



A Mighty Arrows' question for His Grace Bishop Youssef:



“What Determines who can be Called ‘Coptic’

ΜΕΤΡΕΜΝΗΧΗΜΙ ... ΜΕΤΨΑΜΙΣΙ

is it Birthright, Nationality, or Religious Endearment?”

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His Grace's response:

Often I am asked by those born in the United States of Egyptian Christian parents or those converts of American descent whether or not they are “Coptic.” Is it correct to simply say that they are only “Orthodox” as many are told?

In the United States the descriptive term “Orthodox” could denote a wide range of religious groups from Jewish to Protestant which does not correctly identify their religious beliefs. So I want to address the “Coptic” descriptor in spiritual principle rather than religious ethnocentricity.

Who should correctly be called “Coptic?” Let us examine this in terms of the American person who converts to the Coptic Orthodox Church following evangelism efforts of a college friend. Here I'd like also to answer a question about our identity, who am I?

First, when God created a woman it was to do a different function from the man. Do the man and the woman know and accept their mission in life as a man or woman?

Second, is this convert college student considered a Christian? From an early church father perspective, *Theophilus a second century bishop of Antioch (c. 180) generally states we (both male and female) are called Chris-*

tians for this reason because we are anointed with the oil of God. So to be Christian means to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to be baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, to be anointed with the Holy Oil, to be established in the Body of Christ through Holy Communion.

Third, what comprises a Christian person in general? Is he a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? ***“You are the Body of Christ and members individually.” (I Corinthians 12:27)***

Fourth, what is considered an “Orthodox person?” Does he hold fast to the Orthodox teaching taught to him? To be more specific, does he hold true that the Lord Jesus Christ's teachings were handed down to us by the Apostles and have remained unchanged? ***“There is one body and therefore ‘one spirit.’ (Ephesians 4:4)***

St. Irenaeus wrote: *Although dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, the church has received this faith from the apostles and their*



disciples... The Church received this preaching and this faith. Although she is scattered throughout the whole world, yet, she carefully preserves it, as if she occupied only one house. She also believes those points just as if she had only one soul, and one and the same heart. She proclaims these things, teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony—as if she possessed only one mouth. For although languages of the world are different, yet the significance of the tradition is one and the same. For the churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different. Neither do those in Spain, Gaul, the East, Egypt, Libya, or in the central regions of the world. (c. 180)

Fifth, what is considered to be a “Coptic person?”

The word “Coptic” literally means “Egyptian” but now it means the Egyptian Christians **and** all those who accept the Coptic Holy Tradition and heritage and consider St. Mark as their father, apostle, and first patriarch. Irenaeus states, “After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.” (c. 180)

Clement of Alexandria further supports this by saying,

“Mark was the follower of Peter; Peter publicly preached the Gospel at Rome before some of Caesar’s equestrian knights and adduced many testimonies to Christ. In order that thereby they might be able to commit to memory what was spoken by Peter, Mark wrote entirely what is called the Gospel according to Mark. (c. 195)

The answer to these questions should determine if one is among the

“Coptic” Orthodox faithful.

Birthright does not function to make an individual actively accept his religious teachings. Birthright does not make one Christian different than another. Nor does birthright give one a special place in Heaven. Nationality denotes only where a person is born. Not every one in Egypt is Coptic Orthodox. Not every one in Egypt is Christian.

But it is everyone who believes that should be counted among the believers.

St. Polycarp identified the one church by its current location as he wrote: *The church of God that sojourns at Smyrna, to the church of God sojourning in Philomelium—and to all of the congregations of the holy and catholic church in every place. (c.135) ✱*