



## **Article about the Coptic Orthodox faith – The truth that leads to the narrow way which leads to Heaven**

**Written by: Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi**

**St. Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Church Sydney, Kirrawee**

### **Question:**

*In Conversation yesterday with a 34 yr. old wannabe Coptic convert (he is currently Church of Christ), he stated that the Coptic Church had NEVER indicated that She was the only way to Heaven. When I disagreed with him, he argued fiercely saying he had studied Theology and I was wrong. his young man is typical of his age group and sincerely believes he knows everything. I fear his lack of humility will produce disappointment for him and cause him to be shunned by wiser heads, leading to an eventual falling away instead of a deepening of his Christian Walk! Please would you comment on this situation?*

### **My reply/answer:**

Please find here my response to this wrong claim.

#### **1. Introduction about the Coptic Orthodox Church and her position in the Christian world:**

- The Coptic orthodox Church is the Orthodox church of Egypt, as the word 'Coptic' means Egyptian.
- The Coptic Orthodox Church is the oldest church in the world after the church established by the holy apostles at Jerusalem, which started from (year 42 AD) when St. Mark the apostle came to Egypt, preached all over there and then martyred in Egypt. Here I mention that the house of St. Mark in Jerusalem was the house where the Lord always met with the apostles and where the most important events occurred. *For example:* when the Lord delivered to us the covenant of 'Holy Communion' - it was in the upper room of St. Mark's house. Also, the Apostles used to gather there all the time after the crucifixion of our Lord, as they were hiding from the Jewish anger; also, the first three holy Masses in all the Christian history were prayed in the 'upper room' of St. Mark's house.
- The Coptic Orthodox Church is the only **one** who kept all the: - theology, dogma, tradition and rituals delivered to us from the Apostles, who received it from the Lord Himself, then it was delivered to us by St. Mark the apostle **WITHOUT** any change whatsoever from what we received it since year 42 AD till current (so it is kept from generation to generation). There have been large witnesses for the Coptic Orthodox Church contained in the majority of the historical big references like: - the 'Oxford dictionary' for the Christian Churches (edited by: FL Cross) and the '9 volumes of the history of the Christian church' (by Schaff ND), as well as the 'Nicene and post Nicene fathers (38 volumes)', they all witness about the great theologian fathers of the Coptic Orthodox church, who kept the true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ without any change.
- The first theological school in the whole world was established in Alexandria Egypt by St. Mark the apostle in the time where there were no similar theological schools in the whole world for so many decades. Out of this theological school came out great theologians and teachers for theology and dogma like 'Pope Athanasius the apostolic, 'Pentinos', 'Oregan', 'Klimundus the Alexandrian' etc....
- The Coptic Orthodox Church is the first church to get the title of 'Pope', which in its Egyptian dialect is said: 'Papa'. This title is from the Coptic Language meaning 'father of fathers', as the patriarch or the Pope is the 'father of the fathers' of those who are the bishops and the priests.

- The faith that was delivered from the holy apostles to the church worldwide was kept thoroughly by the Coptic orthodox church and whenever any person created a heresy in the true faith, the Coptic orthodox church was the first one that would connect to the king of Rome in order to have an ecumenical council to deal with the heresy. In the first three ecumenical councils, which all the different denominational churches in the world recognised, in each one of them the Roman king was supposed to appoint the bishop of Rome to be the head of the council but instead (As recorded and mentioned in the history), the king of Rome appointed the ‘pope of the Coptic Orthodox church’ to be the head of the council, as everyone knew that the great theologians of deep knowledge and understanding in the true faith were in Egypt. You will also find that the first council of Nicea (year 325AD) against the heresy of Arius where Pope Alexandros of Egypt accompanied by his deacon ‘Athanasius’ were heading the council and debating with Arius; the second ecumenical council at Constantinople year (381AD) against the heresy of Maccandonius and Apolinarius was headed by ‘Pope Timothy of Egypt’, then the third council at Ephesus (year 431AD) against the heresy of Nestorius was headed by ‘Pope Cyril the great of Egypt’ and the second council at Ephesus year 449AD, which was done to fix a few issues that arose from the decisions of the first council at Ephesus. This was headed by Pope Dioscorus of Egypt – these were all Coptic’s who were very strong leaders in the faith.
- The church that offered the highest number of martyrs (contained in 100s and 1000s) during the time of the persecution by unbelieving kings were all in Egypt and when king Constantine became the first Christian king, he brought to himself the Egyptian members who suffered the maximum persecution in the time of martyrdom but who were still alive in prisons to his palace and kissed the places of their wounds in order to get their blessings. He tried to offer them new clothes, but they all refused and asked that they only need new vessels and veils for the churches. Those were suffered, persecuted and martyred in order to keep the true faith with no change whatsoever and also with no leniency.
- When martyrdom was stopped by king Constantine the great, the Coptic Orthodox people in Egypt found nothing to offer (i.e. martyrdom stopped), they left the world willingly and went to the deserts to offer their whole life for our Lord and this was the beginning of monasticism in the whole world. From Egypt it spread to the rest of the world i.e. to have monks/nuns and monasteries, anchorites, archimandrites etc... The monastic canons that were delivered to St. Bakhomios - father of communal monasteries was in Egypt and from the copper sheet delivered to him by the angel containing monastic rules, made the full monastic canons and systems for monks/nuns inside the monasteries which are currently used by all the monasteries worldwide without change as St. Bakhomios expanded the points on the sheet to cover all aspects in the life of monks and nuns inside the monasteries.
- The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt was the reference for any theological, dogmatic and ritual problems and debates that would arise over the history and in the first council of Nicea as mentioned above, king Constantine stated that the Church of Egypt is to set times and dates to celebrate the feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord and all the world was to follow that.
- The Coptic Orthodox church kept thoroughly the true faith delivered to her by St. Mark the Apostle **without any change** whatsoever; it is only the translation according to where in the church is being prayed that changed. It is well known (we read a lot and see with our eyes all over the internet and conversations with people) that all the other denomination churches change things from the origin (not following the Holy Bible to its fullest), while the Coptic orthodox church kept all the origins as it is!
- The Coptic language is the oldest language in the whole world, as it has been derivated from the ancient hieroglyphic language of the pharaohs; the Coptic language expresses the theology terminology and expressions more thoroughly/expressingly than any other language in the world.

## 2. The response to the claim that the Coptic Orthodox church did not announce that she is the only way to heaven:

- The Coptic Orthodox Church is a church of spirituality and humility, following what the Lord said in the Holy Bible: “*learn from Me for I am Gentle and Humble in heart*” (**Matthew 11:29-30**); accordingly, we don’t announce that we are the **only** way to heaven due to humility **BUT** the Holy Gospels and teachings of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ and by us following this without change or alteration is a clear announcement without words that we truly are the church that follows the truth of the Holy Bible without change. Also, as I mentioned above about the ecumenical councils as well as the great theologians in the Coptic orthodox church and also the history itself also announces that we are the **only** way following the truth while standing up for it, practicing it to its entirety knowing that the truth is the **only** way to Heaven, as the Lord said, “*I am the way the truth and the life*” (**John 14:6**). Here I would like to give you some examples out of so many references in the holy Bible that clearly announces that our church follows the correct teachings promptly/to the letter and by this, the Holy Bible announces that this is the **only way** to heaven, which is followed by the Coptic Orthodox Church till now:
  - (**John 4:23-24**):

“*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup>God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” – here the Lord is talking to the Samaritan woman saying, “God is Spirit and He wants those who kneel unto Him to worship Him with the spirit and **truth!** the church of God is seeking such worshipers to worship Him. The Lord said, “to kneel unto Him (from the Coptic translation) by the spirit and the truth”, it means true spiritual life practised in its entirety/fully, targeting to reach to heaven and that is by the spirit and the truth, it means without any change from what our Lord taught to us by the holy apostles; so following the Lord’s teaching in true spiritual life and ‘in truth’ is the **ONLY** way to lead to salvation and accordingly to heaven. This is what the Coptic orthodox church is doing and keeping over all generations and accordingly here our Lord is announcing that the Coptic Orthodox church is the only way to heaven, and this is a declaration of our Lord without us announcing anything.

As I mentioned above - that all the other denominational churches have changed things from the origins. Let’s read (**Mathew 7:13-14**):

<sup>13</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. <sup>14</sup>[c]Because narrow is the gate and [d]difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*”.

– Here the Lord said, “difficult and hard is the road and **narrow** is the gate that leads to heaven”. What is the difficult road and narrow gate spiritually? It is the long fasting’s, the long holy masses prayed many times in the week and sometimes every day, it is the long praises in preparation for the holy masses (tasbeha) which our church has kept and prayed, it is the other long prayers and services containing all its original rituals e.g. The holy mass in other churches is between 30 minutes to one hour maximum, sometimes without fasting’s and starting late in the day after breakfast, while we pray the masses while abstaining from midnight the night before. If we sum up the whole prayers relating to the holy mass in full on Sunday for example, they will be easy 9 hours (5 of them in the evening of the service and 4 hours of them for the mass itself). The fasting’s in our church are 205 – 220 days out of 365 days in the year. There are also no other church in the world that do such long fasting’s as us and our fasting’s are very strict i.e. to be vegan **only**, while in some times of them we allow seafood to help the believers to do them, but the majority of the fasting days are only **vegan**. For e.g. in the Catholic church in their fasting, they tell the believers today you can eat this but don’t eat this the next day and then you swap and so on... on some occasions like the four weeks before the birth of the Lord

(Christmas), the evening prayer and praises which is a main part of the holy mass, starts from 3 pm and continuous until around midnight, then the 4 hours of the mass in the morning. Another example is the prayer of the holy great Friday (Good Friday) that starts at 8:00AM and goes continually until 6:00pm; then the joyous Saturday in the same day the prayers start at 10:00PM and finish by the holy mass at 6:00am the next day. Those are only a few examples, but what we actually practise in our church is far more than that. There are also no other denominational churches that practise the fasting's, prayers, praises and the holy masses like the Coptic orthodox church, so this is by itself a witness that we follow exactly what the Lord mentioned: - **“the difficult road and narrow gate”** that is to be the only way leading to life which means the kingdom of heaven and this by itself is a declaration that we are the **only** church that leads to heaven without us announcing anything.

- Another example in **(Matthew 7:21-27):**

*<sup>1</sup> “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ <sup>24</sup> “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: <sup>25</sup> and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: <sup>27</sup> and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”*

Here the Lord says, “he who hears My sayings and **do them** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...” and then “...will enter the kingdom of heaven”! The Lord made it very clear that not everyone who comes at the end and says, “O Lord, we did this and we did that in Your Name will enter the kingdom of heaven but I will say to them *“I do not know you from where are you from?, away from Me you cursed you iniquity doers”*. **(Matthew 7:21):**

**“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he **who** does the will of My Father in heaven”.**

As I explained by the practises and the spirituality with humility of the Coptic orthodox church, we are following promptly/ to the letter the teachings of the Lord, which is the **only** way to leads to heaven and this in itself is a declaration that our church is the **only** one leading her believers to heaven without us saying anything.

- Also, in **(Revelation 22: 18-19)**, the Lord said:

*<sup>18</sup> [1] For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, [1] God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God [1] shall take away his part from the [1] Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”.*

So, anyone **who adds or takes off** from this book (it means from the holy Bible) he/she will have no inheritance in heaven! Then it says *“the Lord will wipe away his name from the book of life”*: and here I sadly say that some other churches not only changed the rituals, prayers, practises and even the holy mass from the original but they were bold enough to change the words contained in the holy Bible!!!??? and make translations to change the origins of what the Lord our God and Saviour said to match what they want to do in their own lives?!!!. We hear a lot about ‘Bible for men’, ‘Bible for women’, ‘the brief Bible’, ‘Bible for businessmen’, ‘the simplified Bible’, Bible for life’ etc...

- The Coptic Orthodox church is following the true original Holy Bible, and it is witnessed in all my sermons/ topics/ teachings/ lectures/ Bible studies etc. that I never say what is my own but only what the Bible states and I always refer back to the original Coptic translation which is the most accurate as it was done at the end of the first century and beginning of the second century in order to correct the wrong expressions and words contained in the most close translation which is the NKJV translation. The difference between the wordings and what it is, makes the meaning more meaningful and the message of the Lord meant for us to be more accurate. *Please note* that in Egypt, we always read the readings and the gospel of the holy mass in Coptic first then Arabic. So here accordingly, the holy Bible that we use is the original and in its truthfulness, which is different from all other churches and is the **only** way to Heaven witnessed that our church is leading her believers to Heaven. And as our Lord said, “he who has ear to hear, let him /her hear”.

**Conclusion**

What is mentioned above are only a few examples out of many that speaks loudly and clearly that the holy Bible and the world church history witnessed that our church the Coptic Orthodox church is the **only one** leading her believers in a straight line to heaven without we/us announcing anything and I am happy to answer any other questions you might have.

Please pray for me.

If you would like to learn more about anything similar, please visit my web site which contains useful resources, booklets, articles and sermons from myself at:

[www.stbakhomios.org.au](http://www.stbakhomios.org.au)

**Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi OAM & JP**

**T – (02) 95246626**

**M-0427101575**

**F-(02) 95249128**

**E-father\_tadros@bigpond.com**

**[tadros.el-bakhoumi@correctiveservices.nsw.gov.au](mailto:tadros.el-bakhoumi@correctiveservices.nsw.gov.au)**

**Web: [www.stbakhomios.org.au](http://www.stbakhomios.org.au)**



*(1 John 3:18) “let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth”*

**BY: Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi**