

# ***Coptic Music***

***Selected Writings***



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**Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ King of Kings and  
Lord of lords**



**THE BEHOLDER OF GOD  
MARK THE EVANGELIST  
SAINT AND MARTYR**



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of  
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

# Coptic Music: Value and Origins

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**By: Ragheb Moftah Habashy**

*Article by: Ragheb Moftah Habashy, Head of the Coptic Music Department, Coptic Studies Institute, Cairo, Egypt (1958)*

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

Music elevates the spirit. It takes it from this tangible materialistic world towards the intangible spiritual world. Art in general and music in particular fleshes out what is spiritual. It is the medium between spirituality and our material life. Every beauty in nature shows elevation and every artistic inspiration demonstrates a level of elation.

Music is not fantasy or distraction; it is part of life and one of its most important elements. Musical talents are in each one of us. Some have the strength to express it and others have the strength to feel it, enjoy it, and be touched by it.

The best instrument ever is the human's voice. People used vocal music since their very early existence on earth. It has no substitute. All mothers, starting with Eve, sing in order to calm down their babies. The songs or tunes may differ, but they have one source: Motherly love.

For thousands of years, people used music in worship to praise their creator. They used music when working in

prairies and over hills and mountains, when building their houses, when traveling down rivers or across oceans. Music is not just a combination of beautiful sounds that pleases the ear; it is an essential nourishment of the soul. Food might taste good, but the purpose of food is the nourishment of the body. Similarly, I won't be exaggerating when I say that music's purpose is the nourishment of the spirit.

The Old Testament tells us that musical arts existed from the very early existence of humans. In Genesis 4:21, we learn of Jubal son of Lamek of the 9th generation from Adam. He was the father of all harpists and organists.

When Moses and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Exodus tells us how "[they sang] this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously... And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." [Exodus 15:1,21] Also in Judges we read: "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel." [Judges 5:1-3]. And during the prophet David's time, music reached its fullness in poetry, melodies and performances. Music was an essential part of all their praises to their creator, their prayers in times of war and in times of peace, theirin times of joy and and in times of sorrow.

In Chronicles we read: "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and

instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD." [2-Chronicles 5:13].

With this artistical splendour, the Spirit came along, and with the strength and influence of music immobile materials were moved, and Jericho's walls fell down.

This is the status of art in worship it arrived to it's optimum.. How beautiful are Psalms!!.. People still enjoy them until this day.. They were written by the best ever mentioned psalters..

And Isaiah says in Isa 6:1-4: I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

The church on earth tries to imitate the Heavenly Church.. The Revelation Book says that all heavenly hosts despite their different classes praise around God's throne and in His house day & night saying the Trisagion and reply saying that to Him be Power & Wisdom & Strength & Honour & Glory & Blessing for all things were created by Him.. And Rev 5:8-9 says And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

This is life in heaven.. One hymn on heaven will

exceed all earthly hymns together in beauty.. That will be our life in the New Jerusalem coming from heaven..

*(There the Chorus sang the Bright Saturday Response on the Revelation reading: If you have ears, then listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches!)*

How beautiful are the tunes of these few verses of the Bible: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. I think that however great & profound our imagination is, we can never realise how beautiful these tunes were..

I think it became clear why Apostolic Churches did take a big amount of music in it's services & dogmas over the whole year.. Specially the Coptic Church where almost each word during the whole year whether in the morning or evening is chanted..

Here is the Apostolic teaching.. St.Paul speaks to Christians in his letter to Ephesians.. Eph 5:19-20 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; And in his letter to Colosians.. Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord... St.John Christosomos explains that "singing with grace in your hearts".. Also Origen, St.Basil, St.Augustin among others explained these verses clearly.. It was clear from that letter to Clossians that St.Paul was referring to Church Prayers which were well known to the readers.. From both texts, it is clear that St.Paul made music an essential element of worship and divided it to three: Psalms-Praises-Spiritual songs which are hymns.. These three parts were the

fundamentals on which all traditional churches: Oriental & Occidental based their prayers.. If anyone objects on Apostolic Churches we may say that the base is in the Bible..

*(Here a University Female Chorus sang the 'Big Fast' Hymn : Apenchois)*

The early Christian Congregation began in Jerusalem.. It did attend both the synagogue & the temple.. Several texts in the Acts book mentioned that.. Among which Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.. Although the temple's music was instrumental, the synagogue's music was vocal.. So, when the first christians became independent, they took their musical rites from the synagogue and used only vocal singing.. Composers & Readers who left Judaisme & believed in Christianity used to have the same job in Christianity.. So, Psalms were chanted exactly the same way they were sung in synagogues..

As the early Jerusalem's Church the music was vocal in all Oriental & western churches.. Also, it used the same Jewish way of psalm chanting in most cases as the Jewish Christian church.. That what was said by fathers: Apostles did transmit something from the Jewish dogmas & traditions to all lands..

With the beginning of Christianity, in every oriental or western country, raised prayers, liturgies & dogmas conforming with the nature & environment of each land also every land composed the music conforming with it's own taste so the Byzantine Church Music is Byzantine, the Egyptian Church Music is Egyptian, the Jewish the same.. The best example for that is that the Ethiopian Church although conceived and affiliated to the Egyptian Church for long generations remained pure Ethiopian.. That means that

the local inherited art had the biggest influence in forming the Church Art..

*(Here an Ethiopian Chorus sang an Ethiopian Hymn)*

That shows a big evidence on the difference between Coptic & Ethiopian Hymns.

So every nation took from it's previous worship tunes which were found appropriate. So undoubtedly, Greeks took from their ancient worship hymns and used it in Christianity.. Also Romans took from their Ancient war Music & used it and so did Egyptians..

Once St.Mark came to Alexandria, Inianos' family was baptised and Christianity spread quickly in all Northern & Southern Egypt in the first & second generations.. In year 400 the Anas-Elwogood Island had a church and a monastery.. Scientists agreed that no population believed in Christianity in strength & zeal as the Egyptians did.. The Ancient Egyptian man did in vain search for the unseen creative strength in the soul & spirit.

The most important tradition for the Ancient Egyptian City was art.. As the Ancient Egyptian arts were profoundly engraved in the people's heart, it appeared clearly in Architecture, Sculpture and Ornaments.. Very influenced, almost the same as the Ancient Egyptian with a compromise with the new positions & thoughts of Christianity in the first four generations where Christianity Hypostasis & basics were founded..

Let's have a look at Ancient Egypt's art the land which believed in Christianity.. Pithagorus, the Greek scientist visited Egypt after 520 BC during the Hellenic invasion to Egypt.. their pressure and destruction to all civilisation & troubled social life.. He said that he could gather from Egypt elements on which he based his well known musical theory!!

Singing & Music was necessary at every Ancient Egyptian festival.. No meetings lacked music.. Also women in every house, mastered music & practised it.. In the pharaoh's Palace there existed Musical teams or bands with singers they had conductors which were proud that they fill the pharaoh's heart with joy & can realise His wants with their beautiful singing..

Religious Festivals were real wonder and Glory when they move with the God in his ship over the priest's shoulders in the temple.. People used to present their offerings and salutations.. These customs were usually accompanied by Musical & Singer groups.. Many of the religious liturgies were accompanied by music.. Also kingly marches were lead by priests with praises & incense many of the priests were called Psaltos Priest.. Or King singer priests.. The Egyptian People is a very rich civilisation since old times.. Yet some of ancient words are said in Labours' songs and a song to Nile's Sailors sung in Arabic exactly in it's same Ancient Egyptian pronunciation which is:"Ya Tera Tiri we hatili..."

Egyptians usually preferred to use blind singers.. There were many and the Coptic Church still chooses it's cantors among blinds.. But we should take care and choose only the talented ones..

The Alexandria Library responsible " Dimetrios the Valerion" in 297 BC said that in their Honour & Intercession festivals for Gods Egyptian Priests used to sing on the 7 Greek vowels consecutively.. It produced beautiful sounds which satisfied them from using the Flute or Harp.. Nikomax the Mathematician who lived in the first century said the 7 vowels were special to the seven stars.. Until today, most of the Coptic Hymns are sung on these vowels.. Some are sung on Alpha (a) others on (e) as aretenshonty, the Big Alleluia and the Offering Alleluia.. Ancient Egyptians considered that

singing with these vowels represented the most profound religious expression..

*(The Chorus sang the Offering Alleluia)*

Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish Philosopher who lived in the first century said:

"The first Christians took from the Ancient Egyptian Hymns & used it in their new worship" Whether they took it as is, adding a spiritual dimension or didn't take it, the Egyptian Art was still living and was still Egyptian Flesh & Blood.. The Singary tune was named after Singar a city in the delta since Ramses II which became famous in the Coptic Aera for the numerous monasteries which were there around and it's church were 2 consequential Popes were chosen..

The Edriby Tune is probably named after Edriyah the City whose Ancient temple was changed by Abba Shenuti to a church.. Copts used also to find a relation with the Coptic word "Eder Hipi" which means sorrowful..

The text for hymn of the Cross: "When King Costantine's peace letters arrived Alexandria saying close the Baraby doors & open the churches" this hymn was written for the discovery of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in 326.. Many other hymn share this same tune with this one among which the Shaaneen Sheres & Tarh and the Cross Tarh Hymn.. That proves that these hymns are old..

Among the oldest hymns, one written by St.Clement of Alexandria in 180 in his book "Paedagogus" (the teacher).. It is a thanksgiving for Christ recited by new baptised people for their salvation from the seas of sins its translation is:"Holder of the wild animals, wing of the young birds, director of peace for ships, shepherd of kingly lambs, gather Your poor children to praise in holiness and sing in honesty with sincere mouths the Christ leader of children..

Jesus human's salvation, the Vineyard Shepherd, the heavenly help and the Holy sheep" No wonder that this hymn is no longer in use since our fathers wrote hundreds of hymns

The Oldest Christian hymn transcribed with musical signs was found on a Papyrus in Bahnasa.. Coming from the ends of the 3rd century it is a trisagion musically deciphered by Prof.Phales among which:"Let all forces praise the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit the only giver to good people Amen"

*(Here sang Monsieur Youanidy the Hymn with the musical note and his pure voice)*

This Papyrus is a very important one.. It is not like any of the thousands of old Coptic Papyrus available in Egypt & in the whole world.. Some of them return back to the 9th Century & of course copied from older copies (Many of them are concerned with music) Nothing has any musical sign except in one Papyrus in John Rylands Library, Manchester Collection.. Mr.Crum the Coptic Language scientist used some specialists to decipher those signs but they could never do it.. I hope Prof.Phales will arrive to a decision in this matter.

Coptic Hymns were transmitted as oral tradition from one generation to another until 1927 when I brought Prof. Newlandsmith (Composer & Ex-Prof. in London Royal Music Academy) we signed a contract to transcribe hymns and masses in Musical Note.. I will mention that in details later on..

The Egyptian Church arts & dogmas began to raise with the beginning of Christianity in Egypt.. The Egyptian Church has it's own four masses never used by any other church..

The Kyrollos Mass was written by St.Mark the Apostle himself.. Probably, this Mass' status became stable long ago before St.Kyrollos because it is very similar to St.James Mass & The Lord's Covenant Mass, the oldest liturgies.. Both St.Basil Mass & St.Gregory do share the same Awashy part with St.Kyrollos Mass that's why we think that their music also return to it.. Except those, most of St.Kyrollos Mass Music was lost.. Nothing remained except the hymn Oukoty & Ouoh Nay they are used for the Dead Mass (Requiem Mass)

Concerning the St.Basil Masses, there exist 3 masses named after St.Basil.. St.Basil of Costantinople Church Mass, The Syrian St.Basil Mass & St.Basil Coptic Mass (it has a Greek text).. These three differ from each other in text, dogmas & music..

Certainly, the Egyptian St.Basil Mass does belong to the Egyptian Church.. It was used before the division of 451 (long before St.Basil the Great).. St.Basil's Mass Music is pure Egyptian except the confession part & Confession Introduction they are Byzantine..

This Byzantine part also belongs to the Egyptian Church since it has no brother in the Costantinople text except a small sentence.. Neither in the Music, nothing is similar.. The St.Basil Mass Music, whether the Coptic or the Byzantine is so beautiful and have big influence if chanted in their original tunes and with a beautiful talented voice..

The Gregorian Mass also belongs to the Egyptian Church before division.. It's music also is Egyptian except it's beginning "The love of God the Father..." and the Confession are Byzantine..

"The Love of God the Father" is available in both the Coptic St.Basil Mass and Byzantine St.John Christomos but still their music are VERY different.. The Gregorian Mass Music is nothing but some Big Hymns which were going to

be lost unless I did record it several times from MIm.Mikhail who was the only one to have known it complete.. This mass is used in Big feasts.. It's tunes are splendid and profound and have celebration influence..

The Malachite Church in Egypt used these 3 masses also after the division of the Church until the 12 th century.. The 4th Mass is Abba Serapion Bishop of Tomees (Tamyel Amdid) who was the disciple of St.Anthony the Great and a friend to St.Athenese the Apostolic. It was published in 1894.. We have strong proof that it belongs to the church of Alexandria.. Part of it is exactly the same in St.Mark Mass.. We do know nothing about it's music or use.. It seems it wasn't used widely and didn't last for long..

In the writings of HH Gabriel Ben-Toreik Pope No 70 we got that some people tried using different masses than the 3 known ones.. In section 26 of his writings we found: "It came to me the weak, that some people in the Southern Cities (Seiid) pray inappropriate masses different from the three we all know which are St.Basil, St.Gregory & St.Kyrollos.. I defended people who are depending on that until they come at my residence and show these masses.."

*(Here was played a tape in Hegmn.Morcos priest of Matay-el-mahatta's voice "The Love of God the father", The Commemoration of Saints & Tarhim)*

Concerning hymns, a big rich collection survived and was preserved for the Church.. Their number exceed 300 Big & Small hymn.. Most of their texts are Coptic, some are Greek.. BUT all the music IS Coptic... These hymns are Spiritual, Profound & Beautiful.. They represent the High Standard of Spiritual Literature.. The original source of these hymns is pure Musical.. Some of them do last 15 minutes & are sung over one or few words or just a short sentence..

Some of them (only in Greek words) are in use by Malachite but have different Byzantine Music..

All Church services as Tasbeha, Evening & Morning Incense Offering, Masses, Feasts & Fasts have their own hymns.. It differs accordingly to seasons.. Many Hymns are said just once a year. Which means it was composed for a special occasion.. Which proves that the Coptic Church is a very Musical One.. The Coptic Dogmas with their hymns throughout the year represent the LIFE in both the Old & New Testaments which shows CHRISTIANITY with splendid beauty in representation..

The sorrowful hymns have a very strong influence.. No music in the whole world is similar.. It seems that this special aspect did characterise Egypt since very old ages: Herodote who visited Egypt in 460 BC said in his book about Egypt section 79:"One thing I am wondering about, which is the source of the song called Linos.. I think it is so old there, they call it Maniros.. They say that Maniros was the only son of their very first King.. He died very young so that they sang this sorrowful song for him.. And that this song was the first one they had.." In 1933, when more than 30 European Musician & Scientist heard these sorrowful songs, in the Music Conference held in Cairo, where I had the honour to be a member, a strong feeling mastered them.. I will never forget the "Singing Science" Professors in the Sorbone - Paris who asked Hegmn. Morcos Shenouda to repeat the Commemoration of Saints OVER 6 TIMES.. Also Mr.Newlandsmith said in one of his speeches: "Give me Cruzu's voice singing some Coptic Hymns and I will destroy Jericho's Walls.."

These sorrowful Hymns make the earthly boundings disappear, make the soul humble some of them could destroy the Hypocrite soul who insists in living sinner!!

*(Here the chorus sang the hymn Golgotha)*

The Coptic joyful hymns have their very special spiritual taste.. They make us feel that the heavenly beauty is very superior to all this world's feelings.. We do believe that a hymn, sung in a talented voice and sincere soul has big influence more than dozens of words in attracting people to the Lord..

*(Another Chorus sang Ei Aghaby whose music is Coptic and another hymn said in the end of Resurrection Feast)*

Religious Hymns which were composed similar to folkloric songs played a big role in spreading heresies and also in fighting them.. By the ends of the second Century, the Syrian "Beridessane" composed 150 psalm to spread the Gnostic Heresy which he joined he and his disciples.. So St.Avraam the Syrian composed hymns to resist & oppose it and gathered Choruses of Virgins who were intended to become nuns to sing them.. Also Arios composed folkloric songs to spread his heresy.. And a lot of fathers in Egypt & Europe composed opposite hymns to resist his thoughts.. As I did mention previously, Coptic Music was transmitted orally since the beginning of Christianity until 1927 when I called the Great Professor Newlandsmith who spent eight years transcribing it from the voice of Mlm.Mikhail until the work was done in 16 volumes.

In 1931, when this job came to it's middle, the renewing supporters who called themselves the Reformation Party attacked me saying that I don't want to preserve the old things.. On this same year in May, I travelled to England and gave with Mr.Newlandsmith three speeches concerning Coptic Music in the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London.. Hundreds of Newspapers & Magazines in Europe, the States, Egypt & the Far East wrote about these

speeches.. Fortunately, I still have all these speeches, here I show it to you.. Here on the first page an article in Oxford Newsletter: "A Great Speech added to the group of this season's speeches" These articles described Coptic Music as Very Spiritual Music Very impressive and A Great Musical Treasure..

Here are the 16 volumes dear Copts would you publish them.. I don't want any personal benefit, I even don't want to write my name down there.. After that, I don't think that any group of people would lack in preserving the most important tradition he & the whole world have, the oldest musical heritage. Many scientists everywhere are waiting for the publishing of these volumes to study Coptic Music & know the Coptic musical scales.. Although great researches on Byzantine, Syrian, Gregorian Music were published, not a word in any Musical Encyclopaedia was written about Coptic Music!!

I am working on recording the hymns on tapes to provide the Great Genius Prof. Phales with the recordings and transcriptions and prepare to publish them. This Professor is the one who deciphered Old Byzantine Music Transcription..

Coptic Music is Not Arabic, Not Turkish, Not Byzantine & Not Western IT IS PURE ORIGINAL EGYPTIAN MUSIC.

Until today, many traditional Church music is only vocal among which Coptic, Greek & Syrian.. Above mentioned Scientists and many others advised to preserve it. They said it is the biggest crime to try playing it on musical instruments for it was designed for human's voices.. Playing it on strings gives poor, cut performance which does not represent by any way the hymn itself.. Playing it on Piano (or keyboards) requires adding harmony which also is not appropriate and requires us to destroy it's basis & skeleton

foundations.. That means destroying the Church Heritage which is considered one of the most profound Church traditions.. The Greek Church also doesn't use instruments even the Cymbal & Triangle are not used there..

Prof. Newlandsmith did find some few small Coptic pieces, counted on one's hand fingers which could give the same effect when played on violin as when sung (A Capella) such as the Revelation Book Response..

*(Here Monsieur Yoanides played it on his violin, then Mlm.Sadek Attalla sang it, both were wonderful and mastered it very well.. To show the difference, Monsieur Yoanides played the Blessing Hymn (Lahnel Baraka) which is Tenouosht.. Mlm.Sadek sang it as well.. The difference was really big & clear, which proves that these hymns should be only vocal and should never be played on instruments..)*

Although we do have this great heritage, Copts tend now to use western songs & hymns which are superficial in both structure & meaning.. It's music is repulsive with our Church's beautiful dogmas & hymns.. What really hurts me & breaks my heart is that these songs did invade some of our Coptic Orthodox Church's atmosphere. which surely not appropriate with our father's spirit.

So, dear Copts I urge you to preserve Your heritage & Your church's tradition.

*Shenouda Mamdouh*

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**COPTIC THEOLOGY COLLEGE  
OF POPE SHENDOUDA III**

***BRIEF NOTES ON COPTIC HYMNS***

*by*

*Deacon Nabih Fanous*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Music is the language used by the Seraphim in heaven and humans on earth to Praise God. It is the language of the soul as prayer is the language of the heart. St Augustine says “There is no emotion of the human spirit which music is incapable of expressing”.

In spite that Coptic hymns are primitive and very ancient they are still alive and appeal to both the simple and the sophisticated. It offers joy, peace, stimulation and fulfillment to whoever takes interest in it. All other forms of music run out of fashion with time but the Coptic hymns have provided the Copts with an everlasting means of praising God as well as of self comfort.

It is very cumbersome to try to trace back the origin of the Coptic hymns as they were not recorded on musical notes but in the minds of clergy and deacons. Thus, no one can be certain as to how the hymns were developed and to what extent they were influenced by the surrounding cultures and time. However we are certain of one thing; that they were developed through the gifts and inspirations which accompanied the Apostolic Period.

As to the value of hymns in the Coptic Church, our fathers consider that God’s praise through hymns is the means which lead to the rewards obtained in the holy Sacraments ie praise is essential for receiving the grace of God.

## **II. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HYMNS**

### **A) In the Old Testament**

Man has used music in the worship and praise of God since the very early days of humanity. It started during the days of Adam and reached a peak during the life of King David who's Psalms and hymns are still in use today. The Old Testament is full of references to the use of music and musical instruments in the Jewish worship.

### **B) The Early Church in General**

The early church was founded by the 'Jewish' apostles and hence it is expected that the early church must have been influenced by the Jewish music. This music took two forms; the Temple music which was vocal and the Synagogue music which used musical instruments. An evidence of such an influence is the universal use of the Jewish word 'Alleluia' in all churches.

Such an influence, however, varied from one church to another depending on the language, culture, music and tradition of the various nations. No attempt was made by the early preachers to dictate a uniform system of prayer on all churches. Rather they devoted their teachings to faith and doctrine and left the remaining details to individual churches to be arranged in accordance with their traditions and culture. An example of this is the Ethiopian Church which used dancing and their hymns and music totally differ from its parent church; the Coptic Church.

As to the wording of hymns used in the early church, it began with poorly written extracts of translated Psalms. Shortly afterwards the church realised the value of hymns and praise in establishing proper worship. As a result effort of writers and poets were poured into formulating hymns and praise passages.

**The Serian Hymns:** (Iraqe, Syria, India) – The Serian hymns were totally dominated by the hymns of St Avram who influenced not only the eastern church but the western church also. This saint who is known as the flout of the Holy Spirit reached peaks in spiritual depths and musical talents that he lived in his hymns. During the life of St Avram the Serian hymns entered a new era in depth and excellence and his hymns are still alive in the Serian Church today.

**The Byzantine Hymns:** (Greece and Turkey) – This Church adopted a lot of music and hymns of the Serian Church but because of the language barrier it did not advance as rapidly as other churches. In fact it did not really begin until the end of the sixth century through Anatolius the bishop of Constantinople, Romans and others.

**The Latin Hymns:** (Rome) – Its music was also influenced by the eastern church but its real founder is St Ilary followed by St Ambrose who is considered the Prince of the Latin music (equivalent to St Avram of the Serian Church) with over 100 hymns related to him, followed by St Augustine and others.

In comparison with the Byzantine music, the Latin music was considered more spiritual and more realistic as it was centred around Christ and Salvation. It became the source of all

western music and the basis of the Protestant hymns after the sixteenth century.

## **B) The Coptic Hymns**

Historical evidence suggests that the Coptic hymns existed since the Apostolic ages. It was formulated and formalised during the foundation of the Coptic Church. Contrary to the western churches whose hymns were developed with time, the Coptic hymns remained unchanged.

### **Development of Coptic Hymns**

The Coptic hymns began to develop shortly after the preaching of St Mark the Apostle in Alexandria. Early Christians were basically Jews, who lived in large numbers in Alexandria, and Egyptians. Both groups have contributed to the formation of the Coptic hymns, namely:

- The Christian Jews brought with them well established hymns both in wording and music.
- The Christian Egyptians brought with them the very deep music of the Pharaohs relating to immortality of the spirit, the one God and resurrection.

Both contributions mixed exceptionally well due to the similarity of the background of the two cultures, but mainly due to the dedication of the early Coptic Christians. That dedication was so strong that those new believers sold everything and devoted their lives to worship in monasteries near Lake Mariut first (in the forties of the first century) and then afterwards they spread to other locations.

With such devotion and zeal efforts were concentrated to establish the system of prayer, wording and music of hymns, the Liturgy, the system of hourly prayers etc.

An evidence of the early development of the Coptic hymns (basically the first two centuries) is the discovery of an ancient hymn called 'xorinex' recorded on musical notes near the City of Bahnassa in Upper Egypt which dates back to the third century.

### **Nature of the Coptic Hymns**

Coptic hymns are deep, harmonic and exactly defined songs meant to express the innermost emotions of the praising spirit. They do not follow musical notes or dedicated rhythm but rather they translate the pulses of the spirit. No doubt, the Coptic hymns were the product of highly spiritual people guided by the gifts and inspirations that were pertinent to the apostolic period. As such, it would seem impossible to duplicate it or challenge it by musicians.

This conclusion was confirmed by the English musician Professor Earnst Newland Smith who visited Cairo in the winter of 1927 upon an invitation from Mr. Ragheb Moftah the Egyptian researcher. The English musician listened to the entire range of Coptic music and documented it in 18 volumes. Some of his findings and comments are listed below:

“What we understand today as oriental music appears simply a degradation of what was once a great art. This music which has been handed down for untold generations within the Coptic Church should be a bridge between the east and the West and place a

new idiom at the disposal of Western musicians. It is lofty, noble and great art especially in the element of the infinite, which is lacking today. Western music has its origin in ancient Egypt”. He also says,

“Give me the voice of Ceruso singing the Coptic hymns and I shall destroy the walls of Jericho.”

### **III. IMPORTANCE OF HYMNS**

#### **a) To Coptic Studies**

Coptic hymns are essential to any Coptic study simply because it is related to the Church’s tradition, rites, worship and spirituality. This could be appreciated if we imagine our church services without hymns?!

#### **b) To the Coptic Church**

- i. In a non-apostolic church such as the Protestant churches hymns are used to prepare the spirit for prayers or listening to Preaching. Contrary to that, however, in the Apostolic churches especially the Coptic Church hymns are itself a worship for both the singer and the listener. Thus there is no specific time allocated for the hymns in the service but the whole service is a symphony consisting of the priest, deacons and congregation served by the music. In other words the hymn is the part of the service during which the spirit is let free to praise God with its full capacity and strength.

- ii. The hymns represent a valuable inheritance, which dates back to the apostolic age unchanged. Thus are regarded as part of the Church's Sacraments and a living gift, which could be obtained through learning. Those who learn it become distinguished servants of the holies and participants of one of the church's most valuable Sacraments, namely, Praising God!
- iii. Praising God is highly honoured by the Coptic Church to the same degree as the Holy Sacraments as it is a 'sacrament of the heart'. Thus, the Discolia warns even the bishop against taking hymns lightly or neglecting it. It says: "If you, 'bishop', were sitting teaching or listening to the reader or the singer and an important personality enters the Church do not allow yourself to be distracted but continue talking or listening to the readings or the hymns'

**c) To the Coptic Person**

- i. The Coptic hymns are phrases written around Divinity, faith and theological beliefs, which reflects the human conception of the nature of God. When it is sung driven by the spirit it expresses our participation in this faith and our thirst to the Creator.

Thus, its real effect comes from the fact that the hymns are centred around God and his love. It is an appreciation and a display of love and gratitude towards the love giving Father!

- ii. Praise is a Divine service whereby we join the cherubim and seraphim in their continuous praise.

Thus, we get raised to the same rank of the heavenly Angels.

#### **IV. SCOPE OF COPTIC HYMNS**

The Coptic hymns total above 300 songs, which differ in music, tones and length (in excess of 20 minutes of some). The bulk of them are written in Coptic but few are written in Greek and some of them have been lost or disappeared. They are so diverse that only very few could claim absolute mastership of all hymns.

#### **V. OBJECTIVES OF THE HYMN'S SUBJECT**

1. Appreciation of the importance of hymns.
2. Brief introduction to the history and development of hymns.
3. Survey common hymns and their occasions.
4. Learn selected hymns
5. Encourage further studies in hymns beyond this course.

#### **VI. COMMON HYMNS**

Please refer to attached list of common hymns and their occasions.

## **VII. REFERENCES**

1. Deacon's service book (in Coptic)
2. The EBSALMODIA (in Coptic)
3. The book of daily Praise and hourly psalms by Father Matthew
4. Relevant cassettes by the Coptic Theology College in Cairo.

## COMMON COPTIC HYMNS

### 1. LITURGY HYMNS

#### A) Priest Prayers:

*These include the Prayer passages associated with the Liturgies of St Basis, St Gregory and St Cyril.*

#### B) Congregation Hymns

1. Aal El-Orban – prayed after the selection of the holy sacrament.
2. Ten Ou-Osht – prayed while deacons get dressed.
3. Shere Maria – follows Ten Ou-Osht.
4. Sowtic Amen.
5. Tai – Showry – Prayed after the absolution.
6. Pre Epistle of St Paul.
7. Pre Catholic Epistle:
  - i. Apet Jik Evol – prayed only in feasts
  - ii. Catholicon introduction hymn.
8. Pre Acts of Apostles (Epraxis) – this varies with the occasion, but commonly Shere Maria hymn which has a longer version.
9. Agios (The Trisagion) – has a longer version in feast services.

10. Ownof Emmo Maria – prayed after the prayer of reconciliation.
11. Epchoice Efnouty (Ayoha el Rab).
12. Karahmatica Yarab – has a longer version.
13. Esmo Erof (Psalm 150) – prayed during communion.
14. Ek Esmaro-Owt. Prayed during Communion.
15. Pee Oik – Prayed during communion after Ek Esmaro-Owt.

**C) Deacons Hymns**

1. Tovh Ejane – prayed during morning offering of incense, the intercession of offering.
2. Amen Espatir – prayed during the preparation of the elements.
3. Aspazeste – prayed during the reconciliation.
4. Pee Neshti – Prayed during the Commemoration of Saints.
5. Ef Sheese – Prayed instead of Pee Neshti in the presence of the Church fathers.

## **2. CHRISTMAS HYMNS**

1. Le Parthenos – Prayed before Agios, followed by
2. Pi Gane Mici
3. ....

## **3. LENT AND PASCH**

1. Meghalo – prayed after the reading from the Acts on Lent Sundays.
2. Lent Passages – Prayed before Agios.
3. Evlogimanos (Palm Sunday hymn) – Prayed during the evening and morning offerings of incense of Palm Sunday and in the Service.
4. Palm Sunday Passages.
5. Ke Ee Perto – Prayed before the Bible readings of the Pasch and funeral services.
6. Ethvate Anastasis – prayed as introduction the epistle of St Paul after the Palm Sunday service and the ninth hour of Good Friday Service.
7. Oukati Kasis – Introduction to the good Friday Preaching.

8. Pekethronos – Prayed in the Eleven<sup>th</sup> hour of Pasch Tuesday and the Twelf<sup>th</sup> hour of Good Friday Service.
9. Fai Etau Enf – prayed in Pasch Thursday, the Six<sup>th</sup> hour and Nine<sup>th</sup> hour of Good Friday Service.
10. Avetchnown – Prayed in the third hour of Pasch Thursday morning and Wednesday night after the reading from the Acts.
11. Epraxenton – Introduction to Acts reading of Pasch Thursday.
12. Agios (Mourning tune) – Prayed in the Six<sup>th</sup> and Nine<sup>th</sup> hours of Good Friday Service and in funeral services.
13. Youdas – Greeek hymn prayed during Pasch Thursday
14. Ti Epestoli – Introduction to the St Paul’s reading of the Six<sup>th</sup> hour of Good Friday.
15. O-Mono-Ganis – Greek hymn prayed in the six<sup>th</sup> hour of Good Friday, Consecration of bishops and their funerals.
16. Golgotha – prayed at the end of Good Friday Service.

#### **4. EASTER TO PENTICOST**

1. Ekhristos Anesti – prayed during Easter procession (till ascension) marriage and funeral services of this period.
2. Ton Sina – Greek hymn prayed in the Easter procession.
3. Easter Passages – prayed before Agios.
4. Katani Khoros – prayed during Communion (Easter to Ascension).
5. Afrik Etve – Prayed on Ascension Thursday, the Six<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter.
6. A-Pekhristes Anali Epsis – prayed during the Procession of the Ascension Feast.
7. Pekhristos Aftonf – Prayed in the precession of Ascension Feast.
8. Pi-Epnevma Emparakliton (hymn of the Penticost) – Prayed in the Feast of Penticost, Consecration of bishops and marriage ceremonies.
9. Asomain – Prayed during Communion between Penticost and the fasting of the Apostles.

## **5. IN THE PRESENCE OF FATHERS**

1. Ek Esmaro-owt
2. Evlogamanos
3. Ni Saviv Tico – prayed in lieu of Sotis Amen in Sunday Services
4. Tomakario
5. Ee Aghapi

## **6. GENERAL HYMNS**

1. Ep-Uro (O'King of Peace) – Prayed in marriages, processions, main feast services.
2. Khen Efran – Prayed in Saints feasts, marriages, baptism.
3. Agios Esteen – Greek hymns – Prayed in Saints feasts
4. Ouran En Shushu – Prayed in the feasts of John the Baptist
5. Etai Parthenos – Prayed in feasts of St Mary
6. Apekran – Prayed in feasts of Saints especially St Anthony
7. Ondos – Prayed in the feasts of the Apostles
8. Keryeleyson – Special hymn for processions.

## **7. DAILY CHORAL SERVICES (PSALMODIA)**

1. Ten Sino
2. Ten Nav
3. Khen On Showt
4. Maren Ou Onh
5. Tenene
6. Ten Oweh Enthok
7. Semoaty
8. Shere Ne Maria
9. Ni Ethnos Tiro
10. Ti Owi En Hiranos
11. Avsholame Erof
12. Af En Pi Arshi
13. Shere Ne Ethmeh
14. Are Ho Ou Tshasf
15. Esmo Epchoice
16. Leibon