



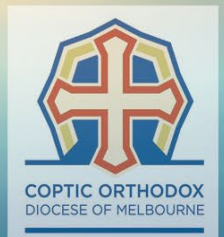
Summer Festival | 2024 / 2025

The Lord is My Light and



Youth (19 -29 yo)
English Edition

My Salvation (Psalm 27:1)



His Holiness Pope Tawadros II



118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of The See of Saint Mark

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“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

Topic 1 "The Lord is my light and my salvation"

"The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1)

-This is the theme of our Summer Festival for the year 2024, God willing. It is the first verse of Psalm 27 by our teacher, David the prophet, during a time of distress when he was pursued by King Saul. The Lord brought light into David's life. He did not despair in the darkness, as his life was filled with the presence of the Lord, and thus his life was filled with light and hope.

-The Lord brought salvation into David's life, saving him multiple times.

-Whoever has the Lord as their light will see God's power and salvation from fear, the sorrows of this world, and its worries, as well as from sin.

-This psalm is a declaration about God as our light, our salvation, and the stronghold of our life on a personal level. It saves the believer from their spiritual enemies, enlightening their inner vision to behold heavenly glories. Thus, it is a psalm of confidence and triumph, as the Lord is our light and our salvation.

***These are the main themes of this year's motto:

1. The Lord.
2. The Lord is my light.
3. The Lord is my salvation.

First: Who is the Lord?

We believe in one God in a Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... Meaning that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Not three gods, but one God. This is our faith of the Holy Trinity.

God has revealed to us in the Holy Bible in both Testaments (Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 John 5:7) that He is One, and triple in Persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal in Essence, but the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Holy Spirit. Each Person has a distinctive attribute that distinguishes Him from the other Persons, meaning they are different in personal attributes.

The Father = the source or the fountain. The Son = begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit = proceeding from the Father. These faith truths are the teachings of our Coptic Orthodox Church about the Holy Trinity, and they empower us with grace to be ready to answer everyone who asks us about the reason for the Hope that is in us.

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). The Scripture says, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). While some believe in God who exists in heaven, which is good and true, others reject the existence of God or deny Him altogether due to the darkness and weakness of their pitiable hearts. Our faith is that the Incarnation is the solution to all human problems. In the Incarnation, the mighty, loving God and the wise teacher came down to enlighten the path for humanity and save it, washing it from the mire of sin and raising it to heavenly immortality. *So, let us understand: who is God?*

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1. God is Eternal (Everlasting): God has no beginning and no end; He is eternal (everlasting).

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2 NKJV). God alone is eternal, having neither beginning nor end. No other being is eternal because all creatures have a beginning and an end. Their beginning was the day they were created, found, or born. Before that, none of these creatures existed. All of this universe is created, has a beginning, and will also have an end. Nothing within it is eternal. God, however, differs in that He is from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth itself. (REVISE)"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths ... Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills, I was brought forth;" (Proverbs 8:23-25). God had no beginning in time and will have no end. "But You are the same, and Your years will have no end" (Psalm 102:27).

2. God the Creator: God alone created everything. The term "created" means bringing into existence from nothing. God created the entire universe by His word; "Let there be" and there was. God not only created matter and everything material, but He also created spirit and intellect, and He created angels, who are spirits. God created life*. As the Creator, He alone can also take away the life He granted. He holds life and death in His hands. He also created nature. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). He can also destroy it.

-Here we talk about the beginning of creation: earth, the firmament, the sun, the moon, the stars, plants, animals, and humans. All of this happened in time when God created the heavens and the earth and everything on it. Those who deny the existence of God are blind and cannot see.

3. The Necessity of God's Existence: A unique attribute of God is that He is imperative, meaning that His existence is essential. All things require the existence of a higher being, all-powerful, who created them and is the original cause of all things. No being other than God can be described as necessary. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:26).

4. God is Infinite, and His Power is Infinite:

God is not limited by space or time. He exists in every place and time, in heaven, on earth, and in between. No place is devoid of Him, no place can contain Him, and no place can limit Him. He is ever-present in every location. "Who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Throughout all times and beyond, He is infinite in everything, and His power is limitless. No one among humans or angels shares this attribute. "Jacob said to Joseph: 'God (is) Almighty'" (Genesis 48:3).

5. God Knows Everything:

God alone knows everything about everything. He knows everything at all times and in every place. He also knows things before they happen, meaning He knows the future, the unknown, and the innermost things. He knows the past, the present, and the future, all of which are before Him at the same time. He knows the hidden and the visible. His knowledge is complete, comprehensive, and certain. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

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6. God is Sovereign [Pantocrator is better be translated almighty, all-powerful or Ruler of all] : Nothing can happen in the universe, whether big or small, without God's permission and consent. Everything that happens in the universe is under divine management. "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30)

7. God never Changes: God's standards are constant and unchanging. "With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). God never changes. He does not increase (grow) because there is no increase (growth) to be reached since He is infinite and perfect in everything. He does not decrease (diminish) in anything because deficiency does not align with His divinity. He does not change because there is no better state than what He is to change into.

8. God is All-Holy:

God's holiness: is His infallibility, meaning the inability to err. His holiness is absolute and unlimited. The word 'infallibility' consists of 3 parts: In-fall-ability, meaning the complete inability to fall or be wrong. This absolute, unlimited holiness exists only in God alone, as "there is none holy like the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:2). This is one of the essential proofs that the Lord Jesus is the 'Logos', God 'the Word' manifested in the flesh, for "He knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and He challenged the Jews saying, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46).

9. God Incarnate for Our Salvation:

Some may think that incarnation is unacceptable when attributed to God, but the truth is that incarnation:

- Does not contradict God's holiness.
- Does not contradict God's power.
- Does not contradict God's honour.
- Does not contradict God's wisdom.

It was necessary to have a Redeemer who had the following attributes:

- Be human ... to represent fallen humanity.
- Be mortal ... because the wages of sin is death.
- Be infinite... because Adam's sin was infinite, as it was directed against an infinite God, and the required Redeemer must be infinite to atone for the sins of all humanity throughout the ages.
- Be without sin ... because one who lacks something cannot give it.
- Be a Creator ... to renew the creation of man. The only one who could meet all these qualifications is God, who could incarnate in the form of a mortal man, being infinite, holy, sinless, and the Creator capable of renewing man and restoring him to his original image.

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10. God the Immortal Who never Dies:

God is life itself. Can life die? Can the giver of life die?... Never! ...He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). After dying for us in the flesh and redeeming us on the cross, He raised Himself and will never die, having overcome death, "who lives forever and ever" (Revelation 4:9, 10:6, 15:7)

11. God Who Dwells in Us:

Immanuel = God with us. Christianity = God in us.

This enormous transition from the high God dwelling in His heavens, who came down to us as "Immanuel," becoming God who descended to be with us, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7), after which, another significant transition came: Immanuel dwelling in us! This is the essence of Christianity! And God's Spirit dwells in us, and we have become holy temples inhabited by the Holy Spirit. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27)

Second: The Lord is My Light

1. God is the true light and its source: "God is light .. He abides in light .. and the angels of light .. sing unto Him ... The Light has shone .. from Mary ..." (Ninth Part -Monday Theotokia). For God is the light, the Creator and the source of light: A-God is light: He who said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12)

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

In the Book of Revelation, it is said of the Lord Christ when He appeared to Saint John the Beloved: "His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (Rev 1:16).

In the First (Morning/Prime) Hour Prayer we say: "O True Light, that enlightens every man, that comes into the world... When the morning hour approaches, O' Christ our God the True Light, shine upon us...".

Indeed, God is the Father of lights and the source of light (James 1:17), and "who dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16).

God is the source of light:

He who created it when He 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" (Gen 1:3-4). This is the first act of God for humanity, by which they can see, understand, and enjoy what the divine love offers... The Church teaches us to walk in this divine light through...

2- The Teachings of the Holy Bible:

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Our Holy Bible, with both its Testaments, is the word of God, His commandments, and promises, written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it is the light of our lives... We received it through tradition... so we preserve it and live by its commandments:

- "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps 19:8).
- "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105)
- "For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light" (Prov 6:23)

So we can discern the good from the bad... Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us:

- "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" (Matt 5:16)
- "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you" (John 12:35)

3- The Church and Its Liturgies:

A. The Church is a spiritual liturgical beacon:

resembling the heavens in its stars and angels, its interior is full of many lights, like heaven on earth, indicating the presence of God who dwells in the light, and it is an indication of the glory and splendour of the Church. Wasn't the interior of the tabernacle lit up during the assembly... Therefore, the Church is lit, especially when reading the divine scriptures. For we cannot imagine heaven being dark. It is "the dwelling of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people" (Rev 21:3)

This is evident in the liturgical prayers:

B. In The Prayers of Baptism (The Sacrament of Enlightenment)... Since we have been baptized, we have been enlightened, and since we have been enlightened, we have become children of God, and since we have become children, we have been perfected... -The priest prays for the baptized: "Call your servants to Your pure light" - "Open their hearts to shine by the light of the Gospel of Your Kingdom" - "who has made the darkness of delusion in us to shine by the coming of Your Only-Begotten Son in the flesh". (The Rite of the Sanctification of the Baptismal Water- Other Prayers)

C. In the prayers of the Fraction in the Divine Liturgy, we pray: "O God, the Father of Light, the Prince of life... Who uplifted us from the depth to the light... Who caused the darkness of deceit which is in us to shine, through the coming in the flesh of Your Only Begotten Son". (A Fraction to the Father Anytime)

- "You are the merciful God... who has enlightened us, the sinners".
- "O You who opened the eyes of the blind, open the eyes of our hearts".

D. In the Prayers of the Agpeya:

- In the Absolution of the Morning Prayer, we ask: "O' Master of all, to enlighten our minds, hearts and understanding... may You enlighten us with the light of Your divine knowledge. Make us children of light, children of daytime, that we may complete this

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day in righteousness, purity and good order and that we may complete the rest of our life without any blame".

- In the Absolution of the Midnight Prayer, we ask: "Enlighten our minds to understand Your life giving words. Raise us from the darkness of mortal sin".

E. The Glorious History of the Church:

Through the ages, it is also a light for us on the path, with the heritage of the Fathers from laws, decisions, and outcomes set by the Ecumenical Councils, which cannot be altered or ignored... The lives and sayings of the Great Fathers of the Church and their interpretations of the Holy Scriptures are lights on the path and the way to reach Eternity. Hence, the Coptic Orthodox Church strives to preserve the orthodox faith, the sound teaching, and our firm doctrine as received from these great Fathers, such as Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, Saint Cyril the Great, Saint Dioscorus, and others... etc.

4- The Light of the Saints' Lives:

The Lord Jesus came to enlighten the world, and He made His disciples reflect His light just as the moon reflects the light of the sun... He commanded us to live a holy life: "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16), so the Church was filled with saints who became a light for us, and we listen to their lives in the Synaxarion daily...

During Holy Week, when we finish reading a chapter from the sayings of one of the Fathers, we say: "Let us conclude the homily of our holy father (name), who has enlightened our minds with his beneficial teachings". Therefore, we follow in their footsteps according to the commandment: "Consider the outcome of their conduct and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7)

5- The Life of the Righteous is Light:

The first thing said in the praise is: Arise O children of the light, let us praise the Lord of hosts" . Because "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). This is a symbol of the radiance that emanates from the believer in his words, actions, movements, behaviours, and all his activities, through all of which the light of Christ dwelling in him shines, defeating the forces of darkness and guiding the steps of those around him.

6- The Light of Eternal Life:

And as the beginning of the Holy Bible speaks about the creation of light that God created on the first day, the end of the Holy Bible also speaks about the illuminated heavenly Jerusalem, where it is said: "The glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (Rev 21:23). In the resurrection, the righteous will rise with: luminous, spiritual, heavenly, and holy bodies to Eternal Life with the Lord Jesus and the Saints. The light shining in the world, which is necessarily:

A- The radiance and reflection of Christ's light upon us: just as the light of the sun reflects on the moon.

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B- The indwelling and settlement of God’s light within us, therefore, the Lord Christ likened His bride to the pure sun (Song 6:10). Let us thank the Lord, who made us a light to the world, as He dwells in us, and He shines through us with His divine image. He is capable of illuminating our lives from within and from without, and guiding our path to the kingdom.

Third: The Lord is My Salvation

1- What is the meaning of "salvation"?

Salvation in our Coptic Orthodox understanding is based on the Holy Bible and the Church Fathers:

- The word 'Salvation' is derived from the word "Save".
- Humanity sinned and transgressed the commandment, resulting in the penalty of sin and death. Consequently, humanity (all mankind) was sentenced to death, and human nature was corrupted as a result of sin. Therefore, mankind needed a Saviour to redeem them from this condition and to return them to paradise to dwell with God once again.
- Salvation is a lifelong process that begins in the Church through the practice of the essential sacraments for salvation: Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist. It is completed through repentance and confession, and ultimately concludes with the transformation of our bodies into spiritual, heavenly bodies. This is why we reject the phrase "I am saved" and the concept of "instant salvation", not out of a love for doctrinal debate, but out of an understanding of the dimensions of the "process" of salvation. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III states in his book "The Heresy of sa"lvation in a moment: "You, my brother, were in the loins of Adam when he sinned, when he was punished, and when death entered into him. You inherited all this from him, and you received the sentence of death as part of him. Sin entered into your nature, and you lost your divine image. You need salvation from this original, inherited sin and all its consequences and penalties, as our teacher Paul the Apostle said: 'Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.' (Romans 5:18)"

We need the Lord Jesus Christ who:

- Saves us from the original sin: which we inherited from our father Adam and our mother Eve.
- Saves us from the corruption of our human nature: which became inclined to sin after the fall.
- Saves us from the fourfold death:
 - a. Physical death: by the resurrection of the dead.
 - b. Spiritual death: by entering into a relationship with Him and having Him dwell within us.
 - c. Judicial death: by becoming His children and partakers of His divine nature.
 - d. Eternal death: by entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

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- Saves us from actual sins that dominate us due to frequent falls: sins of the mind, senses, emotions, body, relationships, etc.
- Saves us from the sorrows and tribulations of this world: by the work of His Holy Spirit dwelling in us, as He promised: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)
- Saves us from the body of weakness: which does not cease to fall until the last breath, until it is transformed -by the power of the resurrection -into a glorious, luminous body.
- Saves us from the wars of the devils: and the deception of the enemy of goodness, who desires nothing but our destruction. We trust that "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." (Romans 16:20)

2 -The Foundations of Salvation (How are we saved?):

Through the Birth of Jesus Christ, not only was the Saviour born... but was also Salvation itself. Jesus is both the Redeemer and the Ransom at the same time.

There is no salvation without redemption, no redemption without incarnation, and no incarnation without birth!

Jesus Christ offered salvation sufficient for all sinners, in all places, and in all ages... but not all are saved, only those who believe in Him are saved.

The acceptance of salvation comes with specific conditions:

1- Faith in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour: Therefore, St. Peter the Apostle said: "Nor is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12).

"That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

In the annunciation of the birth of Jesus Christ, it was said: "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21).

And when the angels announced His birth, they said: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11). Thus, Christ is the Saviour, and there is no salvation for anyone without believing in Christ the Saviour.

Salvation from our sins is not merely through belief in the existence of God, as even Akhenaten believed in the existence of God. But salvation occurs when we believe that our great God incarnated in the form of a human, from the Virgin Mary, was crucified on the cross, died, and rose again for our salvation. He then ascended with His glorious body to heaven, sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, established for us the Holy Church, and instituted within it the salvific sacraments, without which there is no salvation for mankind.

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Clearly, faith in Jesus Christ is essential for salvation, as the Lord said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

He also said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16, NKJV), "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5)

2- Practicing the Holy Sacraments: Because the Holy Bible teaches us about the importance of the sacraments for salvation:

- The Sacrament of Baptism: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).
- The Sacrament of Chrismation: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One." (1 John 2:20), so that we may be holy temples in which the Spirit of God dwells.

3- The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3-5)

4- The Sacrament of the Eucharist: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6:56). The four previous sacraments are necessary for salvation.

5- The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:14-15).

6- The Sacrament of Marriage: Holy marriage is a union between one man and one woman (as God intended) in purity and chastity for life, with the goal of establishing a family. It is a holy sacrament in which the Holy Spirit descends upon the bride and groom (man and woman), uniting them so they become one heart and one body. From the beginning, God created Eve for Adam as "a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18).

The Bible says about the Sacrament of Marriage: "This is a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32) , Our Church has taught us a life of purity.

7- The Sacrament of Priesthood: Priests are the servants of the mystery of salvation, appointed by the Church to undertake pastoral care, teaching, and the administration of the holy sacraments.

- "A bishop then must be...able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2)
- "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." (1 Timothy 4:16)

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- "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."
(1 Corinthians 4:1)

3 -Good Works:

"Faith without works is dead." (James 2:20). "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10). Good works are essential for salvation as they prove the authenticity of faith and are the fruit thereof.

4- The Transfiguration of the Body:

Our bodies, which we live in on earth, have been defiled by sin, causing us to sin from time to time. Even though a Christian strives not to sin, due to the sinful body we live in, he may weaken and sin. However, he quickly repents with remorse, faithful confession, and tells sin: "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise." (Micah 7:8)

As long as we are in this sinful body, the heavy body prone to fall, illness, and death, our salvation is not complete. We must shed this earthly body, the body of shame and weakness, to be clothed with a luminous, heavenly, glorified body that is not susceptible to illness, fall, or death.

Thus, we are freed from this sinful body at the Resurrection! When we rise at the second coming, we will rise with new bodies: spiritual, luminous, heavenly, glorified, just like the body of Christ that rose from the dead. The term "Transfiguration" refers to the change in the form of our bodies into that luminous and spiritual image... This is the body with which we will ascend when Christ comes at His second coming to take us on the clouds. All believers in Him will rise with luminous bodies.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body."
(Philippians 3:20-21)

"And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man." (1 Corinthians 15:49)

These, then, are the four pillars of salvation:

- Faith in Christ: Let us live for Him, believing in His incarnation and redemption for us.
- The Holy Sacraments: Let us practice them faithfully to sanctify us.
- Good Works: As evidence and fruit of the authenticity of our faith.
- The Transfiguration of the Body: This is what the Lord grants us at His second coming.

Thank our God, the Lord Jesus, the light of our lives, and the Saviour of our souls, who gives us strength, hope, comfort, peace, and steadfastness. Therefore:

We do not fear any tribulations, no matter what they are. The Church has gone through many wars, doubts, and doctrinal deviations throughout history. All these have vanished, and the Church remains strong, unique, unshaken, a light to the world, a shining sun, and a terrifying

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army that all the demons fear. "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18, NKJV)

We do not fear because we are united with the Lord within us through partaking of the Holy Sacraments. Thus, we abide in Him and He in us, thereby receiving God's grace which preserves us, grants us peace and assurance, defeats the forces of evil, and illuminates our path.

We do not fear because we are the children of God. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Romans 8:14). He grants us the power of His Cross for victory and triumph, so we boast in Him as He is the power of God for our salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18)

This was the faith of all the Church's martyrs throughout the ages, as witnessed by the world in the martyrdom of the 21 martyrs in Libya.

We do not fear because we have hope in eternal life. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Revelation 3:21).

May the Lord grant us a spiritually enriching festival, full of peace, making us fruitful branches in the Lord's vineyard, and satisfying our lives with good things, so we live for Him and witness to His holy name all our days.

To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Topic 2 “The Theology of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John”

Saint John wrote his Gospel to achieve a dual purpose: theological and spiritual. He clearly explained this: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

- Theological Purpose: To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- Spiritual Purpose: That by believing, you may have life in His name.

Saint John achieved these purposes in two ways: through the miracles he recorded and the unique conversations he presented. He began his Gospel by declaring that Christ was with the Father before all ages, that He is eternal, the Creator, and in Him was life, and He is God Himself (John 1:1-4).

1. The Gospel of Saint John uniquely includes conversations that affirm the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, such as:

The Gospel of Saint John includes unique conversations that affirm the divinity of Jesus Christ, such as:

- His conversation with Nathanael (John 1:47-51)- His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3)- John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus (John 3:26-36)- Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4)- His discourses with the Jews (John 8)- His declaration about Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10)- His conversation with Martha during the raising of Lazarus (John 11)- His prayer to the Father (John 17)- His discourses with His disciples at the Last Supper (John 13-17)- His encounter with Mary Magdalene after His resurrection (John 20)- His appearance to the disciples and granting them the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23)- His conversation with Thomas after His resurrection (John 20:24-29)- His appearance to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21)- Other scattered discourses not mentioned in the other Gospels.

2. Unique Miracles Proving the Divinity of Christ:

The Gospel of John also includes unique miracles that prove the divinity of Jesus Christ, such as: - Seeing Nathanael under the fig tree (John 1:47-50) - Turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11) - Healing the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54) - Healing the paralytic at Bethesda (John 5:1-16) - Giving sight to the man born blind (John 9:1-41) - Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11) - The miraculous catch of fish after the resurrection (John 21:1-14)

Here, we will focus on the main theological themes concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John:

“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

First: Jesus Christ Proclaims His Divinity

1. Proclamation of "I AM":

- The phrase "I AM" is the name of God that He revealed to Moses in the wilderness when He appeared to him in the burning bush and commanded him to lead the people out of Egypt. When Moses asked God, "What is His name? What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13-14).

Jesus used this same expression multiple times, declaring that He is their God, who delivered them from slavery in the past. When they came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:4-6).

2. He Declared That He is the Coming God Who Will Tell Us Everything and Renew Our Lives

He is the One with absolute authority (John 6:69-70) and the source of eternal satisfaction and fulfillment (John 6:53-55). He is "the true light" (John 1:9) whose light is inherent and from whom all derive their light, for He is the "Light of the world" (John 8:12). He exists beyond time (John 8:58), the Creator (John 1:3), the only door to salvation (John 10:7-9), and "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), who knows all things (John 21:17), and who is awe-inspiring (John 18:6).

3. He Declared That He Came from Heaven

He declared that He is not of this world: He came from heaven, from above, from the Father. He came from the Father and will return to Him. In His divinity, He exists in the Father from eternity (John 8:58). Regarding His presence on earth among people in the flesh (John 13:3, John 7:29).

4. He Declared That He is One with the Father in Essence

By saying, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30), "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The fact that the Father is in Him means that He possesses divinity, i.e., the union of divinity with humanity.

5. He Declared That He is Equal to the Father in All Things

- Possessing all that the Father has: "All things that the Father has are Mine" (John 16:15).

- Equal to the Father in work: "For whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

- Equal to the Father in power and authority: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will" (John 5:21).

- Equal to the Father in honor: "That all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23)

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6. He Declared That He is the Son with Specific Roles Proving His Divinity

- The Son alone liberates from the bondage of sin and Satan, as the Lord says, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).
- Belief in the Son is a condition for receiving eternal life, as the Lord says, “Everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

7. Jesus Christ also declared that He is the Son of God:

Affirming that He is equal to the Father, this was during the healing of the invalid at Bethesda on the Sabbath, which caused the Jews to seek to kill Him because He not only broke the Sabbath but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:17-18).

Second: Many testified to the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ

A. Testimony of John the Baptist:

- He testified that Christ is eternal. Although the Lord came after John according to His humanity, He existed before him in His divinity from eternity. "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me'" (John 1:15).
- He testified that He is the one who takes away the sin of the world: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).
- He testified that He is the Son of God: "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34).
- He testified that He is from heaven: "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all" (John 3:31).
- He testified that He is the Son of the Father, uniquely begotten, possessing the same nature as God, with absolute authority, and the giver of eternal life: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand" (John 3:35). "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

B. Testimony of the Disciples:

- Nathanael testified to the divinity of Christ when the Lord revealed to him that He saw him under the fig tree. Nathanael responded, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49).
- Peter testified to the divinity of Christ with living faith and certain knowledge, saying, "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69).
- Thomas testified when the Lord invited him after the resurrection to touch His wounds and remove his doubt. Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).
- Saint John the Evangelist testified that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son who has declared the light of the Father to us: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

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- He also testified that He is the Son who performs signs and gives life, saying, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

C. Testimony of the Samaritan Woman and the Samaritans:

- The Samaritan woman testified that He is the Messiah who knows the hearts, and she told the people of Samaria: "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, 'He told me all that I ever did'" (John 4:39).

- The Samaritans who believed also testified that He is the Christ, the Saviour of the world: "Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world'" (John 4:42).

D. Testimony of Martha, the sister of Lazarus:

- Martha testified to the divinity of the Lord Jesus when He came to raise Lazarus, saying to Him: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27).

Third, Names and Divine Titles of Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Saint John:

1. God

- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

- The Apostle Saint Thomas declared to the Lord Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

2. The Word (Logos):

- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). the term "Word" in Greek is "Logos," which means the rational mind of God, or the articulate speech of the wise God. It denotes both intellect and speech together. This establishes the position of the Son in the Holy Trinity. It is natural that God's intellect does not separate from God. God and His intellect are one entity.

- Among the attributes of the Logos (Word):

a- He is Eternal: "In the beginning was the Word," affirming the eternal nature of the Word and its permanent existence. By saying, "and the Word was with God," it declares His eternal coexistence with the Father without separation, and that He has the same nature. When it says, "the Word was God," it proclaims His eternal existence with the Father without separation, and that He shares the same divine nature.

b- He is God: "And the Word was God," a clear declaration that the Word is God. Since there is only one God, the Word is this one God.

c- He is the Creator of All Things: "All things were made through Him, and without Him, nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3).

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d- He is the Source of Life: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

e- He is the Light: "That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9).

f- By Believing in Him, We Receive Sonship: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

g- He Receives Supreme Divine Glory: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

3. Son of God:

The sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Father is a unique sonship from the same nature and essence of God. The Gospel recorded this title on miraculous occasions, confirming the divinity of the Son:

- At the occasion of the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Trinity was declared, and John the Baptist testified saying: "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (John 1:43).

- Nathanael recognized the Lord's ability to know the unseen, when the Lord revealed to him the secret of seeing him under the fig tree, so he testified saying: "Rabbi, You are the Son of God!" (John 1:49).

- The Lord declared His sonship on occasions that confirm His divinity, including His authority over raising the dead, whether sinners or the dead in the tombs. The Lord of glory says: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:25-26).

- After creating eyes for the blind-born, He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" and he worshipped Him (John 9:35-38).

- Martha, the sister of Lazarus, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ (the Son of God), who is able to raise her brother, so she said: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27).

- Our teacher, the Apostle Peter, declared his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, saying: "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69).

4. The Son:

This title is unique to the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The Lord Jesus Christ confirmed that He is the Son who liberates from sin, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

By believing in Him, we obtain eternal life, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

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And He has all authority, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22).

- He is equal to the Father in honor, "that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23).

- He is equal to the Father in work as well, "For whatever the Father does, that the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

- Saint John the Baptist testified that the Son has all authority, including the authority to grant eternal life: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:35-36).

5. Son of God, the Only Begotten:

This title means that He is the only one who has the same nature, essence, and divinity of God. Therefore, it is said of Him that He is the Only Begotten who has the surpassing glory, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

- He is the only one who has declared or explained the Father, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

- He is the only Redeemer, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

- He is the only one who saves believers from judgment, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

6. The Lord:

The term "The Lord" (الرب) is used according to the Arabic language dictionaries, where the word "The Lord" with the definite article "ال" is only applied to God Himself, while if it comes without an article, it can be used for others, such as "the master of the house." The word "The Lord" appeared in the Gospel of Saint John on occasions indicating the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- Saint Thomas the Apostle used it, expressing his faith in the risen Lord, saying: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

- Saint John the Apostle used it after the miraculous catch of fish after the resurrection, he said to Peter: "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7). "Now none of the disciples dared ask Him, 'Who are You?'—knowing that it was the Lord" (John 21:12).

- After the miracle of the resurrection, the name "The Lord" was used for the risen Lord Jesus Christ, as in John 20:18, "Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her."

- In John 20:20, "When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord."

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- Our teacher, Peter the Apostle, when the Lord asked him three times, "Do you love Me?" Peter answered the Lord three times: "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:15-17).

7. Jesus (Yahweh is Salvation):

Yahweh is the special name for God in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 3:15).

Yahweh is the name of God in the New Testament as well. For the Lord Jesus Christ is called by the name Jesus. The name Jesus in Hebrew, "Yeshua," means Yahweh (God) is salvation, as mentioned in Matthew 1:21.

- The name "Jesus" is mentioned in the Gospel of our teacher John in many places, affirming His divinity. Among them: He is the creator of all things (John 1:3), (John 6:11-13), (John 9:14). He has glory (John 2:11). He is the giver of eternal life (John 4:13-14). He has absolute authority (John 5:8), (John 6:19-20). He is the life giver after death (John 6:43-44), (John 11:41-44). He is the bread of life (John 6:35). He is the light of the world (John 8:12). He is the eternal (John 8:58). He is the Son of God (John 9:35-37). He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). He is present everywhere (John 14:23). He is the Lord (John 21:7).

8. Son of Man:

While this title refers to the humanity of the Lord of Glory, it also appears in the Gospel of Saint John with a theological meaning, affirming that the Son of Man is, in fact, the Son of God.

- The Son of Man is present everywhere: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13).

- By believing in the Son of Man, we obtain eternal life: "The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

- The Son of Man is the Lord of angels: "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51).

- The Son of Man is the judge: "And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:27).

9. Messiah (Christ):

The title "Messiah," which is translated as "Christ," means "the Anointed One" and refers to "the anointed King." Saint John, in his Gospel, presents our Lord as the Messiah King, whose coming the Jews had long awaited.

10 - Teacher John mentioned the title Christ associated with other theological titles such as:

- Andrew said to his brother Simon: "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ) (John 1:41).

- The Messiah who knows everything, as the Samaritan woman said to the Lord: "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:25-26).

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- The Christ, the Savior of the world, as the people of Samaria said after they believed: "We ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

- The Christ, the Son of the living God, as declared by Saint Peter the Apostle: "We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69).

- The Christ, the Son of God, who does the works of the Father: "But the works which I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me" (John 10:25), "that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:38).

- The Christ, the Son of God, who came into the world: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27).

- The Christ, the Son of God, who gives life to believers: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

Fourth: Divine Attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator God:

It is said of Him: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). It is also said: "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him" (John 1:10). The Lord performed miracles that indicate He is the Creator:

- The miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11) is a miracle of creating a substance that did not exist, achieved by His mere will from within.

- Miracle of Feeding the Multitudes with Five Loaves and Two Fish (John 6:5-13):

This miracle is a creation of material that did not previously exist. Thousands were fed, and the miracle's greatness is emphasized by the fact that everyone ate and was satisfied. Then, twelve baskets of leftovers were collected. Where did all these leftovers come from? They are materials that did not exist before, created by the Lord.

- Miracle of Creating Eyes for the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-7): The Lord created eyes for the man born blind from clay, just as He created the first man.

2- Jesus Christ is the Life and Giver of Life

- He is Life: It is said of Him: "In Him was life" (John 1:4). He said of Himself: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:26). He also said: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

- He is the Giver of Life: By raising the dead, He demonstrated His power. He raised Lazarus after he had been dead for four days (John 11:1-44). He also gives life through the Sacrament of the Eucharist: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51). "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54).

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- He is the Giver of Eternal Life: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

3-Jesus Christ is Above Time

- He Exists Before His Physical Birth: He said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58).

- He Exists Before Creation: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him" (John 1:10).

- He Exists Before the World: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5).

4- Jesus Christ is Omnipresent

He is on Earth and in Heaven: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13). He is Present in the Heart of Every Believer: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

5- Jesus Christ Descended from Heaven

- He Said: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51).

- He Said: "For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world" (John 16:27-28).

And because He alone is in the "bosom of the Father" (John 1:18), in the highest heavens where the throne of God is, He alone can say: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13).

6. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ:

- The Lord Jesus said: "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30) and "You believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

- "He who believes in Him is not condemned" (John 3:18) and "should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

- Those who believe in Him are granted the right to become children of God through baptism: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Through faith in Him, they are also eligible to receive the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39).

7. Acceptance of Worship and Veneration:

The Lord Jesus accepted worship from the man born blind when He asked him: "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered: "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him: "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." Then he said: "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him (John 9:35-38).

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8. His Divine Glory:

a- Divine Glory in Incarnation: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

b- Divine Glory as Creator: Demonstrated in the miracle of turning water into wine: "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11).

c- Eternal Glory: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5).

9. The Holy One Without Sin:

- The Lord said to the Jews: "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46).

He also said: "The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30).

- Pilate said about Him: "I find no fault in Him at all" (John 18:38).

10. The Omniscient:

The evidence of Christ's omniscience is abundant in His words, such as:

- His knowledge of what happened to Nathanael under the fig tree (John 1:47-50).

- His knowledge of the Samaritan woman's past (John 4:17-18).

- His awareness of the history of the paralytic whom He healed, knowing his illness was due to his sins (John 5:14).

- His knowledge of Lazarus's death (John 11:14).

- His Knowledge of the Crucifixion He Was to Undergo (John 12:32-33)

- His knowledge of who would betray Him (John 6:64, 70; 13:11, 26).

- His knowledge that Peter would deny Him three times (John 13:38).

- His knowledge of the tribulations His disciples would face (John 15:18-21; 16:1-4; 17:15).

- His knowledge of what would happen to Him (John 18:4).

- His knowledge of Thomas's doubt and his conversation with the other disciples (John 20:27).

11- Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World

- He said: "For I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (John 12:47).

- John the Baptist testified of Him, saying: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

- The Samaritans testified of Him: "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

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Fifth: The Absolute Authority of Jesus Christ and His Miracles

1- His Absolute Authority Over Nature

- The disciples saw Him walking on the sea, coming near the troubled boat in the stormy sea, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going (John 6:16-21).

- His authority over the fish of the sea is shown in the miracle of the great catch of fish after the resurrection (John 21:11).

- His authority over incurable diseases is shown when He healed the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15), created eyes for the man born blind (John 9:1-12), and healed the nobleman's son without seeing him (John 4:46-54).

- His authority over nature is demonstrated when He entered the room where the disciples were after His resurrection, even though the doors were shut (John 20:19), and when He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11), showing His authority that surpasses the laws of nature.

2-His Authority Over Life and Death

- About His authority over life, He says: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

- About His authority over death: in the miracle of raising Lazarus, He called out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!" And the dead man came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes (John 11:43-44).

- His authority over His own life confirms His divinity when He says: "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18).

- This authority is shown in the resurrection, as He rose by Himself without anyone raising Him, and He came out of the sealed tomb without anyone noticing.

3- His Miracles Prove His Divinity

- His miracles are countless: as Saint John says: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

- Among them are miracles of creation: turning water into wine (John 2:1-11), granting sight to the man born blind (John 9), and the miracle of feeding the multitudes (John 6). Also, raising the dead, such as raising Lazarus (John 11).

- His absolute authority over nature, such as walking on water (John 6:16-20), the great catch of fish (John 21:1-14), entering through closed doors (John 20:19), and ascending to heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

- The miracles of Jesus Christ were performed by mere command, such as healing the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5) and raising Lazarus (John 11), or by a mere word, from a distance, as in the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54), or performed by His mere will without a command, as in the miracle of turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).

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- From all the above, it becomes evident that we Christians do not worship a human being whom we deify, but we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, true God of true God. Creator of all, Savior of all. In the fullness of time, He became incarnate to restore humanity to its lost dignity and glory through the fall, and to grant every believer life in His name.

Topic 3 “The Correct Understanding of Religion”

1. Understanding True Religion

Some people think that religion is merely a collection of virtues, and possessing them makes one religious.

Others believe it is just a series of practices, and performing them makes one religious.

Some think that it is a set of emotions to be experienced, or principles to kill others for.

Some belong to a religion without knowing anything about it, and because they do not commit major sins, they consider themselves religious.

Others reject religion altogether, and some reject religiosity specifically. Some reject both religion and religiosity. We aim, by the grace of God, to explore the matter of religion and religiosity together.

Does God love religion? Does He hate religiosity? Is Christianity a religion? Is being religious a Christian matter?

In the Book of Genesis, we read: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7 NKJV). "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:15-17 NKJV).

Thus, God did not only grant man life but also taught him how to preserve this life. I dare to say that this is what religion is. Religion is not life itself but how to live it.

God gave Adam life through the divine breath but taught him how to live through His commandments.

Man should have trusted God, believed in what He commanded, and obeyed Him. Had man done so, he would not have fallen when he believed the serpent.

Therefore, religion is a divine creation meant to serve man. Its purpose is not to please God but to retain God's life within man, or in other words, to keep man's life in God. From this perspective, whoever believes in God, keeps His commandments, and preserves his life in the way God has set for him is religious.

God does not hate that man walks in the path He has outlined and in the manner He has specified, because it is a matter of life or death for man. God said to Adam, "For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17 NKJV). He said to Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door" (Genesis 4:7 NKJV). We also read in Genesis 6 about the ark, which God specified as the way of salvation for mankind. Those who believed in God's word through Noah accepted salvation from the flood, while all those who followed a different path perished.

Therefore, religion is not only a divine creation but also something that God does not hate.

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Thus, God outlines to the Prophet Moses a way for the salvation of the children of Israel from destruction, through the sacrifice of the Passover and the sprinkling of blood. And so it was. And whoever took another path, death snatched them away. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram also fell prey to destruction when they defied the command of God, the ritual of incense, and the service of worship, as God ordained.

Note that all these matters do not fall within the framework of literary recommendation. That is, the discourse here is not about virtues, whereby those who embrace them are saved, and those who reject them perish. Rather, the discourse here is about belief and ritual. Abel's sacrifice was a matter of belief and ritual, redemption through the shedding of blood. The ark, Passover, incense, and prayer all fall under belief and ritual. So God specifies a particular ritual, by means of it, believers obtain salvation from destruction.

That is why His Holiness Pope Shenouda III said:

"The faith is not a collection of virtues. Virtues exist even among non-believers, among the Brahmins, Buddhists, and others... But firstly, the faith is a belief and faith. And from this faith, virtues arise, and they have a spiritual status, different from the status of virtues among non-believers... And salvation, even though it is related to the spirituality of humans, it is a belief that has its foundations. And this belief affects the nature of spiritualities."

- Why did God care to explain the details of the tabernacle? Its dimensions? And its materials?
- Why did He specify the sacrifices? Their types? And the way to present them?
- And why this detailed description of the ark? The number of decks? And the number of animals?
- Why the incense? And why describe its clothing? And why the tabernacle and Aaron's tent?
- And why did He describe heavenly Jerusalem with such accuracy and detail?

Despite some people finding the description of the rituals burdensome, it's necessary for those who wish to live with the mind of God, not their own. If I were to be troubled by the rails of the railway, you would say to me: The train cannot do without them if it wants to arrive safely. If the ritual, with its underlying belief, were not essential, why did God strike Korah and Dathan? And why did He destroy those outside the ark? And why did Uzzah's pride fall when he touched the ark, despite his belief that he was doing well? (2 Samuel 6:6)

Therefore, religion is not a rigid doctrine or dry ritual. Thus, the religious are not just theologians or Pharisees of deeds.

Through true religion, man can reach salvation. And he can also, through false religion, establish for himself an idol that he worships and claims that it is God. And he remains an idolater, despite his religious activity and outward religiosity.

This is why our teacher, the Apostle Paul, called on the believers to write: "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." (1 Corinthians 10:14)

And the Lord Jesus Himself indicated this truth by saying: "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" (Matthew 7:21)."

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So the standard isn't just faith alone, or works alone. Rather, to say "Lord, Lord" must mean that faith is pure, the heart is clean, conduct is upright, and worship is in spirit and truth, for "the way of the wicked is an abomination." (Proverbs 12:7)

But how? Where is the way?

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself answers, saying: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." (John 14:6-7)

Christian life began firstly with the life of Christ Himself, when humanity united with Him. We became in Him, and He became in us. We became His body, the Church, of which He is the Head.

The Church is not separate individuals, but one body of Christ. For the assembly of believers to be the body of Christ, they must be one. Thus, when Christ chose His disciples, He taught them how to live in unity, and taught them that "a kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand." (Matthew 12:25) And when they debated who among them would be the greatest, He humbled them. Until He gave them His body and blood, so that true unity would be achieved. That for which He prayed on their behalf: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:17) And, "And they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." (John 17:21)

- So, the Eucharist is what unites us in Christ, and the request of the Father in the divine liturgy: "That we all may become one body and one spirit." Thus, our participation in the one bread makes us, who are many, one body.

See what our teacher, Paul the Apostle, says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

The only thing that ensures the unity of the Church over time is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who declared that "because of this He is also the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." (Hebrews 8:6) So, it's not just the words of the Lord Jesus, nor His teachings, but Jesus Himself. However, with certainty, through His life He ensures: "Because I live, you will live also." (John 14:19)

Second: the return of Christian life

The true bread that came down from heaven (John 6:41)

- The life of God is the cause and secret of our life... So, how do we take it to live by it?

The Lord Jesus Himself answers by Himself: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.

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57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum." (John 6:51-59)

Thus, we understand what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, "I am the way." (John 14:6) So, the way isn't to hear Christ, or to hear about Him, or to speak with Him, but to eat His body and drink His blood.

This is faith. And faith is to live this way. Thus, the kingdom of God comes, and thus, we live it.

The Birth from Water and the Spirit:

Let's listen together to what our Lord said about the kingdom of God, and how we can attain it: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:3-6).

So, baptism, therefore, is a condition for experiencing the kingdom and entering it. And you cannot consider it merely a practice, to be replaced by another. For in baptism, a person is born from above into a new birth, not according to the flesh but the Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God, who dwells in us, in the mystery of chrismation, makes us a temple for God. For a woman gives birth to the dead for death, but whoever among them desires life comes to Christ, knocking on the door of the Church, and is renewed in baptism. The life of this person is renewed, with a new birth, a new nature, and a new life. Indeed, a new person.

This is the Christian life. Or life according to Christ: fellowship, alive, strong, with God, in His Son, by the Holy Spirit. Fellowship can only be attained through the new birth, by the Holy Spirit: through baptism, chrismation, and the Eucharist, the bread of life.

These are the mysteries of the Church:

Would you call them rituals? Are they Pharisaic practices? Can life be without them? No, beloved. For this is the way. Or rather, this is the religion.

Repentance and confession and the perfection of the way:

Here is our teacher, Paul the Apostle, directing our attention to the perfection of the way through repentance.

But why is repentance necessary before partaking of the Holy Mysteries?

Our teacher, Paul the Apostle, answers, saying: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). Sin prevents a person from perceiving divine grace, as the Lord said: "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). And the Lord has drawn for us a path, through the priesthood.

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The Sacrament of Confession, The sacrament of confession helps us to rid ourselves of sin, making the path to righteousness easier. After His holy resurrection, Jesus breathed on the faces of His holy disciples and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23 NKJV).

Observe how the church leads us to Christ. In his pursuit of worthiness, man lives in righteousness. He tests it in his repentance and worship, in his prayers, fasts, and self-discipline. This is the life of the church. This is the life of the believer. For thus lived the fathers.

- Is there anything that can deter man from God other than sin? The path to righteousness is made easy only through salvation. Salvation is found in Christ. However, we achieve this salvation through effort. It is not by our own strength or righteousness that we achieve it. The scripture itself says, "The righteous by diligence will be delivered, But the transgressors will be taken by their schemes" (Proverbs 28:18 NKJV). The righteous, who are justified by the blood of Christ freely, are saved by diligence. It's not their own struggle that saves them, but it is necessary for their salvation. If one does not strive, one does not succeed. They did not strive lawfully (2 Timothy 5:2 NKJV).

The struggle to live in the righteousness of Christ:

This is what the church has learned from the gospel and from the truth itself, and what it has followed until now, that it should strive to live in the righteousness of Christ, not to create righteousness for itself. And the church struggles with one spirit, one faith, one mind, and one worship, so that it may be one church.

And this is the sign of unity: the one agreement, the one bread, the one Eucharist.

Otherwise, how can the body be one? How can the mind be one? How can the church be one?

This is what prompted our early fathers to organize worship uniformly.

This is the Christian life. Life outside it is not life. Christianity lives in Christ, for He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6 NKJV).

But a person may focus on rituals or commandments, forget God, forget his brethren, and think he is religious just because he is faithful to the church, for example! For such, our teacher James the Apostle says: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:26-27 NKJV).

Pure religion before God is to care for the distressed in their distress, lest the devil ensnare them, causing them to lose the life they have in God. At the same time, the believer must keep himself unspotted from the world. How? "...[Look] to the end of their conduct" (James 1:7-27 NKJV).

"If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flocks, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents" (Song of Solomon 1:8 NKJV): This is the advice of the bridegroom to his bride, to follow the footsteps of the flock. And it's strange that he didn't say my footsteps, but the footsteps of the flock. The bridegroom will disappear from his bride, but she will not lose her way because she will walk in the footsteps of those who preceded her to her bridegroom.

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"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7).

In his first letter to his disciple Timothy, Saint Paul the Apostle speaks about bishops, priests, and deacons. Aren't these the shepherds?

Let us flock to their dwellings. Come, let us listen to them, learn from them, and offer our repentance at their feet. Come, let us seek their blessing:

- From their hands that bear what Simon the Elder carried.
- From their feet that are blessed in the path of service and holiness.
- From their pure teachings and spiritual words.
- From their efforts and diligence.

"Let us flock to their dwellings, the house of the living God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

This path, the Lord Jesus Christ consecrated it with Himself.

So, when He appeared on the road to Saul of Tarsus, and announced Himself to him, Saul, trembling and bewildered, asked Him: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" The Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6). What is remarkable here is that God did not directly tell him what He wanted. Instead, He sent him to the holy Ananias. Then Ananias appeared, and informed him of what He wanted him to do with Saul. "And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized" (Acts 9:17-18).

The question here is:

Couldn't God deal directly with Saul?

Yes, He could. So why did He send him to the church?

The answer is simple: This is the way that our Redeemer, who created and saved us, has drawn. The church is not isolated from Christ, for where the head is, there is the body. Whoever finds the church, finds Christ. And whoever wants to know Christ, follows the footsteps of the church. And so...

Thus, a person becomes truly religious, his eyes open to life. He clings to it. And he strives on its path. And he finds in its wake. He prays with a sincere heart, and repents with honesty. He loves faithfully, and is redeemed in love. He believes sincerely, and holds fast to his faith. He keeps himself unspotted, and seeks the distressed. And overall, he worships God in spirit and truth. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was religious, as He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. And He went to the temple since His childhood. He read the Torah and the Prophets. He celebrated the feasts and observed the law. And although He resisted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Matthew 23) who lived outward rituals without inner life, He did not violate the law, nor did He abolish the commandments. Therefore, the apparent religion, and the flawed conduct of some religious people, does not diminish faith, nor does it mean that the church is flawed. Hence, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12)

Topic 4 “Beware of the little foxes”

The great apostle Paul, who experienced service and spiritual life deeply, who toiled in service more than all the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:10). In the spirit, he ascended to the third heaven, to Paradise (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4). We see him writing to his disciple Timothy, the bishop of Ephesus, who dwelt in steadfast faith, without hypocrisy, and in his family, his mother and grandmother knew from childhood the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). He writes to him, saying: "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16). And he says: "Take heed to yourself" first before teaching, and he sees this as necessary for his own salvation and the salvation of others as well..."

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus says: "We must be pure in order to purify others, we must learn in order to teach, we must be lights to give light, and we must approach God to bring others closer to Him, and we must sanctify ourselves to sanctify them."

What emerges from the depths of your being through personal experience is the only thing that you can influence in others, and it is the measure of success in our spiritual life. Therefore, it is important that the life of university youth be vibrant with the vitality of the church, and that it be itself a moving church, and a means of clarification for all virtues. This only comes through a serious involvement in membership in the church, and interaction with its rituals, from the blessings of its life by the Holy Spirit, and being attentive in everything.

First: Be alert to the little foxes that spoil the vine.

"And catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines" (Song of Solomon 2:15). The vineyard is the church, and it is also the human soul. The little foxes spoil the fruit of the vine, that is, they spoil the fruit of the church, and the fruit of the spirit in the human soul (Galatians 5:22). Little foxes may be sins that seem small. The youth does not pay attention to them, nor does he feel their danger... Just thoughts and feelings that may not initially take the form of sin, nor do they trouble the conscience.

A fundamental rule is: the first step leading to sin may not be a sin. An example of this is an unhealthy relationship that began with innocent friendship, and perhaps very innocent! Then it evolved and the devil intervened, so it became a sin. Therefore, one needs to be careful and cautious... There are hidden sins and mistakes that a person may not feel. There are sins that do not appear to be sins, and one does not regret committing them. Hence, we must learn the life of scrutiny.

Why did I liken these sins to foxes, and to little foxes?

Because the fox is famous for its cunning. And because the little fox can slip through any small gap in the walls of the vineyard. Just as the vine growers may not consider it a danger. Yet, it is capable of ruining the vineyards... You may be concerned with the apparent major sin and prepare to resist it. While the minor sins (seemingly) pass by you without your noticing them.

"And therefore, the Lord Christ, glory be to Him, highlighted the danger and importance of the word 'fool' and the word 'foolish' (Matthew 5:22), and He also showed the importance of a mere wrong glance, even if it leads to plucking out the eye because of it (Matthew 5:27-30). And that is why the spiritual fathers taught their children to be vigilant."

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Some examples of the little foxes:

1. Laziness, negligence, and procrastination: When you wake up in the morning, instead of starting your day with prayer, you procrastinate a little. You postpone prayer for a few minutes, waiting until you fully awaken. During these minutes, the devil may present you with a set of thoughts to preoccupy you, or excuses to numb your conscience to prevent you from praying, and to make your mind wander... etc.

Why do we say in our prayers: "O God, my God, early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You" (Psalm 63:1)? It's because of the longing for God, to flee from this little fox, the fox of procrastination, the fox of laziness... Sometimes due to lack of time, and sometimes due to fatigue... and all of this may turn into a clear pattern... Undoubtedly, leniency inevitably leads to deviation... It might be similar to a train derailing from the tracks... and then it requires a great effort to return to its course.

2. The sin of pride: Another may begin with a small fox: it may start with a desire to defend oneself, and perhaps the defense of oneself develops into condemning others... It may start with a person getting used to answering a question directed to someone else, and allowing oneself to interrupt others in conversation, even politely and with permission. And it may begin with a smile of satisfaction and a feeling of contentment upon hearing a flattering word... Therefore, observe yourself.

3. Jealousy: All the problems of Joseph the righteous began with something simple, that he was talking about his dreams in the hearing of his brothers, even simply... This talk aroused in them the factors of envy and jealousy. And this jealousy did not last long with his brothers until they plotted against him, and it reached a dangerous level that led to throwing him into the well, and selling him as a slave!! So beware of feelings of jealousy, lest they grow in you and turn into envy and hatred.

Second: Be steadfast to the goal

Life without a goal is a complete waste... This is a fact agreed upon by most people, and when the Epicureans in ancient times said: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" (1 Corinthians 15:32), they faced strong opposition across generations, for man is not just a body, but he is also a spirit that prays, a mind that thinks, and relationships that carry within them the happiness of love, giving, and responsibility... So why do we aim for our lives?

A. Spiritual goal gives life meaning: That is, the person who sets a certain goal before him has chosen the goal from a certain spiritual or intellectual perspective, which emphasizes that life has a special meaning. Life is spent in making ourselves happy with God, and making others happy with Him. Otherwise, how will man bear for eternal life are incomparable to the sufferings of the present time. So, let's set a goal for our lives.

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B. The goal gives man the way: As long as the goal is clear and specific, there must be a way to walk towards it, to reach it. Thus, man knows where to put his steps, and in which direction to move, until he reaches his noble goal.

C. The goal gives the soul enthusiasm: Seeing the goal compels us to exert more effort to reach it, with enthusiasm that helps us overcome obstacles, and deal with them. Without seeing the goal, we lose our enthusiasm, sit in confusion and anxiety, and sometimes live in fear and loss.

The importance of the clarity of the goal:

A. The shortest path: In other words, a clear goal helps me draw a straight line between my starting point and the destination, and the straight line is the shortest path between two points. Therefore, the clarity of the goal helps me to move directly towards it, while the lack of clarity makes me wander right and left, and I may deviate from the right path, ending up far from the final goal.

B. Less energy: Because it is clear that the shortest lines to the goal mean that I will exert the least required energy, while hesitation about the goal will make the person exert more energy, without reaching the right goal.

C. Greater return: It is well known that exerting a simple or limited effort in reaching the goal gives a surplus of energy that we expend in other fields, which may also succeed, as long as our goals are clear and sound... Therefore, the clarity of the goal makes me follow the shortest path, exert the least energy, and get the greatest return... by the grace of God.

Third: Be steadfast in habits

"We will not neglect the house of our God" (Nehemiah 10:39). There is nothing harder than forming bad habits. They seep into the depths of a person and mingle with his psyche and the fibers of his body, and with time, they become an inseparable part of him. And then, when one wants to get rid of them, he faces great difficulties and may not be able to. Here, St. Basil says: "Habitual sins acquire the strength of nature." And St. Isaac says: "And habits that have been acquired in man take the place of nature." And the danger lies in that some habits may threaten the salvation of the soul, if the person does not have the discernment and the ability to distinguish between what is good and what is bad, and between what is acceptable and what is not... "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

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A. How are habits formed?

Habits are formed in the inattention of a person, as while walking in a certain way, he discovers over time that he has become a slave to some habits that attract him with attraction, and initially, this is to his satisfaction and perhaps without harm. Little by little, he finds these habits having a place in him over time, and rooted in his psyche.

Imitation : Habits can be formed through imitation and influence from others. For instance, if a servant in Sunday School habitually folds his hands during prayer, this could become a habit for him, possibly accompanying him throughout his life. The same is true for the way we speak, walk, style our hair, and so on. We can now observe that many of our habits, which have become part of our personalities, originate from imitation.

Organized Repetition:

Habits can also be formed through organized repetition, and it's important for individuals to notice this in themselves. One should break this repetition to avoid becoming enslaved by it. St. Isaac the Syrian said, "Do not leave a habit that is established in you, for the ideas increase without stopping."

B. The Severity of Wrong Habits:

1. Habits transform into character traits: When a habit becomes deeply rooted in a person, it turns into a character trait, shaping and contributing to the overall personality. St. Isaac says, "Habits are worse than enemies. Whoever raises a child with a habit is like someone igniting a fire with a lot of fuel. The force of both sustains the material. However, when the habit demands something and is not answered, it becomes weak at another time. But if you respond to its demand, it strengthens more the next time."

What is said about food can be said about speech. Those who are talkative, gossipy, or slanderous develop such habits without anyone noticing, whether at home, in church, or in society. It's at this point that sincere advice from others regarding what they observe as undesirable habits becomes crucial, thus contributing to the formation of one's character.

2. Prevents a person from doing good deeds and virtues: The danger of habits also lies in preventing a person from doing good deeds. For example, smoking prevents someone from fasting because they cannot abstain from smoking for a few hours and hence cannot abstain from eating. Similarly, it prevents someone from waking up early for prayer. Thus, bad habits deprive their owners of spiritual growth.

A person may lose credibility in society due to their bad habits, which are not acceptable to others. They may even lose their job or be unable to obtain one due to their habits, and these habits may lead to committing sins.

C. Some Useful and Positive Habits:

St. Isaac says, "Train yourself in habits, whether good or bad." Good habits contribute to the salvation of the soul. As mentioned earlier, children can be taught good habits such as waking up early, praying as the first act of the day, showing gratitude, reconciling, welcoming, understanding, encouraging, loving and being generous to others, being polite in speech, and so on.

Good habits lead to the formation of a stable and influential spiritual personality in the Church of God and in society. The Bible mentions some of these habits, such as Jesus' habit of going to the mountain to pray (Matthew 14:23), teaching the people daily (Luke 19:47), and the habit of the disciples going to the riverside to pray (Acts 16:13)

Fourth: Maintain the Behaviour

As we mentioned, the term "notice" does not just mean observation but rather deep contemplation. Now, let's talk about behavior and its quality.

A. Behave as children of light:

St. Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, directing his profound words filled with the Holy Spirit to people who had lived for a long time far from the light of the Gospel. They dwelt in the darkness of sin and various paths of wandering. Here, the Apostle Paul warns them, saying, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). He earnestly advises his readers, "Do not walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind" (Ephesians 4:17).

B. Behave as you have been called:

In the morning prayer, the Church arranged a passage from the same letter (to the Ephesians) for us, specifying a pattern of behavior throughout the day: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Ephesians 4:1). The calling to which we have been called is that we are Christians, called by the name of Christ, and that we should walk in righteousness, desiring to be as He is. Thus, as He walked, so should we also walk (1 John 2:6).

C. Behavior with vigilance:

When a person is vigilant, they occasionally need to have a moment with themselves, to reassure themselves about their path, their position, and their relationship with God. The more attentive a person is, the more frequently they do this. People with high spiritual stature reach daily introspection, which we call self-examination. In this, a person subjects themselves to scrutiny, judgment, and review, making it possible to rectify any deviation from the path and to observe any changes that occur in their journey.

D. Behavior from virtues and not like virtues:

is a term that refers to the fact that a person may deceive himself in behavior that he believes to be a virtue, while in reality, it is deviation and sin, such as fake humility on one hand and genuine humility on the other. The motive behind fake humility is pride, with the purpose of gaining

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praise from others, while genuine humility is a virtue sought by a person who feels his weakness and his need for God's help and the prayers of others.

Some philosophers say that virtue is a moderate position between two extremes, one being excess and the other deficiency. For example, generosity is a moderate position between extravagance and stinginess, and courage is a moderate position between recklessness and cowardice. Thus, there is a difference between poverty and fasting and loss of appetite, and genuine humility and weakness of character."

Gentleness and Chatter, Simplicity and Naivety, Personal Strength and Pride, Calmness and Introversion, Vigilance and Sleeplessness, Softness and Sensitivity, Courage and Daring, Knowledge and Teaching, Shepherd and Teacher, Virgin and Bachelor, Eyesight and Insight.

And so is the difference between scrutiny and suspicion; the matter requires wisdom. The scrutinizer is a serious, committed, and organized person who proceeds consciously and vigilantly. On the other hand, the suspicious person tends to exaggerate trivial matters, burdening himself more than necessary. His caution can lead to the extent of illness, error, and danger.

Fifth: Pay attention to your thoughts

Thought is an intellectual action that can be either good or bad, depending on the person's condition. Contemplation, for example, is a good type of thinking. Similarly, thoughts related to the love of God, as the scripture says, "But seek the Lord your God, and you shall find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29). Also, among the good thoughts is what Saint Paul the Apostle said, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). As for erroneous thoughts, it's like what the scripture says about them, "Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment, but a man of understanding walks uprightly" (Proverbs 15:21). Also, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile" (1 Corinthians 3:20). But why is it important to pay attention to thoughts?

a. Thought is related to the heart; it takes from it and gives to it. the sin of thought may be, at the same time, the sin of the heart if it originates from it, as the Lord said: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Thus, it is said in the story of the flood: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). The phrase "the thoughts of his heart" here means the thoughts that originate from his heart. So, it is not logically possible for a pure heart to produce evil thoughts, for "you will know them by their fruits. Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit" (Matthew 7:16-17). And so the scripture says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Matthew 22:37) before saying, "And with all your mind." So, the heart comes first. Hence, the scripture says, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you" (Proverbs 4:23-24). What is required of you is to guard your heart, to guard your thoughts, and to maintain the straight line between the heart and the mind.

b. If the reins of your thoughts are in your hands: It is permissible for thoughts to come to you from outside sources, from other sources. So, if you accept the thought deep within you, it will then reach your heart. And then the thought turns into feelings in the heart and into emotions. Thoughts can occur while awake or during sleep. Thoughts during sleep may be remnants of the

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thoughts and news of the day, deposited in the subconscious mind from desires and thoughts, and what the ear brings of news and tales, and what the person reads in readings that settle in his mind.

All of these come in dreams, or in reverie, or what they call daydreams. A person continues in them as long as the heart is receptive to them. If it rejects them, they cease, and he wakes up to himself. Human will is the controlling factor in thought; it allows the thought to enter and allows its continuation or cessation. Hence comes the responsibility of what fills your mind, what fills your senses.

Always strive to sanctify your mind with sacred readings from the Holy Bible and the lives of the saints. Do not leave your mind empty, for this is your responsibility. How true are the words of St. John Chrysostom: "No one can harm a man as much as this man harms himself."

Sixth: Beware of deviant ideas and upright faith

Teaching the Coptic Orthodox Church's doctrinal faith is not part of its teachings or a form of its life but is the whole church, all of its life, and its complete tradition that cannot be separated, changed, or summarized from it or added to it. Those who attempt to explain and interpret the faith with a personal human idea either mix up the teaching and distort the comprehensive framework of the doctrine, which cannot be separated into separate units. They are responsible not only for what they say but also for what they do not say and intentionally neglect.

It is not hidden from anyone that explaining the doctrine and presenting Coptic Orthodox teaching must be based on what happens in the liturgy because it is the practical application of the doctrine. There is a big difference between those who preserve the faith without blemish or deception and those who accept it simply and superficially.

Therefore, we say to those with deviant ideas: "Do not despise the Church of God" (1 Corinthians 11:22). And we must warn them because they may "stumble" (Romans 11:11). The church should not stumble, and it is not according to terror but according to love, "lest anyone fall" (Romans 11:12).

And let us ask here about the defectors and their followers:

- Where is the church that transfers to us the liturgy of heaven (the vision)? And where is the secret of the divine presence?
- Where is the interest in the inner depth and the dedication to it through the prayers of the responses?
- Where is the pure spiritual humility in the chanting and worship?
- Where is the real humility from the emotional tensions and psychological acts?
- Where are the means of grace by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is poured into our lives?
- Is the faith we believe in merely intellectual faith and spiritual words spoken in halls? Or is faith life and sanctification?
- Where are the struggle, asceticism, practices, and spiritual exercises?
- Where are the divine mysteries emanating from the side of the Redeemer?
- Where is the baptism by which we are born from the womb of the church?

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- And where is the Chrism by which we are sealed with the anointing of the Holy One?
- And where is the mystery of the Eucharist by which mutual confirmation occurs so that we are in Christ and Christ is in us?
- Where are the heavenly companions? And where is the intercession of the saints? And where are their feasts?
- Where are the fasting, supplications, and virtues?
- Where is the teaching of the apostles, the community, the breaking of bread, and the prayers? Where is the authority of the kenoot?

In short, where is the pride in the Coptic Orthodox Church, the straight view?

Let us, therefore, be vigilant and cautious of those who hold deviant or non-orthodox ideas, which are empty of the content we have learned and received from our Coptic Orthodox Church, from the tradition that was handed down to us once by the saints, the fathers. When I made every effort to write to you about the common salvation, I felt compelled to write to you, exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 1:3)

Seventh: Notice Who Your Friends Are

Certainly, companionship, friendship, and environment have a profound impact on the state of the heart. If you associate with people who have sensitive hearts to the commandments of God, you will learn sensitivity from them, and we will learn accuracy in spiritual behavior. If you associate with people who do not care, they will teach you the hardness of heart. Here are some examples from the Holy Bible:

- Queen Jezebel: Perhaps if it were not for the companionship of Jezebel, Ahab the king would not have hardened his heart to kill Naboth the Jezreelite. (1 Kings 21:12) Jezebel is the one who presented the wrong idea to him, helped him execute it, arranged everything for him, facilitated the obstacles for him, and hardened his heart.
- Rehoboam: And so Rehoboam followed the advice of the young men who had grown up with him, who he listened to rather than the advice of the experienced elders. They advised him to say to the people, "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist. And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" (1 Kings 12:10-11) Thus the dignity was misunderstood in a wrong way. His heart hardened, and he executed their wrong advice. Solomon's kingdom split afterward because of Rehoboam's friends.

Also, observe yourself in terms of who your friends are from: books, media, and social networks:

Evil companionship can be books, media, printed materials, audio recordings, movies, or what is published on social networks, which have unfortunately become a trusted source of learning for some people without investigating their credibility or source. They have become a source of information, behavior, and principles for them. All of this leaves an impact on you in a certain direction, and it may lead you where God does not want you to be, and it teaches you new things that may harm you and instills in you ideas that may change your spiritual outlook, making your heart harder. Or it may introduce new concepts to you about freedom, power, personality, and happiness, which may confuse your principles and values.

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Let the Holy Bible be your constant friend and your primary source. I wish you would befriend the saints and contemplate their lives, so you may absorb from them holiness, fear of God, and a constant longing for eternity. I wish you would be very careful about who your friends are because the wise say, "Tell me who your friend is, and I'll tell you who you are."

Eighth: Remaining Rooted in Your Spiritual Life and Its Depth

Some think that spiritual life is just prayer and fasting, confession and communion, meetings, and service. They try to fill a spiritual schedule with these means to ease their consciences, and in all this, they fall into spiritual stagnation. So, what is the reason for spiritual and superficial stagnation?

1. Concentration on Practices without Depth: This is because they have confined themselves to these practices and have forgotten the purity of the heart from within, which is the foundation upon which spiritual work relies. Without this foundation, a person will falter. For the love of Christ in his heart and his eternal salvation is not the driving force behind his practices. Mere spiritual practices, without the fruits of the Spirit within, can turn the one content with them into a clear Pharisee... it transforms them into whitewashed tombs from the outside, just as the Pharisees used to do, focusing on external practices, while their hearts were empty of true spiritual feelings.

2. Neglecting Primary Virtues and Internal Work

Therefore, focus on internal work, on primary virtues such as love, faith, humility, meekness, purity, and chastity... and then you will find your prayers ablaze with fire because they spring from a pure heart filled with the love of God and the love of virtue... Unfortunately, there may be someone who prays, and yet between them and others, there is a severe feud, or they pray, read, preach, and teach, while inside them, there is anger, agitation, and pride... and so on.

How can there be warmth in prayer while one's heart is distant from spiritual matters, and how can there be a connection with God in their prayer when their heart is far from God, filled with anger, resentment, and discord?!

Remember in all your spiritual practices the clear word of the Lord: "My son, give me your heart." (Proverbs 23:26) and His rebuke to the Jews in the book of Isaiah, saying, "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:15)

Finally, Dear Reader:

Be eager to focus on spiritual growth. Sometimes a person reaches a certain spiritual level without advancing further and thinks that there is a limit without considering surpassing this level to what lies beyond it. Or Satan fights him by claiming that what is beyond this level is a form of extremism.

However, our holy fathers did not settle in their spiritual lives where they had reached. Instead, they constantly strove for better clarity. Our teacher, the Apostle Paul, who was caught up to the third heaven, said: "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Philippians 3:13). Whoever stands still: he is at risk of falling backward.

Therefore, continuously strive to grow, and never be content with what you have. But do so wisely, avoiding extremism, and with spiritual guidance and obedience to your confessing

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father, set before you the higher levels that the fathers reached to motivate you to further strive. Set before you the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to each one of us, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). " You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy."(Leviticus 11:44) Thus, the Lord asks us for holiness and perfection, but we may not be able, with our human effort, to achieve holiness and perfection. Here our great teacher, the Apostle Paul, answers us and reassures us and encourages us saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). God is able, by the work of the Holy Spirit within us, to make us grow spiritually.

Topic 5 “Your Identity ... Who Are You?”

"If we put carrots, eggs, and coffee into boiling water, the effect of boiling water on each of them will be different. The carrots will soften after being hard, the eggs will become hard after being soft, while the coffee will turn the water into a delicious drink!! Water affected the eggs and carrots, while the coffee affected the water.

Do you get influenced by your surroundings and change?! Or do you remain firm, influencing and changing those around you? In a world dominated by globalization, global culture, media, and social media platforms that have brought billions of people together... This is our topic: Dissolving Identity in the Era of Globalization.

Identity Dissolution

This is because the contemporary communication revolution, from satellites to the internet, has created interaction on a daily basis, 24 hours a day, without interruption among the various humans browsing the internet or watching satellite TV. While this social interaction has numerous benefits, the most important of which is the mutual exchange of information, news, ideas, cultures, civilizations, innovations, and news from here and there, the problem lies in the fact that our children and youth will be raised more on the internet and satellite TV than by the upbringing of the family, church, and school.

As the role of the family, church, and school diminishes in the process of raising children, they will be raised based solely on what they see on the internet and the relationships they form in the virtual space on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and others.

Here the problem begins: when one's identity melts due to leaving oneself to be raised by these platforms, and by associating with people who hold ideas that do not suit us, and forming relationships that could be deviant or deceptive... it takes away from their original identity!

Here, gradually, the identity of the users of these platforms begins to fade and dissolve, and this identity can consist of the following elements:

a. Religious Identity:

If the arena of upbringing is left to the world of satellite TV, we expect the outlook of the upcoming generations towards religions to dissolve, and perhaps complete loss of it.. where they imagine that religion is secondary, or irrelevant to life, and that happiness can be achieved without it, and in vain they imagine that.. some intellectuals even speak about the possibility of the upcoming generations reaching what is called "Global Culture" and a "New religion!!"

Therefore, it is important for anyone entering the world of cyberspace to be confident in their religious identity, and to adhere to it with conviction, love, and understanding, so that their religious identity does not dissolve easily in this globalized atmosphere."

"For this reason, the digital generation will encounter much misinformation about the Lord Jesus Christ, His glory, and Christianity in general, making it essential for them to know: Who is Christ? What is His role in life? What does He offer me in this life and in the hereafter? We must hand over to our children the Christian faith from a young age, in infancy, then in nursery, so that they grow up with a sound faith upbringing and Coptic Orthodox doctrine, as we have received them from the church and the fathers.

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b. Doctrinal Identity:

As numerous Christian satellite channels are now spreading, non-Orthodox ones as well, and also some dialogues or chats on social media platforms, they may offer us the deficient Christian education that leads us to lose our Coptic Orthodox doctrinal identity, but in one of two ways:

1- Anti-Orthodoxy Education: Meaning attacking the beliefs of our church in sacraments, intercession, and others. The word "Orthodox" means "straight in praising God..." for Orthodoxy is simply the original, first Christianity, in its depth and simplicity. The church was all one before the schism, moving in one straight line. Orthodoxy continued in the same line, without addition or subtraction, of the original teachings, recorded in the writings of the pre-schism fathers... So, if we want to distinguish between right and wrong, we must go back to the roots, to the Christ of the resurrection, the Christ of the apostles, the Christ of the apostolic fathers, the Christ before the schism. Therefore, as youth in universities and servants in the Coptic Orthodox Church:

- We study Coptic Orthodox doctrine and live by it in our daily lives.
- We understand the difference between it and other beliefs.
- But this should be a comprehensive approach of learning, acceptance, and practice.

2- Non-Orthodox or Non-Denominationalism: Where the expression and the Orthodox concept are erased, presenting a discourse empty of Orthodox doctrine and its role in spiritual life. Some sayings suggest, "They do not attack Orthodoxy explicitly but they erase Orthodoxy, they erase Orthodox belonging, they erase Orthodox church life."

For example, when they talk about repentance, they say it is: regretting the sin and resolving to leave it, and they talk about believing in the blood of Christ that purifies us from every sin, and they do not talk about confessing to the priest, who is also a testament in the Scriptures: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (John 20:23) "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,(Matthew 18:18). The Non-sectarian do not directly attack the liturgy at all, but they never mention the liturgy positively. Meaning, you won't find someone urging you to take communion or confess, or urging you to bring the priest to visit a sick person to pray for him, take his confession, and anoint him with oil, and there's no mention of the liturgy or the prayer of anointing the sick in their conversations or writings because they do not believe in the sacraments and do not practice them."

- You won't hear or read among the non-denominationalists about the monasticism or its fathers... You won't hear about the great Saint Antony, nor Saint Athanasius the Apostle, nor about our fathers the monks who struggled, and how they struggled, and to what extent they toiled? But the Scripture guides us: "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7).

- Also, they don't talk about the necessity of praying with responses; their approach is: "Pray as you wish, you are free, we are not limited to formal prayers with the Lord Jesus." Here, no one directly attacks the responsive prayer, but they teach the youth another method, saying to them: "You have the freedom to pray as you wish," and they convince them, saying: "The words you say from your heart, you feel them; what's our relation to what David said?! Where are your words?!"

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God wants to hear your words, He wants you to pray freely," and this is how they manipulate whenever they encounter someone who is genuinely Orthodox and Coptic.

The Danger of Non-Denominationalism:

1- Young people are not informed about the general dogmas of our Orthodox faith, such as the belief in intercession, baptism, and the sacraments. The essence of non-denominationalism is abandoning these doctrines and neglecting to talk about them, like someone who promotes one product to the point where its advertisement is everywhere, while we neglect another product that is essential for our lives. So, the youth who go to a non-denominational place, where they don't see any liturgical rites, communion, icons, or priests, how can they be connected to the Orthodox faith specifically in its doctrine and rituals?

2- Denominationalism erased from our children the heritage of the Coptic Orthodox fathers that we received.

3- Orthodoxy implants in us a sense of belonging; because non-denominationalism's essence is the dissolution of everything. The Orthodox Church is the mother church; it is the national church. Foreign missions came to Egypt under specific circumstances in the 19th century. It is essential that our children belong to the Coptic Orthodox heritage. If not for the blood of the martyrs, and if not for the struggles of the fathers and the first school of Alexandria for teaching the faith, we would not have been Christians.

4 - The nondenominational ideology is to deceive the simple among the Christians, by claiming that we are all one in Christ, and that our Lord Jesus Christ taught us love, and that God is love... etc.

5- The danger of non-denominationalism is that it makes a person confused between the two groups: because many of our children attend church and also go to those non-denominational associations or non-Orthodox places to listen to a sermon or attend an attractive recreational day sometimes. The Gospel principle is clear, that a person cannot serve two masters. Non-denominationalism is a type of serving two masters.

6- Non-denominationalism makes us forget the perfection of theological thought. Many heresies have entered into us that made us forget the Christian faith. What if non-denominationalism entered at the time of Arius? Can the Arian heretics or Jehovah's Witnesses or Sabbatarians be saved? Can we say we are all one in Christ and reject talking about Jesus Christ the Redeemer? If there were no Athanasius, Arianism would have prevailed!! And the world would have been Arian, and why don't we talk about the great struggle of the great Pope Athanasius against Arianism?

7- Non-denominationalism relies on emotional knowledge, and emotions change from time to time, whereas doctrine does not change, even as emotions change with the change of place, time, and circumstances. Therefore, behavior and spiritual life should be built on the doctrine that does not change.

8- Non-denominationalism introduces many names under the pretext of adhering to human rights, and the basis is human logic, not a theological basis, for example, the issue of the priesthood of women, which is based on human rights, not on a theological or scriptural basis, so no woman throughout the ecclesiastical history has ever held a priesthood degree, and foremost among them is the Virgin Mary, is there any correlation between human rights and divine priesthood?

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9- Non-denominationalism disintegrates Christian communities and loses the unity of faith, the unity of doctrine, and ignores many of the texts of the Holy Bible (regarding communion, baptism, and sacraments). Our Lord Jesus Christ deals firmly and strongly with those who reject the texts of the Holy Bible, like "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53) and "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

c. Coptic Identity:

By "Coptic," we mean the Orthodox Coptic, with its majestic and ancient history. The word "Coptic" itself is derived from the ancient Egyptian word "khepetch," meaning "the land of the Pharaohs." It became "Aiguptios" in Greek, and we pronounce it as "Coptic" today. Therefore, our generations must be familiar with their glorious and unique church, which is:

1- The Church of the Theologians:

Which led the world in the early centuries of Christianity and directed the global ecumenical councils to formulate the Christian faith, rejecting:

- . The heresy of Arius, who denied the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- . The heresy of Macedonius, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
- . The heresy of Nestorius, who separated the natures of Christ: the divine and the human.
- . The heresy of Eutyches, who claimed that the human nature was absorbed in the divine nature.
- . The heresy of Sabellius, who claimed that the substance of the Godhead is one but appeared in different forms in different ages.

Until today, the theological formulations of the law of faith, and the theological writings of Athanasius and Cyril, remain the backbone in explaining Christian theology, in all parts of the Christian world, with its multiple denominations.

2. The Church of Monasticism:

This is the church that spread monasticism throughout the world, through what Saint Athanasius wrote about the life of Saint Anthony when he was in exile in Europe. Thus, this saint and that book became a beacon throughout the Christian world.

The fathers of monasticism in Egypt: Anba Anthony, Anba Paula, Anba Shenouda, and Anba Pakhomius, and others, along with their children and disciples, became teachers of monasticism worldwide. Where came "Blandus" and others from different countries, came to us, lived in our monasteries, learned from our fathers, and then went back to their countries to establish similar monastic lives. They also wrote the history of Coptic monks living in deserts, mountains, and caves, and established the rules of monasticism.

3. The Church of the Martyrs:

Our Coptic Orthodox Church presented the greatest number of martyrs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is the only church in the world with its own calendar, alongside the Gregorian

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calendar, called the "Martyrs' Calendar," which began in 482 AD, with the ascent of Diocletian to the throne. He was one of ten Roman emperors who killed thousands of Coptic Christians.

Thanks to our church, it continues until now to offer martyrs from its own children, such as the martyrs of Nag Hammadi, the beloved ones, the martyrs of the Church of the Two Saints, the martyrs of Libya, and others from the martyrs of this era.

4. The Church of the Spreading of the Gospel:

There is no doubt that the Coptic Orthodox Church has been a missionary church from the beginning. It is the church that extended Christianity eastwards to India, through the distinguished Saint Thomas, and northwards to Palestine and Asia Minor, and southwards to Ethiopia and Eritrea, and westwards to western cities, even to Switzerland and Ireland. This is a glorious history that our children must be familiar with.

The Coptic Orthodox Church extended to all continents of the world under the care and efforts of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. It began with the migration of Copts to the diaspora and the establishment of churches, monasteries, dioceses, the ordination of bishops and priests in the United States, Canada, Australia, Europe, and Africa. We now hear about Coptic churches and liturgies in China, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Fiji, Pakistan, etc. And His Holiness Pope Tawadros continues to work on spreading the Coptic Church in all countries of the world.

d. Cultural Identity:

Each culture has its own distinctive features. American culture differs from English, French, Italian, Arabic, African, Asian, etc. There are multiple cultures in the world, and they respect each other as well as the differences between them.

We have our Egyptian culture, which we have lived by, including respecting the elderly, being committed to our parents and grandparents, compassionately dealing with the sick, elderly, and needy, the sweetness of social solidarity without regard to any religious or social differences. We also do not accept any injustice inflicted upon ourselves or others, the culture of sacrifice, and respect for the feelings of others, as well as the warmth of affection in family, friendship, and society. These are all aspects of Egyptian culture.

But the one entering the virtual world will encounter other cultures, some of which call for:

1. Individualism... where some now sloganize: "Me" and "Me After the Flood."
2. Materialism... "The essential thing is my money?" This is another raised slogan! For what governs is interest.
3. Sensuality ... and rampant sexual indulgence on these sites, whether through images or through available deviant relationships, and a site that encourages husbands and wives to swap and commit adultery.
4. Consumerism... The culture of the mall, where goods are displayed in an impressive manner, so that you buy what you don't need. As for your needy brother: "It doesn't matter... and I am my money."
5. Violence... which has begun to dominate international, social, and family interactions... and is now widespread everywhere. The danger then is that unless our generations are brought up with a solid Egyptian cultural upbringing, with all its positives, while rejecting its negatives...

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unless we do that, our generations will merge into this global culture, with all its negatives. Of course, we don't mean cultural isolation at all, but we call for cultural openness to others all over the world, to benefit from and choose what's good and reject what's bad... to be open to all people and cultures, but on condition that our motto is "Embrace the Good, Reject the Bad."

5- Egyptian Identity:

Among the dangers of hasty integration without proper preparation and solid construction of the human being is that it leads to a kind of "national identity confusion." This is because global cultural integration will necessarily be followed by a lot of erosion of the national belonging to my Egypt.

Because some may boast about other countries for their scientific and economic advancement, or excessive freedom, then they may lose their love and respect for their original homeland, and thus their Egyptian identity melts away, and some may even feel ashamed of it... unfortunately! Therefore, our generations must be acquainted with their original Egyptian heritage and their national belonging, as they are the descendants of the great Pharaohs, the first to know medicine, astronomy, engineering, chemistry, and writing.

- They are the builders of the Pyramids, which modern science is still puzzled by, studying how they were built and how they have endured over time.

- Egyptians are the creators of "Papyrus" which was growing as a plant on the banks of the Nile, so they made it into writing papers, starting in the form of a roll in the first and second centuries, then it became in the form of a "Codex" in the third century.

- The word "medicine" has an Egyptian origin, as the word "Cini" means "papyrus" in the Pharaonic language, then in Coptic, and it is still used in the liturgy. The word "met" means to transform the word into its original form, as we say - ouro (king) and -meouro (kingdom).

And the word "Kemetic" is Pharaonic, so Egypt is called "Kemet" (ꜥꜣy-mrw) which means the black land, due to the color of the Nile's mud. From it, the term "chemistry" (chemistry) emerged later.

- Above all, we are the ones who knew "Monotheism in God" (Θεοδόσιος) before it was known by the entire international world, and that was through "Akhenaten"

- Here are the formidable monuments of the ancient pharaohs challenging time, and if it weren't for the continuation of the Coptic language in our church life, Champollion couldn't decipher "Rashid's Monuments," nor could he recognize the vocabulary of the hieroglyphic language. Thus, a great treasure trove of the pharaohs' monuments and writings opened up to us. Our generations must know all of this so they can take pride in their Egyptian identity, adhere to their Coptic Orthodox faith, and to their ancient, venerable church.

It is important, therefore, that we raise our children with a sound upbringing, and let them savor, even be fulfilled by, their Christian, Coptic, Orthodox, and Egyptian identities, so they do not dissolve in the flood of the internet, satellite TV, and the world of information, but remain steadfast against its influences, committed to the principle:

- We interact positively. - We interact well. - We accept or reject.

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We never want our children to live in isolation from the global community, contemporary developments, or the world of the internet, satellites, and information, but rather to learn the virtue of discernment, which Saint Anthony called the "mother of virtues."

May God preserve our rising generations, keeping their multi-faceted identity intact, so that each of them may say:

- I am a Christian (religious).
- I am Orthodox (doctrinal).
- I am Coptic (ecclesiastical).
- I am Egyptian (cultural and national).

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Memorization

(From the Prayers of the First Hour - Agpia)

PSALM 27 (26)

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. Though an army should encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident.

One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When You said, “Seek My face,” My heart said to You, “Your face, LORD, I will seek.” Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me.

Teach me Your way, O LORD, And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies. Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence. I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD! **Alleluia.**

THE GOSPEL

(John 1:1-17)

A chapter from the Holy Gospel according to St. John
may his blessings be with us all. **Amen.**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This

“ THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION ”

man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **Glory be to God forever. Amen.**

Litanies of The Prayers of The First Hour

O’ True Light, that enlightens every man, that comes into the world. You came to the world because of Your love to mankind, and all the creation rejoiced at Your coming. You saved our forefather Adam from temptation and our mother Eve from the pangs of death and granted us the spirit to be Your children - we praise You, we bless You saying; **Thok-sa-patri Ke ey-you Ke agiyou ep-nevmaty.** **(Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.)**

When the morning hour approaches, O’ Christ our God the True Light, let the senses and the thoughts of the light shine upon us, and let us not be covered by the darkness of pain that we may deeply praise You with David, saying: “My eyes are awake through the night, that I may meditate on Your word”. Listen to our voices according to Your great mercy, and save us, O’ Lord our God, through Your compassion. **Keneen Ke-a-ee Ke-is-touse E-onas ton E-onon. Amen. (Now and forever more. Amen.)**

You are the honourable Mother of the light. Everywhere under the sun, people offer you glorification, the Mother of God (Theotokos), the second heaven. For you are the bright and unchangeable blossom, and the ever-virgin Mother, for the Father chose you, the Holy Spirit over shadowed you and the Son, in humility, was incarnated from you. May you ask Him to redeem the world He has created, and deliver it from tribulations. Let us sing to Him a new hymn and bless Him, now and at all times and forever more. Amen.

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Anthem 2024/2025

(Our God is eternal
Our God is One in Three
Pantocrator, The Logos
Redeemer and Holy) x 2

All generations witness for Him
His creation gives Him praise
Tells of His might and His wonders
How this world His hands have made

We're peaceful in His promises
Guided by His teachings
We live by His commandments
We seek Him and His blessings

Our Church fathers and martyrs
Kept Tradition to this day
A life of Sacraments
My Church unique and firm in faith

My faith and my doctrine are glory
Unchanging the teachings and Holy
The Lord is my light and my salvation
The Lord is my light and my salvation

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