**The Coptic Church and Worship (Part II continued)**

 **THE FASTING ORDER IN THE COPTIC CHURCH**

**A CHURCH OF ASCETICISM**

God, who created all the trees in the Garden of Eden for the sake of man, His beloved; ordered him not to eat from just one specific tree. This was not to deprive man, or to impose His authority, but rather to make man worthy of His love through fasting and obeying His commandment; "man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord..." Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4.

The Lord, Himself, the Word Incarnate, fasted before undergoing trial and undertaking His ministry on our behalf We therefore fast with Him to attain victory and blessings at work, and to be able to proceed in the spirit and not according to the flesh (Rom. 8: 1). The Lord fasted for forty days (Matt. 4:2) to transfigurate in the midst of Moses and Elijah who also fasted for forty days (Exod. 40:28; 1 Kings 19:8). In this way He declared that fasting is not deprivation, neither is it a restraint upon the body; but it is rather a sublimation with our Lord on Mount Tabor which enables us to enjoy His Glory made manifest in us.

The Coptic Church (as well as the Ethiopian Church) is an ascetic church that believes in the power of fasting in the life of the believers. Fasting is not considered a physical exercise, but rather it is an offering of inward love offered by the heart as well as the body. Consequently, the Church requests believers to fast for over six months a year. Strangely enough, the Coptic **Church desires - of** its own free will to spend its whole life fasting, **while most** churches in the world increasingly tend to reduce the fasting periods from one generation to the next. In fact, during confession many of the Coptic youth request to increase the days of fasting... very few indeed complain of the many fasting periods.

**THE CONCEPT OF FASTING**

1. The church requires us to fast and abstain from food for a period of time to experience hunger. The Lord Himself experienced hunger (Matt. 4:2) though He is the source of all satisfaction, physical and spiritual. The apostles experienced hunger as they fasted (Acts 10:1; 2 Cor. 11:27). Moreover, we should not indulge in delicacies after abstention, but rather we should observe eating certain non-fat foods:

*"I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth"* Dan. 10:3.

*" Take you also unto your wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and spell"* Ez. 4:9.

*"MY knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh fails of fatness"* Ps. 109:24.

In spite of that, fasting is not merely abstention from food, drink, or delicacies. It is essentially an expression of our love to God who has given His Only-Begotten Son to die for us. If the Lord Jesus delivered Himself for my sake (Ephes. 3:20), then in turn I wish to die all day for His sake (Rom. 8:38). Thus fasting and abstention from food is closely connected with abstention from all that is evil or has a semblance of evil. It is moreover connected with continuous spiritual growth, thereby achieving an offering of fasting that is holy in the eyes of God.

That is what Pope Athanasius elaborated powerfully in his first letter: [When we fast, we should hallow the fast (Joel 2:15)... It is required that not only with the body should we fast, but also with the soul. Now the soul is humbled when it doesn't follow wicked thoughts... And as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, being the heavenly Bread, is the food of the saints... so is the devil the food of the impure, and of those who do nothing which is of the light, but work the deeds of darkness... For not only does such a fast obtain pardon for souls, but being holy, it prepares the saints, and raises them above the earth].

2. God created our "good" bodies and souls to function together under His guidance and to carry out his will. Now if our souls succumb to the wicked desires of the flesh in disobedience, we become carnal (Rom. 7:14), Through fasting we beseech God to subjugate our bodies by the Holy Spirit so that we might live in the spirit and not according to the flesh (Rom. 8:12). It is true that St. Paul preached the Gospel to many, but he warned against the flesh, which he mastered by fasting as he feared to be a castaway. (I Cor. 9:27).

3. While fasting, we pray to be liberated from our "ego." Thus we fast and abstain from "selfishness" as much as we abstain from food. We practice loving God through loving our brothers and all humanity by His grace. Hence St. Paul says "Though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, it forfeit me nothing" I Cor. 13:3. Therefore fasting should be associated with the witness to God's love through giving alms and striving for the salvation of souls. In the early church, many catechumens were baptized on Easter eve or the Christian Passover as a result of the great activity of church preaching during Lent besides the rest of the year doing so in a state of continuous prayer, fasting and practical testimony. Particularly that people were more prepared, while fasting, to receive the word of God and become members in the body of our Lord Jesus.

Until today, Lent is considered one of the richest periods of wholehearted devotion demonstrated by practical offerings to the poor and the needy. Believers undertake this in obedience to the Scripture: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? Is it not to deal by bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? " Is. 5 8:3 -7.

In the first centuries of Christianity, praying and fasting (the direct love of God) were integrated with alms giving (our love to God interpreted by our love to our neighbors). This is explained in the book "The Shepherd" of Hermes, urging believers to offer their savings resulting from fasting to widows and orphans, Origen blesses those who fast and feed the poor, and St. Augustine has written a whole book on fasting, as he feels that a person, who fasts without offering his savings to the poor, has in fact practiced "greed" rather than fasting.

4. The days of fasting are days of repentance and contrition. At the same time, they are periods of joy and cheer as believers experience victory and power in their innermost self. Fasting does not imply fatigue, restraint, or irritation, but rather it inspires joy and inward gladness with the Lord reigning within the heart... This is the experience of the Coptic Church particularly during the Holy Week. At that time believers practice asceticism more than at any other time of fasting. The signs of real spiritual joy and consolation filling the heart are so clearly evident then.

Pope Athanasius of Alexandria has recorded this experience. He says: [Let us not fulfill these days like those that mourn, but by enjoying spiritual food, let us try to silence our fleshly lusts. For by these means we shall have strength to overcome our adversaries, like blessed Judith (13:8), when having first exercised herself in fasting and prayers, she overcame the enemies, and killed Olophernes

Fasting is not a situation which may be used as a pretext for anger. It is rather an opportunity to demonstrate a loving heart and power over the spirit of anger, selfishness, and all egocentricity.

**FASTING AND CHURCH ORDER**

While many Copts (as well as Ethiopians) spend most of their

days fasting of their own free will, and while they do so by the

Motherly help and love of the Church (through the Church Order),

Many westerners avoid the cross of fasting and put forward the

Following excuses:

1. Fasting is an individual worship to be practiced privately (in secret) (Matt. 6:17,18). The answer to this is that the same commandment applies to prayer and giving alms (Matt. 6:3,6). Besides, prayer and alms giving are practiced in all the churches of the world on a communal basis. In the Old Testament people observed communal worship in the form of prayer, hymns and Bible readings as well as fasting (Zech. 8:19; Est. 4:3. 16; Ezra. 8:21; 2 Chorn. 203; Joel 3:5). In the New Testament the apostles fasted together (Act 13:2,3). Hence why should believers avoid communal fasting under the pretext of private observance? The secret of the Early Church being strong was its unified faith as well as communal participation even in fasting. History itself is a witness that ever since the apostolic age, both Eastern and Western churches fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays besides the Great Lent. To answer to the concept of fasting privately in order to avoid boastfulness, we find the apostle revealing that he fasted. He announces "with fasting," and he practiced it with those who were on the boat (Acts 27:21).

2. Why are the days set for fasting specifically designated? If they are not indicated or organized by the Church, believers may be deprived of fasting all their lives. This is just what has happened in most Western Churches. In the Old Testament there were designated fasting days (Zech. 8:9) side by side with communal fasting or personal ones practiced in periods of hardship.

3. Some object to fasting designated by the Church by quoting the words: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink..." Col 2:16, and "What God has cleansed, that call you common" Act 10: 11- 15, and also the words: some shall depart from the faith. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God has created to be received with thanksgiving..." I Tim. 4:1-3. This can be explained as follows:

a. The Apostle didn't say, "Let no man therefore judge you in fasting" but he said… "In meat or in drink." Thus what is intended here is **the abstention from certain forbidden food designated by the** Law of Moses. As when St. Peter saw a great sheet cover with all kinds of food and abstained at first (Acts 10: 11 - 15). Therefore the Apostle meant here to fight the idea of reverting to Judaism.

b. Concerning those who forbid specific food such as the Manichaeans and the Donatists, who also have forbidden marriage as unclean and eating meat as defiling ... those were excommunicated. During fasting we do not forbid certain food (as unclean) but we voluntarily subjugate and control the body (I Cor. 9:27).

It is noteworthy to underline that the first man was vegetarian (Gen. 1:29), and man continued to avoid eating meat until the period of Noah's ark (Gen. 9:3). At that time his spiritual standard dropped. This explains why believers eat vegetarian food when they wish to create a suitable atmosphere for spiritual development. The same behavior was observed by Daniel and the three young men at the palace, and also by Ezekiel.

c. "Church Order" is essential to communal life, as it is indicated in 2 John. Besides, the church is known for its flexibility; believers can be allowed to increase, decrease or even stop fasting by their spiritual fathers, during confession, and according to their spiritual, physical, or health condition.

**PERIODS OF FASTING IN THE COPTIC CHURCH**

First: The Weekly fast: Just as the church practices worship weekly, it also practices general fasting weekly. This has its origin in the Jewish Church. Jews were accustomed to fast on Mondays and Thursdays, as on these two days Moses went up to receive the commandments and descended the mountain carrying the two stone tablets. That is why when Christ spoke about the Pharisee, He said he boasted about fasting every week (Luke 18:12). Since the apostolic age, the Church has been aware of the value of fasting and designated Wednesdays and Fridays as days for fasting. This is done in memory of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion.

**Second: The Great Lent or "Tessaracoste** (forty days fasting)." This is set to achieve a dual purpose: **first, to be prepared to experi**ence the joyful resurrection of the crucified Lord. Secondly, to prepare catechumens through teaching **and guidance to practice worship** together with practical repentance, so that they might receive the sacrament of baptism on Easter eve.

It is necessary to stop and reflect upon these two objectives. Although we celebrate the resurrection weekly on every Sunday, and practice the "resurrected life" every day through continuous renewal and unceasing repentance, yet we are in need of the fasting period of forty days (Great Lent) besides the Holy Week in order to become ready for the joy of the resurrection and the power it gives. Within this period we practice "mortification" in the Lord, that His resurrection may be transfigured in us, and to be able to say with the Apostle Paul: "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" Rom. 8:17.

With regards to the preparation of the catechumens within this period, fasting is necessary for the performance of this task, and gives an increasingly deep significance. It implies an open loving heart towards human race. The whole church fasts, so that God may attract new children to Him, and prepare them for the blessings of His Fatherhood... Thus fasting is a sign of our faith in God's power manifested in our ministry and preaching. On the other hand, fasting particularly the Great Lent should have the aim of witnessing to Jesus Christ and of unceasing prayer for the sanctification of mankind.

At every Lent, a believer used to remember how the Church fasted on his behalf and strived to gain him as a holy vessel and as an altar to the Lord. Similarly, it is his turn now to repay this love by working for the salvation of others.

Actually the observance of "Great Lent" dates back to the age of the apostles:

a. In the writings of St. Irenaeus in the second century - mention is made of believers who fasted for a day, besides others who fasted for two days before Easter, as well as others who fasted for longer periods. There is reference to some who counted forty hours in a day. This does not mean that St. Irenaeus negates fasting during Lent or the Holy Week, but he indicates the complete abstention from food which precedes the Easter Liturgy of Eucharist. For while some are satisfied to fast on Holy Saturday (and that is the only time when the Coptic Church fasts on a Saturday in the form of complete *abstention), others* abstain for two successive days: Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Concerning the calculation of forty hours in a day, this probably refers to a custom practiced in the second century, and which some Copts follow, wherein fasting starts on Good Friday and continues until sunrise on Easter Sunday i.e., until the celebration of the Easter Liturgy. This is equivalent to forty hours.

b. In the middle of the third century, there is strong evidence that fasting extended for six days (from Holy Monday to Holy Sunday). Some scholars comment on this as a clear *indication of* the distinction made between fasting during the six paschal (Holy) days as a whole and fasting on Good Friday and Holy Saturday which has specific significance 10. Actually, what occurred in the **third century** may be considered as complementary to what is mentioned by St. Irenaeus. This saint mentions complete long abstention preceding the Easter Liturgy, whereas what is mentioned regarding the middle of the third century refers to fasting during the Holy Week as a whole and which also has specific *significance, especially* that it is still observed by our Church with greater asceticism than the rest of Lent period.

c. In AD 325, the Council of Nicene mentioned Lent as a settled matter recognized by the Universal Church, and not as an *innova*tion in the church or in some churches.

d. In the middle of the fourth century, St. Athanasius was greatly concerned with writing the "Paschal Letters," even in his exile. The Popes of Alexandria have followed this custom at least ever since Pope Dionysius of Alexandria. These were written on the occasion of the Epiphany, not only to designate Easter time but also to designate the beginning of Lent immediately followed by the Holy Week and by Easter day.

It is noteworthy that in the letters that have come down to us, St. Athanasius integrated Lent with the Holy Week, although he stressed the clear distinction between them.

The Coptic Church fasts for fifty five days (forty day [Lent]; eight days [Holy Week] and seven days instead of the seven Saturdays which are not observed with complete abstention.

**Third: Other Periods of Fasting:** Besides the weekly fasting and Lent followed by the Holy Week, Copts observe the following periods of fasting:

**I- Fasting before Christmas:** Its win is spiritual preparation to receive the birth of Christ. It lasts for forty days plus three days in memory of the general fast observed in the reign of Al Moiz when EI-Muqattarn Mountain was moved.

**2- The Fast of the Apostles:** This begins on the day following Pentecost and continues until the feast of the martyrs, SS. Peter and Paul, on Abib the fifth (twelfth of July). The aim of this fasting period is to fill the soul with fervor and zeal to preach the Word with an apostolic thought.

3- The Fast of Nineveh: This lasts for three days. It starts on the Monday preceding the one before Lent. It probably refers to Jonah's fast, while he was inside the whale's belly.

4- The Fast of the Holy Virgin: This takes place fifteen days before the celebration of the Holy Virgin Mary feast. (It lasts from the seventh to the twenty second of August (16th of Misra)).

5- Fasting on the eve (Paramoun) of **Christmas and on the** eve of the Epiphany... this fast is observed immediately before these feasts, it is taken with great asceticism. If this occurs on a Saturday or Sunday, then fasting starts on Friday to allow complete abstention until sunset.

Notes on Periods of Fasting observed by the Copts:

1- Fasting is not observed on Wednesdays and Fridays occurring in the "Pentecostal Period," i.e., the fifty days starts from Easter to Pentecost.

2- The sick and travelers may reduce the periods set for fasting by absolution during confession. As for those who observe asceticism, they may fast all their lives and follow no restrictions. Upon consecration, a bishop fasts for a complete year.

**CHURCH READINGS IN THE
COPTIC CHURCH**

Man's words proclaim his inner life, characteristics, personality, abilities and his gifts. Likewise church readings uncover her nature, thoughts, aims, and abilities.

**CHURCH READINGS IN THE EARLY AGES**

Jews used to pray daily liturgies besides the rites of the morning and evening sacrifices, especially on Saturdays and on feasts. The synagogue set certain readings especially for Saturdays.

We can summarize the contents of the daily Jewish liturgy in the days of Jesus Christ in the following points:

1. The president of the synagogue chooses one of the people to read the *"Shema,"* i.e., the Jewish Creed which contains Deut. 6:49; 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41, and the 18 blessings (On Saturday there are only 7 blessings).

2. A reading from the *Pentateuch* (five books of Moses) in Hebrew and in Aramaic.

3. A reading from the Prophets or other books.

4. If there was a suitable person or persons to preach, he (or they) did so (Acts 13:15).

† The Christians who had Jewish origin participated in these Jewish liturgies till the year A.D 60 (Acts 20:16).

† The Christian Church inherited from the synagogue the readings from the Scriptures that were suitable to the Christian mind.

9 In the second century, St. Justin stated that the church admitted readings from the Gospels and the apostolic writings.

9 In the second century there were certain church readings especially for feasts of Christian Pasch and Pentecost. Afterward other readings were set as those of the feasts of martyrs and of Sundays. [Many of the church Fathers mentioned the use of the two testaments in the church readiness.]

† Before the Council of Nicea, the church had one "Lectionary" or more.

**THE FEATURES OF THE READINGS IN THE COPTIC CHURCH**

First: Church readings can be divided into two kinds, each one revealing a side of the church nature:

1. Readings that present a general line throughout the year, starts with El-Nayrouz (the beginning of the Coptic year) and continue till the end of the year in a certain theological and spiritual manner. These readings throughout the whole year uncover the church curriculum and her spiritual ladder, and at the same time represent the church catholicity (universalism) and her unity.

2. Everyday readings, according to the feasts of the saints and other circumstances. These readings show the distinctive nature of a day and the other. According to us, this represents the distinction between church members, and the variety of their gifts. This distinction and variety complement the catholicity of the church and her unity.

We can call the first kind of readings: "The general line of church readings" while the other is called: "The special readings."

Second: Church readings are considered as a part of church worship, these readings are recited with special tones (in Coptic) to declare the purpose of the choice of the church from these readings. Through church readings, worshipers offer to God hymns of love. In other words, church readings are prayers, through them we hear God's voice and talk to Him secretly. These readings are a dialogue of love between God and His people, therefore there is no church worship without biblical readings. Church readings are used not only through the daily Eucharistic liturgy but also in evening *(Vesper),* and morning *(Matins)* offerings, also through different liturgies such as the funeral services. Even in the canonical hours, every time we pray, the Psalms are mixed with certain readings from the New Testament.

**Third:** Church readings in the Eucharistic liturgy are not set by distributing the chapters of the two Testaments throughout the year, but the church chooses by the guidance of the Holy Spirit certain chapters to present an integral spiritual and theological curriculum. This curriculum is in accordance with church occasions, hymns and rites throughout the year, aiming at the edification of the holy community.

**Fourth:** Besides the readings from the two testaments which are in accordance with the church hymns, there are other readings from the traditional and patristic writings, such as:

1. The "Synixarum": It contains the biographies of saints and God's actions with the church throughout the ages.

2. The "Difnar": It contains doxologies to God who acted in the life of the saint whose feasts we celebrate. This book is no longer used in most of our churches.

3. Patristic sermons like those of St. John Chrysostom. Today most of our churches suffice with a sermon preached by one of the clergymen.

**CHURCH READINGS BOOKS**

There are many "Lectionaries" that contain selected chapters from the Holy Bible, used in the Eucharistic liturgy, vespers and matins:

1. General Lectionary: contains readings for Sundays and ordinary days throughout the year. It is divided according to the Coptic months.

2. Lectionary for the Great Lent.

3. Lectionary for the Holy Week (Paschal Week).

4. Lectionary for the Pentecostal period (the period between Easter and Pentecost).

THE GENERAL LINE FOR THE GENERAL CHURCH

READINGS

Besides everyday readings (special church readings of the Days), the general church readings through the Coptic year present an integral church curriculum as an evangelic, ascetic, theological and eschatological (heavenly) one and at the same time it does not ignore our practical everyday life on earth.

*The general church readings are for the followings periods:*

1. From El-Nayrouz feast (the **beginning of the Coptic Year)** to the feast of the Cross (1:17 Tout): The readings of this period concentrate on joy, chanting hymns and the constant renewal; the first verse that is read in the eve of El-Nayrouz is: "Sing to the Lord a new song." Truly, repentance is the way to the kingdom of God, but when repentance is mixed with hope, it is practiced through per petual inner joy.

The analogy between El-Nayrouz (Feast of Martyrs) and the feast of the Cross. Using a joyful *(Farayhi)* tone throughout this period confirms the joyful life of the suffering church, for she joyfully bears the cross together with her Heavenly Groom.

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2. **The preparation for Christmas** (Nativity of Christ in Keyahk 29): The church fasts for 43 days before Christmas, and presents readings which concentrate on "God's friendship with man" realized by the divine incarnation.

3. The correlation between **the feasts of Christmas, Circumcision and Epiphany** (The Baptism of Jesus Christ): The readings of these feasts announce that our Friend became like us, submitted Himself to the Law and was circumcised. He also entered with us into. the Jordan River, was baptized to lift us up to the spiritual circumcision, changing our friendship to Him unto the "Adoption to God", that we might become "members of the household of God" Eph. 2:19.

In other words, the "divine friendship'' (Christmas) can be realized through two integral actions: descent of the Word of God unto, us (His circumcision like us), and lifting us up to Him by His Holy Spirit (our spiritual circumcision or our baptism). He became like us, subjected Himself to the Law which He issued, that we might become like Him, children of His Holy Father!

4. **"Jonah's Pasch"**: Our adoption to God is realized through "passing over" (Pasch), for we have to die with Christ, be buried with Him (as if we were in the belly of the great fish), that we might reign with Him and enjoy the new life [the word "Pasch" means "Passover"].

The readings of the fasting and of the "Pasch" of Jonah represent a call to believers that they might read the books of the Old Testament in a new concept, through the events of the Christian Pasch, i.e., the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

5. **The readings of Great Lent**, on Sundays and ordinary days in Lent. These readings, from the Old and New Testaments, have their particular features, for they urge us to accept the true and practical communion with Christ, our Pasch, who was slain for our sake.

6. **The readings of the Holy Week**, i.e., the readings of the period from Saturday of Lazarus till Easter. These readings are considered the center of all church readings, for through them the church follows all the events of salvation hour by hour, to declare the mystery of the redeeming divine love from the Old and New Testaments, so that believers might live in these events with all their hearts and senses and lastly enjoy the delight of Christ's resurrection

7. **The Pentecostal Period**, with its readings and joyful (Farayhi) hymns reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, which in its essence is the enjoyment of communion with the Risen Christ, who is in heavens.

8. **The Feast of the Apostles (5th of Abib 12 July):** It is the feast of preaching and ministering unceasingly, and the feast of the acceptance of the apostolic life.

9. The Feast of St. **Mary (16 Misra 22 August):** It declares the glories that a believer might attain by his unity with the Glorious Christ, revealed in a unique way in St. Mary as the excellent member among the believers. It also assures the communion of saints.

10. **The preparation for El-Nayrouz:** In the last two weeks of the Coptic year, church readings attract our sight and mind towards the events of the end of the world and Christ's last advent. Church readings prepare the believers to sing: "Yes; Come O Lord Jesus."

In brief, the frame of the general curriculum of the church is:

1. It starts with the spiritual joy in the Lord together with the desire of the continual renewal, as a base for our spiritual life (Feast of El-Nayrouz till the feast of the Cross c.II September up to c. 27 September).

2. This joy is based on God's friendship and love towards men (Christmas or the Feast of the Nativity of Christ - 7 January).

3. God's love and friendship were realized through His participating in our nature, that we may also participate in Jesus' sonship by the spirit of adoption (Feasts of Circumcision and Epiphany - 19 January).

4. This sonship is realized by passing over from bondage through the Pasch, the center of the Old Testament (Jonah's Pasch).

5. The Old Pasch is a symbol of our True Pasch, the Crucified and Risen Christ (The Great Lent).

6. We have to accept the practical communion with our Pasch by participating in His crucifixion so that we might attain the delight and power of His resurrection (The Holy Week).

7. We have to accept the eschatological (heavenly) thought, that we might not miss the inner kingdom (The Pentecostal period).

8. As we attain communion with God we must witness to Him by preaching (The Feast of the Apostles).

9. Our communion with God leads us to the communion with our brothers and unites us with His saints (The Feast of St. Mary).

10 Our experience of the communion with God and with our brothers inflames our desire for the Lord's last advent, to enjoy the heavenly and eternal communion in the perfect glories (The end of the year).



Through the above mentioned summary we remark that the Coptic Church presents through the general readings an integral thought about God's love and His redeeming work. It also presents our responsibility for the spiritual struggling, meditation on the heavenly glories accompanied by accepting sufferings joyfully, attaining the mysteries of the word of God together with preaching and witnessing, and attaining the communion with God and His son by His Holy Spirit through our communion altogether in Him.

**PRIVATE WORSHIP
IN THE COPTIC CHURCH**

ONE WORSHIPPING LIFE

In his daily life, conduct and worship, the believer bears an integral indivisible life, either life "in Christ" or "out of Christ." When he enjoys his life "In Christ," his fellowship in public worship is complimented by practicing his unseen private worshipping; as both represent one devotional life. In other words, sharing the church liturgies with the congregation, a believer fortifies his spiritual life when he goes into his private room and shuts the doors of his senses. Thus when he is among the group physically, his heart, mind and soul are at liberty in heavens meeting and conversing intimately with God as though the universe embraces none but them both. And when he enters into his private room, closes the outer door and pours forth in front of God in a true spiritual worship he holds the whole world -in his heart; I mean the whole human race praying for them and seeking their prayers on his behalf While he is in his room he feels he is inside the church that unites a host of spiritual militants with the victorious including the heavenly hosts.

In the fight of this concept we cannot draw a dividing line that separates between church life and private worshipping life, because the church is every believer holding firmly together with his brethren in the One Head.

That is why in the present time, due to housing problems in Egypt, when a believer does not find a private room to pray in solitude, he stands or bows in prayer in the presence of the family members. He does not abstain from praying because he does not have a private locked room. His room is already inside him if he chooses to shut out his senses.

**PRIVATE OR INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP?**

Individuality is non-existent in our Church's dictionary. The spirit of individuality and isolation has been eliminated in the human loving Christ, that we might live in the spirit of collective love even if we were in our private rooms. This I have clarified frequently while talking about monasticism and monarchism. Hence monasticism is not an inner isolation from the community, or a practice of individual life, but it is a unity with God, the Lover-of-mankind.

**PRIVATE WORSHIP**

In the Coptic Church, the believer practices many private forms of worships of which we mention:

1. **The Canonical Hours** (the Agbia prayers): The early church took after the Jewish Church the system of dividing the days into hours of prayers. Many of the Copts pray Matins and Compline and some pray Midnight. When they have the chance they pray other prayers.

We need to notice the following in the Canonical Hours prayers:

a. Every prayer is called "song of praise," as though the church is calling on her children to lead a life of joy if possible all the hours of their life, day and night.

b. In every hour the church offers us the memory of a certain phase of God's redeeming work. The "Matin" song of praise reminds us of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and our daily resurrection to begin a new life in Him. The Terce (praise of the third hour) reminds us of the coming upon the church of the Holy Spirit of God, the Giver of perpetual renewal and holiness. In the Text we remember the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, while in the None (ninth hour) we remember the death in the flesh of our Lord and the acceptance of the right hand thief, in Paradise. In the Vespers (sunset) we remember the removing of our Lord's Body from the cross, giving thanks for concluding the day, and asking Him that we might spend the night in peace. In Compline we remember the burial of the Body of our Lord watching for the end of our sojourn on earth... yet in the three midnight prayers we await for the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

c. The hourly songs of praise begins with giving thanks to God after the Lord's prayer, then submitting our repentance (Psalms 50 [51]), followed by praise with Psalms.

2. Besides the prayers or the praises of the Canonical Hours the believer practices his **private talk with God;** one time praising, another time thanking and a third time contending and a fourth time asking and pleading. It is worthy of the believer to be openhearted. He would not focus in his prayers upon his personal needs but ask for all if possible: for his beloved as well as his antagonists, for his acquaintances as well as for strangers, for believers as well as nonbelievers.

3. It is worthy of a believer also to practice "kneeling" *(Metanias),* as a sign of contrition and repentance. The believer trains himself to practice "kneeling" for the salvation of others.

4. Preoccupation with God through the day, that is **"prayer of calling Jesus' name".** Which is called the "arrow prayer," in which the believer cries out from moment to moment with a short prayer calling the name of our Lord Jesus Christ as an arrow to strike with, the snares of our enemy Satan. This action, simple as it is, has its own effectiveness in the life and worship of the believer.

5. Praises, glorification and beatification: some believers practice church hymns daily or on feasts as a private worship in their bedrooms. Here we need to mention that some Copts prefer setting up a special corner for prayer. If this is not easy to do we find that many icons decorate their homes as a sign of their longing for holy life in God and fellowship with the saints.