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 22:42.



## Work Hard for Godliness

Early Christian writers tell us how to avoid spiritual laziness.

BY DAVID W. T. BRATTSTON

**T**he sin of sloth consists of sluggishness of soul to make the effort necessary to perform a good work, that is, attend church on Sunday. The sin of laziness or sloth also occurs when a person is disinclined through inertia to make the exertion necessary to maintain a good relationship with God.

Americans today tend to overlook the sinfulness of sloth or laziness. So many labor-saving devices and service industries are available to perform so many kinds of tasks that Christians are tempted to assume that godliness or being a good Christian is an easy matter that can be attended to at our own convenience or left to service people, that is, clergy, and machines.

This was not so for the earliest Christians. In the New Testament, the first generation of Christians clearly spoke against unwillingness to exert effort to maintain friendship with God through good works. The Apostle Paul exhorted Christians to “not grow weary while doing good.”<sup>1</sup> The Letter to the Hebrews was written partly so that its readers would “not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”<sup>2</sup> Hebrews also teaches that maturity in the Christian life is obtained by “those who by reason of use have their senses exercised.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Christian living requires practice and exercise, that is, effort, and repeated effort.

The second generation of Christian writers, the first successors of the apostles and Bible writers, produced two long letters that touch on spiritual laziness. One of them, *The First Epistle of Clement*, was written towards the middle or end of the first century A.D., when some apostles were still active. It condemns those who are “slothful in well-doing and cease in the practice of love.” On the contrary, “let us hasten with all energy and readiness of mind to every good work.”<sup>4</sup> The next chapter exhorts readers to “be prompt in the practice of well-doing”<sup>5</sup> and “be not lazy or slothful in any good work.”<sup>6</sup> Note again that practice is necessary: Christians must exercise themselves repeatedly to gain virtue and godliness.

The other ancient writing, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, contains a passage on what is necessary for progressing in or maintaining a Christian life:

*Thou shalt love, as the apple of thine eye, every one that speaketh to thee the word of the Lord. Thou shalt remember the day of judgment, night and day. Thou shalt seek out every day the faces of the saints, either by word examining them, and going to exhort them, and meditating on how to save a soul by the word.*<sup>7</sup>

We are, thus, to pursue godliness or the Christian life in community with our clergy and local church, always remembering that God will one day judge us. Sometimes requiring help from other Christians, godliness, or a healthy spiritual life was not regarded as easy or to

be attended to at leisure but was seen as entailing strenuous and constant practice. Because this letter is sometimes dated as early as A.D. 70, it might have been written by the Apostle Barnabas frequently mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

In the early third century came the Church scholar Origen, a native Egyptian. His knowledge of our faith was so great that he was consulted by pastorbishops throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Origen taught that hard, positive effort is necessary to maintain progress in the Christian life. He told his audience to exert themselves to be free from sinfulness, exerting hard work and sweat.<sup>8</sup> The sincere Christian must engage in constant practice and vigilance because progress in the spiritual life does not come to the slothful or inactive or negligent.<sup>9</sup> He warned that favor from God can be lost through negligence of mind and laziness of life.<sup>10</sup>

In the same vein, Origen touched on the natural inclination to spiritual inertia. Progress in Christian commitment and overcoming sin do not come if we are lazy or drowsy.<sup>11</sup> Weak Christians are slack and sluggish; they should stir up their idle and neglectful spirits in order to practice godliness and the other precepts of the gospel.<sup>12</sup> He preached against laziness of mind and sluggishness of soul accompanied by bodily lusts and pleasures.<sup>13</sup>

These early authors were at one in affirming that exertion is necessary for the performance of good works and maintaining friendship with God, and that constant practice is necessary in the Christian life, like constant exercise is necessary for an athlete. Another term for these is godliness, of which the First Letter to Timothy 4:7 says: “Exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 6:12.

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# Inner Work

BY HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III

Monastic Sermons Delivered by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III During His Detainment in 1983-1985 at St. Pishoy's Monastery in the Natrun Valley, Egypt

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

Today, I would like to speak with you about a feature of monasticism: inner work. Inner work is the most important feature occupying a monastic; rather, it is the distinctive mark between the monastic and the secular.

“Watchfulness helps a man more than works, and laxity harms him more than rest.”<sup>1</sup>



What does inner work mean? It is work inside your mind and heart. It is how your thoughts are working inside. A monastic might perhaps be a laborer, or perhaps be a sluggard. The laborer is always working internally: the heart is always working with God; the mind is always working with God; the thoughts cling to God; the sensations cling to God. One who is not so is lost, oblivious to one's condition. If monasticism is, as they say, “*Detaching from all to attach to the One,*”<sup>2</sup> then inner work is laboring to detach from all (from the negative perspective), and laboring to attach or unite with the One [God] (from the positive perspective). If one does not work internally, one could become open prey, a toy for demons. I remember—perhaps, you all know this story from the *Bustan*,<sup>3</sup> they say there was a superb scribe from whom people came seeking words in his good penmanship. When his labor increased, he only had one sentence: “*Being preoccupied with my salvation, I have not what to write to you, so please forgive me.*”<sup>4</sup>

If one works internally, one could attach to the virtue of silence easily, because words interrupt inner work. This is why when St. Arsenius was asked about his silence, he said, “*God knows that I love you, but I cannot live with God and with men [at the same time].*”<sup>5</sup> One who wants to work internally needs to be silent. Yet, there is one who is silent, but the thoughts work for other things than God; they work on judging others, in vain-glorious thoughts, in other subjects, and so we cannot call this holy silence. Holy silence is when one is silent in order to work internally with God.

What is inner work? Inner work might be psalms, prayer, meditation, or rumination, praising and singing, self-compunction in the presence of God, or struggling against thoughts. Let us get an idea of these.

Inner work might be the psalms, yet not all psalms. There are psalms that a person says with the lips while the heart is not engaged in them,

or their meaning, nor is speaking to God in them. Inner work is when the psalm touches your heart and you feel in it that you are addressing God and speaking with Him. This is inner work, because it has gone inside you, inside your depth, inside your heart, inside your thoughts.

Likewise is the case with praising. Hymns could turn into musical tunes with which a person had no feeling of addressing God. If you want to have inner work, you have to work with understanding, with depth, with fervor, with meditation, with connectedness between you and God. Prayer internally can take a certain holy feature. Prayer can be with humility, with faith, with love, with understanding, with compunction of heart. There are many features to spiritual prayer. Inner work is how to gain these features during your prayer. Train yourself on how to pray with love. This is inner work. Reciting the psalms with the lips is external work, but how to pray with love is inner work. How to pray with faith, with hope, with understanding, with meditation, all this is inner work. You need to train yourself on this. If you have not trained yourself, then you have not begun monasticism; you are in the external person, not the inner person. This applies to praising, chanting, and spiritual songs.

Is reading considered inner work? I can say that it is a means to inner work, but not an inner work in and of itself. It is a means to unite your thoughts with God, or a means to unite your feelings with the heart of God. It is a means that leads to inner work. If reading is simply for education or knowledge, then it is not inner work. Therefore, the monastic keen on inner work is careful about the type of reading—that it is spiritual, with depth, or a type that moves certain feelings. Once one reaches these feelings, the reading material are set aside and one enters the relationship with God. Here the meditation accompanying the reading is more important than the reading itself. See the expression that our father and

teacher David the Prophet said, “*I have seen an end of every perfection, but Your commandments are very broad.*”<sup>6</sup> Each commandment is so broad, he was unable to reach its end. Here, superficial reading is ineffective, but there is a need for reading with depth for the person to enter inner work through prayer.

Regarding prayer, can a person pray unceasingly, without being bored for example? One would grow weary. What is a solution? There are varieties of prayers. There is prayer with the psalms, there are short repetitive prayers, there is the prayer of the heart, there are personal requests, there are the prayers of the prophets and saints, and there are other prayers. Let us assume someone is busy on a job; how can this one remain in inner work? In this case, long prayers are impractical, but the short prayers and the repetitive prayers could be useful. One might repeat, “Lord have mercy,” thousands of times; it will work internally. Another might repeat, “Thank You God,” “I praise You God,” or, “I praise Your name.” Repeating any such phrases makes the heart ruminate on them, so that even if one pauses, the prayer continues in the mind and keeps going. This is through one short phrase. It does not even need to be a full sentence.

To be continued...

<sup>1</sup> (Miller, 1984), 249.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ibid, 411.

<sup>3</sup> Arabic word meaning paradise. Paradise of the Fathers is a renowned book for monastics.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. (Ward, 1984), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>6</sup> (Azmy, 2009), 127.

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*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Revised Edition). (1984). (B. Ward, Trans.) Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications.

# PILLARS OF OUR TIME

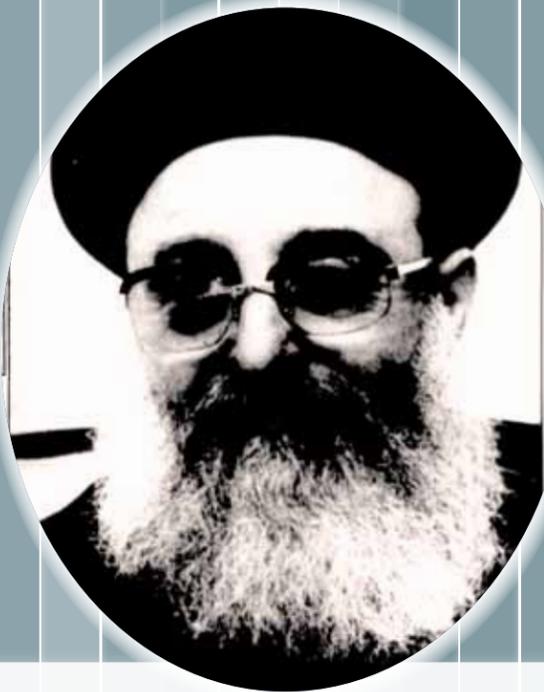
## Ordinary People Serving in Extraordinary Ways

# MAKING AN IMPACT

## Bishop Samuel Beloved Bishop, Scholar, Martyr

(1922-October 6, 1981)

BY MARIE GUIRGUIS



Samuel, serving the Church in many capacities. His Grace founded the Ministry of Services in Egypt. Domestically, he was the liaison between the Church and Egyptian government. Meanwhile internationally, he participated in the central committee of the World Council of Churches, representing the Coptic Orthodox Church.

By 1967, the war between Israel and Egypt left Egypt with a shortage of insulin. Bishop Samuel was sent to Switzerland to acquire information about prisoners and casualties, as well as obtaining one million dollars' worth of these needed medicines. After the departure of His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI, he was nominated for the papacy and his name was among the three remaining for the altar lot. On October 6, 1981, he was seated with President Sadat when the parade was being held, during which both men were ultimately killed. His body now rests between the Church of the Virgin and Saint Reweis and the Church of the Virgin and Saint Pishoy at the papal headquarters in Cairo.

May the prayers of this blessed bishop be with us. Amen.

**Bibliography**  
<http://st-takla.org/Saints/bishops/saad/samoil-services.html>

Bishop Samuel was the *Bishop of Public, Ecumenical, and Social Service of the Coptic Orthodox Church*. A man of peace and a scholar all throughout his life, he became a world-renown spokesman for the Church he served, and the God he loved. He departed to the Lord at the hands of a grenade while appearing as a representative of the Church during the assassination of the late Egyptian president Anwar Al-Sadat.

This blessed bishop was born Saad Aziz Abraham in Cairo, 1922. At the young age of 16, he entered the University of Cairo pursuing a degree in law, but he was unable to obtain a license because he was under the age of 21. He continued his studies at the American University in Cairo where he earned a degree in social work. He later also received a Master's degree in sociology from Princeton University.

His service began locally by reading the Holy Bible to poor Christian farmers at home. If their children had not been baptized, he would take them to be baptized at the nearest opportunity. Afterwards, he ventured out, spending two years in Ethiopia and establishing a seminary. In 1948, he returned to Egypt where he was ordained a monk and became Father Makary Al-Souriany.

He became the secretary of Pope Kyrillos, and then was elevated to become Bishop

# Bishop Samuel

## Killed while representing his faith

The year 1981 may well be called "The Year of the Martyrs." Violent murders and attempted assassinations have occurred on several continents, among world leaders and among the unknown poor.

Bishop Samuel, bishop of public, ecumenical and social services of the Coptic Orthodox Church, was a man of peace, a scholar, a world-known and traveled spokesman for the church he served and the God he loved.

Killed instantly by a grenade while appearing as a representative of his faith in a national celebration, little has been written about his total sacrifice in the shadow of the same-day death of the president of Egypt. But what greater gift of love can any man give than to lay down his life while serving the cause he stood for?

His first cousin, Dr. Samir Makhail, has been an orthopedic surgeon at Bay Pines Veterans Administration Hospital for the past 14 years. Some of the information in this story comes from him and some from the bishop himself.

Bishop Samuel was born Saad Aziz Abraham in Cairo, Egypt in 1922. His father was in the Ministry of Finance in Cairo. At age 16, Saad entered the University of Cairo where he obtained a degree in law. Unable to obtain a license because he was under the age of 21, he went to the American University in Cairo where he earned a degree in social work. Later, he received a master's in sociology from Princeton University.

It was while he was in law school that he became interested in Sunday schools. He began to spend time in Cairo and Zaiser reading the Bible to poor Christian farmers in their homes. If their children had missed baptism, he would take them to the nearest church for baptism. After graduation, he really gave his life to Christ, according to his cousin, who said the family was a very closely knit one.

"He had a chance to go to Ethiopia where he stayed two years in villages in the mountains teaching Christians the word of God," Mikhail said. "When he returned to Cairo in 1948, he was ordained a monk and became Father Makry of the Lel Soriani Monastery. Pope Kyrilus, who had ordained him, appointed him as his secretary. Later, of course, he was elevated to bishop, and became Bishop Samuel. As the public official for the church, he was the liaison



Religion

ANN WELDON

(Editor's note: This is Ann Weldon's tribute to Bishop Samuel (right), who was killed Oct. 6 as he sat in a reviewing stand with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Both were watching the military parade that marked the anniversary of the day in 1973 when Egypt plunged across the Suez Canal to break Israel's Bar Lev Line. Ann Weldon had met Bishop Samuel when he was visiting relatives in Pinellas County in January 1979. She again saw him in May 1979 when she met his family and visited his home in Cairo. Her last contact with him was by telephone in Cairo just 16 days before that fatal day last month.)

between the Coptic church and the Egyptian government."

And so began a long record of service, not only for the church, but sometimes for the government. In 1967, after the war with Israel, the Egyptian government didn't know how many of its people were imprisoned or killed. The bishop was sent to Switzerland and from the Red Cross was able to obtain the information.

After the war, there was no insulin in the country, and the bishop was able to obtain \$1-million worth of the much-needed medication. When Haile Selassie was deposed in Ethiopia, the bishop knew his health was failing severely, so he flew to that country and asked the ruling government to deal mercifully with Selassie. He was successful in this mission and the former king died in his palace.

Bishop Samuel became internationally active. He represented the Coptic church in the World Council of Churches, serving on the central committee and a variety of other church groups and conferences.

"He was a dynamic person, loved by everybody," Mikhail said. "He met presidents, queens, heads of many countries. In Cairo, he created centers to teach the poor to help qualify them for jobs. The night President Sadat was to fly to Israel, he sent aides to Bishop Samuel to get verses from the Bible which would be appropriate for him to quote on his peace mission. It was after midnight when the bishop completed the request, and so his chosen passages

became a part of the historic speech in the Israeli Knesset."

The Coptic church was founded in Egypt in 42 A.D. by St. Mark. He was killed in 68 A.D. Some 600 years ago, his relics were smuggled to Venice, Italy from Alexandria. It was Bishop Samuel who went to Rome and negotiated with the Pope of the Roman church for the return of St. Mark's relics. In 1968, when his relics were returned, there was a parade and a great celebration in St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo. Bishop Samuel also worked on one of the committees revising the Egyptian constitution, according to the local doctor.

Perhaps one of the most interesting stories told about the Bishop's life was about the time "he almost became pope." In the early 1970s, when it was time to choose a new pope after the death of Pope Kyrilus, Bishop Samuel received the highest number of votes for the office.

However, it had been decided by church leaders that the new pope would be chosen from three bishops receiving the highest votes, and that an "Altar Choice" would determine the one to serve. A 7-year-old boy dipped his hand in the bowl containing the three names, and the church had a new pope — Shenouda III.

"Bishop Samuel gave his full obedience to the new pope," Mikhail noted.

It was in 1978 when a member of the Egyptian Council was killed (a Moslem) that it was discovered the bishop's name

was on the top of the "hit list." For one year, he was given round-the-clock protection. But three years later, the same fanatical Moslem religious group, the Brotherhood, succeeded in its deadly mission.

The 40 days of official mourning were over last Saturday, over for two men of peace, President Sadat and Bishop Samuel, one a Moslem and one a Christian.

Bishop Samuel chose not to be

buried in the cathedral of his church in Cairo, but to be laid to rest in St. Mina's Church on the outskirts of Alexandria. The church was built by Pope Kyrilus, who is also buried there. The official portrait of the bishop chosen to be displayed at his funeral service in the cathedral, and also at the memorial service held there last Saturday, was made by *Evening Independent* and *St. Petersburg Times* staff photographer Jackie Greene in 1979, at the time of Bishop Samuel's visit to Dr. Mikhail.



# QUESTION & ANSWER

New FALL 2014 Edition  
**GENERAL QUESTION**  
And its Answer

**Q:** I am going through a very positive spiritual stage, and I need much guidance so that I can continue and persevere. How do I truly benefit from, strengthen my prayers, and grow positively in them? How should I read the Holy Bible to benefit from it the most? What is the appropriate way to speak to God and how is it that I can converse with Him and feel His presence at all times? When I am tempted to commit any sin, how should I go about overcoming it? How do I overcome Satan when he tries to discourage me or prevent me from continuing to draw closer to God? How does one remain humble after feeling God's presence? I would greatly appreciate both the practical and the spiritual methods for doing such things.

**A:** Humbleness is the main attribute we should have in our spiritual lives and our relationship with the Lord. Without humbleness, we will not be able to submit our lives to Him. With regard to prayer, St. Theophan the Recluse says, "Stand with reverence before God, with the mind in the heart, and strive toward Him with longing." Whether you are praying or reading the Holy Bible, you have to have your mind tuned to the Lord so that you might hear Him when He converses with you. After you finish your prayers, have some quiet time with the Lord listening to His words to you. When reading the Holy Bible, do not just read it for knowledge or because this is the right thing to do, but after every verse or few verses you read, ask yourself, "What personal message is God revealing to me in these verses?" This is how to tune yourself to hear the Lord and His message to you.

Persist on holding onto the Lord—praying and following His commandments, knowing that this will make you a target for the devil's attacks to hinder your spiritual growth. However, since you know this is expected, you should be prepared and not let him deceive you. Our Lord Jesus Christ's response to Satan was, "Away with you, Satan" (Matthew 4:10), and this should be always our response the minute we realize we are tempted. Once a sinful thought comes to your mind, chase it away instantly preventing it from growing and controlling you.

One who really feels the presence of God cannot be but humble and feel unworthy to be standing before the Mighty Lord.

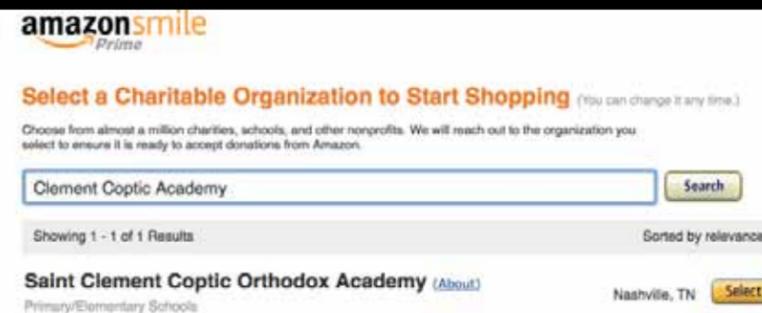


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St. Clement Christian Academy Administration

# Events & Activities

## DIocese PROGRAMS

**Family Ministry Program** [fmp.suscopts.org](http://fmp.suscopts.org)  
(FMP) Summer Registration deadline: December 10, 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](http://tsp.suscopts.org)

Program Registration deadline: March 15, 2015

### 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](http://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](http://copticangel.org)

A program designed specifically for individuals with special needs.

### St. Verena Resource Ministry (SVRM)

(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/](http://www.suscopts.org/svrm/)

### Asaph Hymns Institute

 | [www.sushymns.org/](http://www.sushymns.org/)

(AHI) is the first ever online hymnological seminary.

### Evangelism & Apologetics

 | [CopticTruthMinistry.org](http://CopticTruthMinistry.org)

Learn about Evangelism and Apologetics through conferences, literature, and events.

### The Mentoring Program - A helping hand

Mentoring is the process of helping an individual develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes in order to set and reach important life goals.

## DIocese EVENTS

### Pre-Marital Retreat

TX: Nov 14-16, 2014 | FL: Jan 9-11, 2015 | GA: Jun 12-14, 2015

### Crossroads Graduate Convention

 | Feb 19-22, 2015

### THY College Convnetion

 | FL: Dec 17-20, 2014

### Winter High School Girls Convention

TX: TBA | FL: Dec 21-24, 2014 | TN/GA: Dec 22-25, 2014

### Winter High School Boys Convention

TX: TBA | FL: TBA | TN/GA: Dec 21-24, 2014

### Winter Kids Camp

 | GA: Dec 21-24 | TX: Dec 29-31 | FL: TBA

### Family Convention

 | TX & FL: Nov 26-29, 2014

### Winter Middle School Convention

GA: Dec 26-29, 2014 | FL: Jan 1-3, 2015 | TX: Dec 26-28, 2014

**Texas Winter College Convention** | Jan 9-12, 2015

**CPAR** | Feb 26-Mar 1, 2015

**Arabic Youth Convention** | FL: Mar 6-8, 2015 | TX: TBA

**Ethiopia Mission Experience 2015**

May 26 - June 5, 2015

**FOR MORE - See [suscopts.org](http://suscopts.org)**

\* Dates are subject to change. Please check [www.suscopts.org](http://www.suscopts.org)



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New SUMMER 2014 Edition

**BIBLE QUESTION**

And its Answer

FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS CHAPTER 1

**Q:** What does the word "separated" in verse 1 mean about St. Paul?

**A:** Consecrated to God.

\* Taken from <http://www.suscopts.org/q&a/index.php?qid=1235&catid=602>  
If you would like to ask any questions, please write to [admin@suscopts.org](mailto:admin@suscopts.org)

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## St. Mary & St. Demiana Convent & Retreat Center

Through the grace of God, the Southern Diocese has purchased a property located in Dawsonville, GA.

**DONATIONS NEEDED** and can be made online at [www.suscopts.org/diocese/donations/](http://www.suscopts.org/diocese/donations/) then select St. Mary & St. Demiana Convent or via mail. Checks should be made payable to 'Diocese of the Southern United States' indicated in the memo for 'Convent Purchase' and mailed to:

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States  
P.O. Box 1005 Colleyville, TX 76034

## Triumphant Christian Mission

Thanks be to God, the Diocese found an exceptional opportunity to help serve those in need to triumph-being victorious over addiction. The property in on a beautiful 4-acre land, has a large 57 room building, and enough space for outdoor activities (basketball court, soccer field, and a recreation area).

The program will include a similarly common 12-step program to host the clients for 6-9 months depending on their recovery speed. Christian and mental health healing are the focus, and a social worker will be available to advance residents into the community. Donations may be made online at [www.suscopts.org/diocese/donations/](http://www.suscopts.org/diocese/donations/) and select Triumphant Christian Mission. Checks should be made payable to the Diocese of the Southern United States. Kindly indicate in the memo for 'Rehab Center' and mail to: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States P.O. Box 1005 Colleyville, TX 76034:

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States  
P.O. Box 1005 Colleyville, TX 76034

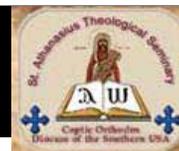


## St. Athanasius Boarding Seminary

St. Athanasius Seminary is a two-year residential seminary program that prepares young men for a life of service in the Coptic Orthodox Church. The seminary is located on the grounds of St. Mary and St. Moses

Abbey in Texas, USA, overseeing the beautiful Corpus Christi lake.

Lectures and dialogue with top Coptic Orthodox clergy/teachers will be conducted at the Abbey, and students will participate in the abbey's liturgical life and have access to the extensive library and other facilities. This boarding seminary is designed by His Grace Bishop Youssef and is endorsed by his Holiness Pope Tawadros to create a cadre of young Coptic men rooted in the fundamentals of the Coptic faith.



## St. Athanasius Seminary

The mission of the St. Athanasius Theological Seminary is to provide the participants with a sound Orthodox Christian education, which prepares them to become Christian leaders who are spiritually mature, biblically and theologically responsible, professionally competent, intellectually astute, deeply committed to sharing the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ and fully equipped for the various ministries of His church.

## Family Ministry Program (FMP)

The Family Ministry Program is a distance learning program that will facilitate servants' understanding of a triadic healing encounter with the living Christ, facilitated by a helper who assists this redemptive, healing process, helping another get unstuck and moving forward on the path to spiritual maturity and psycho-social emotional health .the Holistic approach human . This program is designed

to educate and equip those within the church to provide Biblical encouragement, direction, hope, understanding, and aid to those in need within our community.

