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# PI MONAKHOS THE MONK

## ΠΙΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ

A monthly newsletter with monastic issues for today's youth

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### *A Gospel Motivation for the Monastic Life*

By: Derwas J. Chitty

*"I suggest that, given what we know of the social tensions in Roman Egypt, the presence of an emerging culture of asceticism, and the growth of a church in which Scripture figured prominently, the impact of Scripture on early monastic acts of renunciation should not be underestimated."*

*Douglas Burton-Christie*



The fact that he writes this in response to a rather noticeable lack of Scriptural discussion in the field of the history of monasticism, suggest a certain trend that this field of study has traditionally taken: much effort has been poured into searching for the motivations for monastic renunciation in almost every area *except* Scripture, yet, all the motivations that the Desert Fathers themselves revealed to us in their writings came from Scripture. Do we have a right to pretend we know their secret motivations better than they did?

Indeed, if one examines the *Apothegmata* without the hindrance of too many theories on oriental influences, gnostic tendencies, political and economic fears and so forth, one finds that behind their diverse teachings lies a central, simple call to action that is best expressed in the experience of St Antony the Great in the Church: *'If you would be perfect,'* he heard the Gospel say, as if it were spoken directly to him, *'go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and come and follow me.'* *Matt 19: 21).*

It was this call, this Scriptural invitation to personal perfection through renunciation, to which the individual monks of the fifth century themselves attributed their adoption of the ascetic life. These men and women did not join the monastic ranks as an 'experiment' into a new kind of society, culture, or commune, but as a life-consuming and life-creating journey toward the perfection offered in the Gospel message.

Of course, this very idea requires a widespread familiarity with the Gospel and with the Scripture of the Church. Whether or not, such a



familiarity was actually present in Egypt, during the first centuries of the Christian era has been the subject of considerable debate, and it is in this discussion that Burton-Christie's work is of great importance. His investigation into the presence of books and written texts in the desert, as well as the translation of the Scripture into the various Coptic and other Egyptian dialects, is both thorough and convincing.

It is possible, though, to discover the extent of Scriptural familiarity in the Egyptian desert without the use of such detailed archaeological and anthropological evidence as Burton-Christie takes up: the very sayings of the *Apothegmata*, imbued as they are with a 'Scriptural aura,' betray the great extent to which the inhabitants of even the remotest areas of the desert knew and lived the Scripture of the Church. A short saying concerning Abba Sisoës is perhaps one of the



most obvious examples: A brother asked Abba Sisoës the Theban, 'give me a word,' and he said, 'What shall I say to you? I read the New Testament, and I turn to the old.' And also from a saying concerning Antony: "Someone asked Abba Anthony, 'What must one do in order to please God?' The old man replied, 'Pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes; whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures.'"

In these two injunctions alone, we are able to discover both the relatively ready availability of Scripture in the desert (else how would Sisoës so often read it?), and an assumed familiarity with its teachings among the general population of monks. Yet our evidence for the deep influence of Scripture on the lives of the monks is not limited to those passages which mention it directly, or quote from its pages (though such passages abound). Even those sayings which give no direct mention to Scripture *per se*, often betray so strong a Scriptural influence that the connection is easily seen. Abba Agathon, by way of example, is remembered as saying, 'If someone were very specially dear to me, but I realised that he was leading me to do something less good, I should put him away from me,' and a connection to the thought of Mark 9.43-48 seems readily apparent. Isidore the Priest said, 'It is impossible for a man to live according to God if he loves pleasures and money,' and again we hear the strong and unmistakable echoes of Scripture—this time of Luke 16.13, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other."

And so the writings of the Desert Fathers themselves, evidence the extent to which Scripture was present and prevalent in the desert: not only was it read, but it was absorbed and infused into the lives and teachings of the monks so deeply that they could 'speak a word' to their disciples and have it be so inline with Scripture that it almost seemed a paraphrase.

(By: Derwas J. Chitty - From: [www.monachos.net](http://www.monachos.net))



## **ORDINATION OF MONKS INTO THE PRIESTHOOD**

*(Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2010)*

By the Grace of God and the guidance of H.G. Bishop Daniel, Bishop of St Shenouda Monastery, His Grace is happy to announce the ordination of Fr Shenouda St Shenouda and Fr Theodore St Shenouda into the Priesthood and the promotion of Fr Wissa St Shenouda to the rank of Hegumen (protopriest)



Fr Wissa has entered the monastery on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1995 and was consecrated a monk on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1999 and ordained a priest on 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2000 by H.H. Pope Shenouda III . He will be promoted to the rank of Hegumen on Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 by H.G. Bishop Daniel.

### **AXIOS AXIOS AXIOS FR WISSA THE HEGUMEN**



Fr Shenouda has entered the monastery on 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2000 and was consecrated a Monk on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2006 by H.H. Pope Shenouda III and will be ordained a Priest by H.G Bishop Daniel on Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2010.



Fr Theodore has entered the monastery on 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2000 and was consecrated a Monk on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2006 by H.H. Pope Shenouda III and will be ordained a Priest by H.G Bishop Daniel on Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2010.

### **AXIOS AXIOS AXIOS FR SHENOUDA AND FR THEODORE THE PRIESTS**

In this joyous occasion we would like to invite you all to come and share with us this great and blessed day at the monastery. The Holy Liturgy will be from 7am – 10am.

May the blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit which are bestowed upon our beloved H.G. Bishop Daniel, Bishop of St Shenouda Monastery be with us all also. Amen.



## *Holy Scripture In the life of a Monk*

*By: Fr Anthony St Shenouda*



During my last retreat to the monasteries in Egypt last January and in my numerous spiritual consultations with many of the elders, the topic of the Bible and how to read it frequently came up. In fact the Bible is so central to their lives that one of the solitary elders said to me “the only reason why I and many of my brothers became monks, was to have more time to read and get deeper in the Bible, since life in the world does not provide enough time to read and study the Bible as it should be.” In this article I have summarised some of the techniques that some of these elders advised to help us delve deeper into the bible. The ideas in the article are not mine but I have simply written the ideas of the elders into this article.

The basic and very first thing someone should do when reading the bible is to read the bible several times to get familiar with its content. One of the elders actually advised to memorise the names of books of the bible in its order. This step was not where any of the elders started his conversation but they all agreed it was a necessary beginning and a prerequisite for any serious bible study.

One of the elders advised that the bible should be read in its original language as it is very hard to begin to understand the bible when you deviate from this origin. This monk actually forbade the young monks who are learning Greek or Hebrew to read the bible in any other language.

He gave an example to illustrate the difference. In the Gospel of St John 1:14, he says about Christ “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” In this verse the English language like many other languages translates the words as dwelt. However in Greek it is literally means ‘tabernacled’ as it appeared in the Old Testament, which makes an allusion to Gods dwelling among his people in the tent of the Old Testament.. This has significant meaning when interpreting and understanding the scriptures and would not be discerned unless we have a good background in the Greek language.

To my consolation since I do not know any Greek or Hebrew another elder suggested another method. This method was to read the bible verses from different translations of the bible, for example the Septuagint and the Hebrew. This method is made easier in the English language with the interlinear bibles and the many bible programs that offers this feature. He further suggested making use of some of the references that some bibles have that refers you to different parts of the bible where this topic or word occurs.

From the spiritual perspective the same elder said “To us this method you would have to repeat each verse you read several times which would help you memorise some



verses and at the same time the meditation in these verses through reciting them leaves an indelible impression upon one's memory, emotions and spirit as the psalmist says "As I mused (meditated), the fire burned within me" (Ps 39:3).

Another elder suggested a method that did not require any knowledge of ancient languages or analysing skills. He basically suggested reading the bible – "reading the bible is God talking to us". He then asked "would it be nice if someone talks to you without replying. So when you read the bible you should stop after every few verses and ask God a question or just talk to Him". This if done regularly simply takes the monk from this physical world to the constant feeling of the presence of God which some call 'ecstasy'.

From the answers of these great elders I realised more and more that the bible is a box of treasures that have not yet been opened. It is taking me too long to admire the gems that decorate the box from outside and I am yet to open the box to see the priceless pearls inside. Thankfully though their techniques were not limited to any intellectual capabilities, all it requires is a devotion and willingness to open and spend much more time reading the Bible.



### *Discernment of the Fathers*

A certain brother came to Abba Arsenius, and said to him, "My thoughts trouble me, and say, you can't fast and you are not able to labor, therefore visit the sick, which is a great commandment." Then Abba Arsenius, after the manner of one who was well acquainted with the war of devils, said to him, "Eat, drink, and sleep, and toil not but on no account go out of your cell," for the old man knew that dwelling constantly in the cell, induces all the habits of the solitary life.

And when the brother had done these things for three days he became weary of idleness, and finding a few palm leaves on the ground, he took them and began to split them up, and on the following day he dipped them in water and began to work (i.e. to weave baskets) and when he felt hungry he said, "I will finish one more small piece of work, and then I will eat. And when he was reading in the Book," he said, "I will sing a few Psalms and say a few prayers, and then I shall eat without any guilt. Thus little by little, by the help of God, he advanced in the ascetic life until he reached the first rank, and received the power to resist the thoughts and to vanquish them."



## THE LIFE ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE GOSPEL

By: Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov



From his very early entry into the monastery, a monk should occupy himself with all possible care and attention with the reading of the holy Gospel. He should make such a study of the Gospel that it may always be present in his memory, and at every moral step he takes, for every act, for every thought, he may always have ready in his memory the teaching of the Gospel.

Such is the injunction of the Saviour Himself. This injunction is linked with a promise and a threat in sending His disciples to preach Christianity, the Lord said to them: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* (Matt 28: 19)

The promise consists in the fact that the person who fulfils the commandments of the Gospel will not only be saved but will also enter into the most intimate union with God and become a divinely built temple of God. The Lord said: *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him.* (Jn 14:21)

From these words of the Lord, it is evident that the commandments of the Gospel must be so studied that they become the possession, the property of the mind; only then is the exact, constant fulfillment of them possible such as the Lord requires. The Lord reveals Himself to the doer of the commandments spiritually, and He is seen with the spiritual eye, with the mind. The person sees the Lord in himself, in his thoughts and feelings transfigured by the Holy Spirit. On no account must the Lord be expected to appear to the eyes of sense. This is clear from the words of the Gospel that follow those we have just quoted *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”* (Jn 14:23) It is evident that the Lord comes to the heart of the person who carries out the commandments and makes his heart a temple and dwelling of God. In this temple God is seen. He is seen not with the bodily eyes but with the mind. He is seen spiritually. This form of vision is incomprehensible to the beginner and cannot be explained to him in words. Accept the promise with faith. In due time you will understand it by blessed experience.

The threat to a person remiss in the fulfillment of the commandments of the Gospel is contained in the prediction for him of unfruitfulness, estrangement from God, perdition. The Lord said : *Without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not re-*



*main in Me, he is lopped off like a branch and withers: and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments you will remain in My love. Not everyone who calls Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father in heaven. On that day (the day of judgment) many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name, and expel demons in Thy name, and do many miracles in Thy name?' And then I will confess to them, 'I have never known you. Depart from Me, you whose work is sin.' (Matt 7: 22)*

The giver, teacher and model of humility, our Lord Jesus Christ; called His all-holy, almighty, divine commandments 'the least' on account of the very simple form in which they are expressed and which makes them easy to understand and easy to carry out for every type of person, even the most uneducated. But at the same time the Lord added that a deliberate and constant breaker of even one commandment *will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven*, or, according to the explanation of the holy Fathers, will be deprived of the heavenly Kingdom and will be cast into the fire of gehenna.'

The Lord's commandments are *Spirit and life*. They save the doer of them. They restore a dead soul to life. They make a carnal and worldly person spiritual. On the other hand a person who neglects the commandments ruins himself and remains in a carnal and worldly state, in a fallen condition, and develops the fall in himself. *The animal man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him.'* And therefore it is indispensable for salvation to be changed from an animal man into a spiritual, from the old man into the new.' *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God."* And therefore it is essential for salvation to be freed not only from the influence of the flesh or coarse passions, but also from the influence of the blood by means of which the passions act on the soul. *Those who go far from you* (not by position of body but by disposition of soul which dodges from doing the will of God) *will perish. You destroy all who go* following after their own will and their own understanding, by refusing the commandments of the Gospel or the will of God. The latter necessarily accompanies the former. *But it is good for me, as a true monk, to cling to God, to put my trust in the Lord.*

(From: The Arena: An offering to contemporary monasticism.)





# Coptic Art Symposium

The Society for the Study of Early Christianity  
and the Ancient Cultures Research Centre are proud to present a

## Symposium on Coptic Art

chaired by Dr Ken Parry (Ancient History, Macquarie)



The study of Coptic art has not always received the attention it deserves in the history of early Christianity. This symposium will seek in a modest way to address this neglect by suggesting ways to approach Coptic art and its significance for a deeper understanding of Christianity in Egypt. The three speakers at the symposium are more than qualified to guide us on a tour of this rich and vibrant tradition of Christian iconography.

Speakers will be:

Professor Lucy-Anne Hunt (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK)

### **Coptic Art: Some Themes and Approaches**

Dr Linda Evans (Ancient History, Macquarie)

### **Animals in Coptic Christian Art**

Dr Victor Ghica (Ancient History, Macquarie)

### **The Late Emergence of Christ's Portrayal in the Christian Art of Egypt**

**Time** : Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2010 commencing 7.05 pm

**Place** : Museum of Ancient Cultures, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Building X5B

**Cost** : \$10 SSEC members, \$15 non-members.

Places are limited. It is advisable to register for the Symposium by contacting Margaret Smith 9850 7512 (leave message) or email [AHDRC@humn.mq.edu.au](mailto:AHDRC@humn.mq.edu.au)

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## *Welcome to a new lecturer in Coptic Studies*

We Would like to extend our warm welcome and congratulation to Dr Victor Ghica for his new post as an associate lecturer in Coptic Studies at Macquarie University.

His main fields of research are Coptic Papyrology and Epigraphy, Early Christian, Gnostic and Manichaean Literatures, History of Christianity in the Western and Eastern Deserts of Egypt, Egyptian monasticism, Coptic Arabic Literature, Coptic, Syriac and Byzantine Patristics.

Dr Ghica will be lecturing the MA in Coptic Studies at Macquarie university (Sydney, Australia).