



NEWS of January 2013

1. The Feast of Nativity:

The Church celebrated Christmas, Sunday, January 6, 2013.



2. The Feast of St. John the Beloved:



St. John Church celebrates the Feast of her Intercessor; St. John the Evangelist, on Saturday, January 12, the Liturgy will be from 8:00 a.m. Also, the life of St. John will be studied in the youth meeting on Friday 11, and in family meeting, Thursday, 10 and Vespers of Saturday 12.

3. The Feast of Circumcision:

The church celebrates this Lord's Minor Feast on Monday, January 14 by a Liturgy from 8:00 to 10:00 am. (Note that the O.T. circumcision was a type of the New Testament baptism according to Col. 2:11; 12)

4. The Feast of Epiphany:

On Saturday, January 19, the church celebrates Epiphany, the baptism of Christ, also known as Theophany, when the three Persons of the Holy Trinity appeared. The feast's liturgy starts Friday, January 18 at 7:00 with Vespers, "Lakkan" and followed with an agape meal in the church hall.



5. The Feast of Cana of Galilee's Wedding:

This will be celebrated on Monday, January 21, by a Liturgy from 8:00-10:00 a.m. It is one of the Lord's Minor Feasts. Jesus proved His Divinity and transformed water into wine.



6. H.H. Pope Tawadros II:

+ Pope Tawadros declared his opinion that the Coptic Orthodox Church does not interfere in politics. He encouraged every Coptic Christian to practice his national rights and obligations.



+ His Holiness advised his people to read one chapter every day from the Book of Proverbs because it teaches wisdom and is composed of 31 chapters, which is the number of each month's days. And this is in addition to our daily Bible readings.

7. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

His Grace Bishop Serapion sent to the Diocese' churches, the new schedule of the Clergy Meetings for the New Year 2013.



8. Feast of St. Anthony (Wed. Jan. 30):

St. John church in Covina used to celebrate St. Anthony's feast by a trip to his Monastery in California desert on Saturday, January 26, 2013. Reserve your place in the bus from the Church Book-Store.



9. Renew your St. John Magazine's Subscription:

Do not forget to renew your subscription in St. John Magazine for the New Year 2013.

10. Logos TV Banquet at St. John's Jan. 13:

This Dinner Banquet will take place at St. John Church Hall 21329 E. Cienega Ave. Covina, CA 91724, on January 13, 2013, at 5:00 p.m. It is made as a fundraiser on behalf of Logos TV channel. You can buy your ticket from the Church- Bookstore for \$50.00 (or more as a donation) including the dinner. Please share in spreading the word of God and help our only Coptic channel in America and covers Egypt and all the Middle East countries.



Poems for St. Mary

Prayer for a New Mother

The things she knew, let her forget again-
The voices in the sky, the fear, the cold,
The gaping shepherds, and the queer old men
Piling their clumsy gifts of foreign gold.

Keep from her dreams the rumble of a crowd,
The smell of rough-cut wood, the trail of red,
The thick and chilly whiteness of the shroud
That wraps the strange new body of the dead.

Ah, let her go, kind Lord, where mothers go
and boast his pretty words and ways, and plan
the proud and happy years that they shall know
Together, when her son is grown a man.

Mary Did You Know?

May did you know that your baby boy,
will one day walk on the water?

May did you know that your baby boy
will save our children?

Did you know that your baby boy,
has come to make you new?

This child that you delivered will soon deliver you?

May did you know that your baby boy,
will give sight to the blind?

Did you know that your baby boy,
will calm the storm with his hand?

Mary did you know, when you kiss your baby,
you put a kiss on the face of God

The Maid-Servant at the Inn

"It's queer," she said; "I see the light
As plain as I beheld it then,
All silver-like and calm and bright-
We've not had stars like that again!

"And she was such a gentle thing,
To birth a baby in the cold.
The barn was dark and frightening-
This new one's better than the old.

"I mind my eyes were full of tears,
For I was young, and quick distressed,
But she was less than me in years
That held a son against her breast.

"I never saw a sweeter child-
The little one, the darling one!-
I mind I told her, when he smiled
you'd know he was his mother's son.

"It's queer that I should see them so-
The time they came to Bethlehem
Was more than thirty years ago;
I've prayed that all is well with them."

-Dorothy Parker



Before Christ and After Christ



By H.H. Pope
Shenouda

The world has changed completely after the birth of Christ, and started a new era, which is dramatically different from the previous ages. Christmas has become a divider between two ages, what is before Christ and what is after Christ. So, what is this newness that gave the world a new picture, which did not exist before? What is new that Christianity had brought to the world and led the Gospel to say, "Old things have passed away, everything has become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Lord Jesus Christ presented to the world a new concept for the meaning of life. He brought new expressions and deep spiritual meanings to every known habits and traditions, that His audience were amazed and even His enemy said, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John 7:46).

1. Christ came spreading love among the people, and between people and God: He presented God to people as a loving Father who treats them not as slaves, but as sons calling Him, "Our Father who art in heaven." And when people love God, then they will keep His commandments, not out of fear from His punishment, but rather loving to do good. In this Christianity says, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16). "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn.4:18). Therefore, the Lord Jesus said, "All commandments are summarized in one, which is love, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul and all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22). And the Lord Jesus taught the world a new kind of love, which is the love for the enemies and those who curse you, hate you and persecute you (Matt. 5:44)!

The statement, "God is love", was a new statement to the world, which did not know God before, but a fearful god of vengeance, and punishment and judgment!

And the statement, "Love your enemies" was a new statement to the world in the circle of human relations. The Old world was chocked when it heard that from the mouth of Christ.

2. Christ came also with a message of peace: He taught peace among men, peace between man and God, and peace for man from inside. The peace of God which surpassed all understanding (Phil.4:7). When Jesus was born, the angels sang, "Peace on earth", because He came to establish peace and recon-

cile man-kind with God, after sin had separated both. This reconciliation, Christ wanted to stay in human relations. He said, "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you. Leave your gift before the altar and go your way, First be reconciled

to your brother; and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23, 24).

3. Christ taught that reconciliation is better than offering sacrifices: He repeated the verse that says, "I want mercy more than sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13) Therefore, He said also, "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him" (Matt.5:25). He also said, "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also" (Matt. 5:40)

4. In order to keep peace, Christianity called people to give reference to one another (Rom. 12:10), because love will be confirmed through humility, self-denial and tolerance, and that is why the Lord said, "He who want to follow Me, let him deny himself, carry his cross and follow Me." Also, the word, "self-denial" was a new word that the world did not know before, but used to worship that idol of self.

5. Christianity called the Christian to forget himself in loving his brother: It is the sacrificing love which always giving, and takes the back seat to win others and which disappear to give way to others. The love that says, "He must increase but I must decrease" (Jn.3:30).

6. Humility in dealing with God and people: The humble person does not parade, but do every good thing in secret not to show off. Christianity teaches that "he who seeks honor will lose it, and he who flees from it will find it". And that is what Christ taught, "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12:25).

7. Christ put new measurements for power: Power is not an external appearance for victory and subjugation over others. It is something internal to overcome one's lusts and bad desires. In Christianity, power is not to humiliate others and enslave them, but to win them. He who tolerates others is the real strong person. Those who are strong ought to bear the weak (Rom. 15:1).

Even the commandments of the Old Testament, people did not understand them until Christ came and explained them right by His teaching and His new practical example.





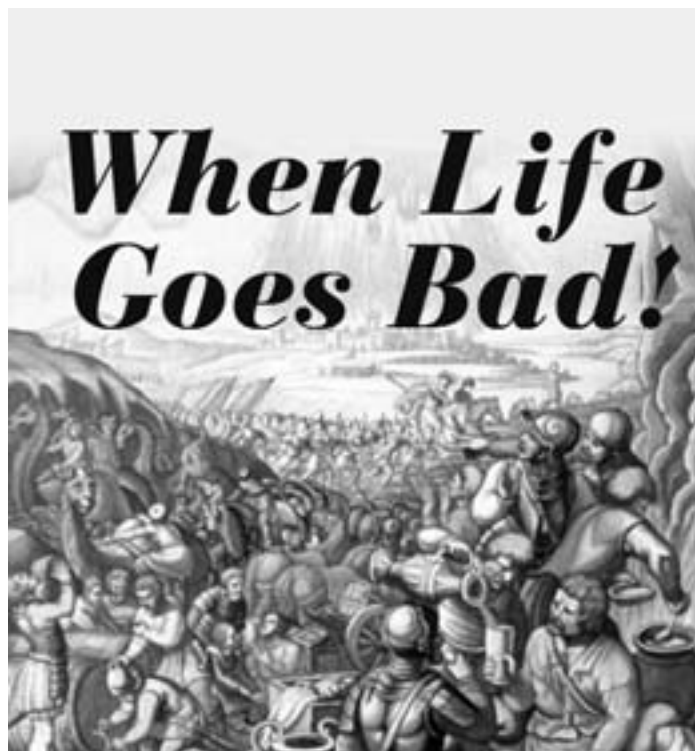
"I cling to Your testimonies; O Lord...I will run the course of Your commandments (Psa. 119:31).

Many people make resolutions on New Year's Day, promising God or themselves or others, that the next year of life will be different and much better. We determine that habits are going to be changed and new patterns of behavior developed.

Resolutions like these are highly commendable and often serve as a stimulus to spiritual growth. But not always. Sometimes our resolutions are carried out only for a little while and all too soon are forgotten!

A committed Christian once said, who lived in the 18th century, frequently wrote resolutions in his journals. Here is a typical entry; "I have corrected no external habits, nor kept any of the resolutions made in the beginning of the year, yet I hope still to be reformed, and not to lose my whole life in idle purposes."

It is good to engage now and then in self-examination. We should face up to the changes that need to be made, and then make plans for the way we're going to implement them. For example, if we realize that our devotional habits are weak and inconsistent, let's resolve to spend some time daily in focused fellowship with God. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us in this consistent practice through all our tomorrows. Today is a good day to start. "This is the Day, which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it" and start a fresh start. Let us re-arrange our priorities and keep the first the greatest commandment, to love the Lord our God from all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Let us run the course of God's commandments with fervency and enthusiasm. Let us increase the time we spend with God every day and decrease the time of speaking idle words with people. Let us ask God to be filled with the Holy Spirit to confirm our new resolutions for the New Year.



"David strengthened himself in the Lord His God" (1 Samuel 30:6).

When everything looks bad and bleak to us, whether in America, or in Egypt, or in the Middle East, and all-over the world; what should we do?

Everything looked bleak to David and his men when they arrived at Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:1-6). The Amalekites had attacked the city and taken their wives and children captive. The men were so discouraged that they wept until they had no more energy. And David, their leader, was "greatly distressed" because the people were contemplating stoning him (v.6).

In the end, David's army rescued their families and defeated the Amalekites. But the story takes a great turn even before that when "David strengthened himself in the LORD his GOD" (v.6). Other translations use the words encouraged or refreshed.

The text doesn't say how David did this. But it makes me wonder, in what ways can we strengthen or encourage ourselves in the Lord when we're feeling discouraged and disappointed?

First, we can remember what God has done. We can list the ways He has cared for us in the past, and how He has provided for us or answered a prayer request.

Second, we can remember what God has promised. "Be strong and of good courage;...for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

Like David, let's learn to strengthen ourselves in the Lord, and then let's leave the rest with Him.

Our greatest strength is often shown in our ability to stand still and trust God.





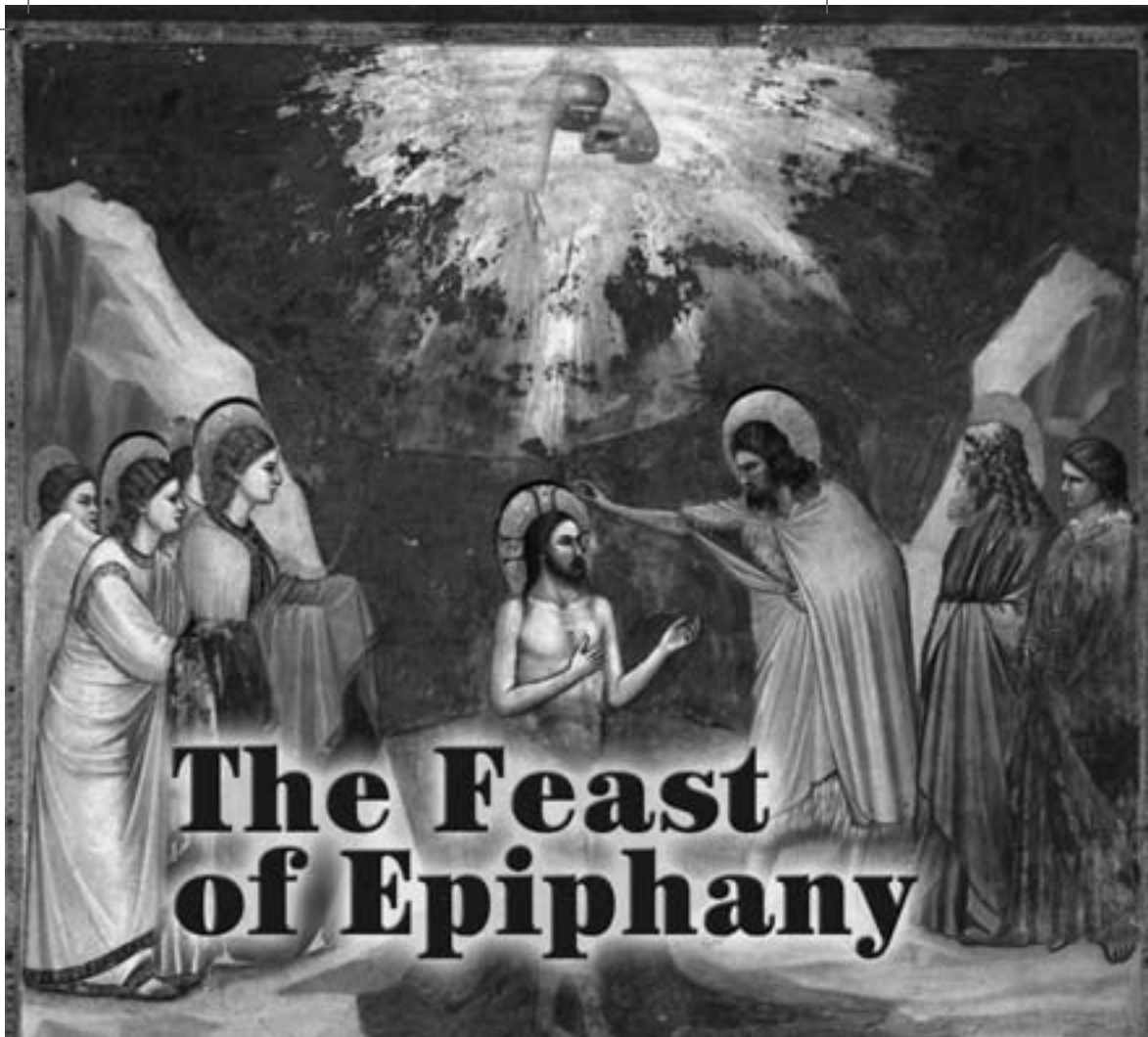
Statistical Summary provided by UBS World Report, ten years ago. Vatican city says, “The Bible is the most widely read book in the world. It has been translated into 2,454 languages, but much remains to be done”, and more in part....

A summary, by geographical area and type of publication, of the number of different languages and dialects, in which publications of the Bible has been registered.

<u>Region</u>	<u>Portions</u>	<u>Testaments</u>	<u>Bibles</u>	<u>Total</u>
Africa	213	279	149	641
Asia	223	228	119	570
Pacific	168	204	33	405
Europe	110	31	62	203
North America	40	26	7	73
Central & S. America	127	244	21	392
Constructed Languages	2	0	1	3
Total	883	1,012	392	2,287

The “Book of Books” was now translated to more than 2,454 languages, and in parts to 4500 to go! The Bible Societies gave out only 26 million Bibles in 2006. The prophecy of Christ that says, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”; this prophecy has almost been fulfilled (Matt. 24:14).





By Fr. Gawargious A. Kolta

Our church celebrates the feast of Epiphany on the 19th of January (11th of the Coptic month Tubah). This feast is celebrated after the feasts of Nativity and Circumcision and is considered one of the seven great feasts of our Master (**Annunciation, Nativity, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost**). We call it the feast of Immersion, as our Lord accepted to be baptized by John the Baptist by immersion. It was said: ***“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water”*** (Mat. 3:16). Thus, we baptize the believers by immersion, as it is a burial with Christ (Col. 2:12). Burial is accomplished by putting the whole body in the grave. We practice baptism ***by burying the whole body in the water three times*** in the name of the Father, in the name of the Son and in the name of Holy Spirit.

It is called the feast of Epiphany because the ***Holy Trinity appeared during His baptism***. The Son was in the water of Jordan, the Father proclaimed from heavens: ***“This is My beloved Son, in which I am well pleased”*** (Mat. 3:17), and the ***Holy Spirit descended from heavens like a dove*** and alighted upon Jesus. The dogma of the Holy Trinity as well as the nature of Jesus Christ as the ***Incarnate Son*** is revealed. John

the Baptist thereafter testified that ***Jesus is the Lamb of God*** who would carry the sin of the world. (Jn. 1:29-34). The Catechumens, as well as many Christians now, use to get baptized on this holy feast.

Reasons for Christ's Baptism:

Jesus Christ was not in need to be baptized by John the Baptist, for repentance. He was without sin, but ***He was baptized on our behalf***, carrying our sins in His body. It was said: ***“All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”*** (Isa. 53:6).

The Lord accomplished many good deeds as a deputy of the fallen humanity, but not for Himself. He ***fasted*** forty days on our behalf and was ***tempted*** thereafter by Satan in the wilderness and He ***defeated Satan*** on

our behalf and paid the wages of sin, also on our behalf.

Jesus' baptism was to fulfill all righteousness (Mat. 3:15), by obeying God and keeping all His commandments. St. Paul said: ***“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, the death of the cross”*** (Phil. 2:8). Christians must obey Him and ***our baptism is the first step for obeying Him***. The Lord was baptized like the repenting multitudes who came to be baptized, ***lest the Jews might convict Him of a sin*** (Jn. 8:46).

Christ's baptism is also a vital lesson for humbleness. He said to the Baptist in meekness and kindness: ***“Permit it to be so now”***. It is a wonderful deed that the great High Priest asked permission to be baptized by one of His priests. The Baptist felt that he was not worthy to baptize Christ, knowing his abject self. He said: ***“I need to be baptized by You and are you coming to me?”*** (Mat. 3:14). The Lord in humbleness was baptized by one of the priests of Aaron, while Christ is the High priest to the order of Melchizedek, which is greater than that of Aaron (Heb. 7).

The baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ was accomplished according to God's plans, that ***He would be revealed to Israel as the Lamb of God*** who would take away the sin of the world. (Jn. 1:29-35). The Baptist did not know Him, but when he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon Him, he perceived by divine revelation that He is the



Messiah the Savior of the world and the Son of God. He testified that to the Jews (Lk. 3:15-18, Jn. 1:19-34).

The baptism of Jesus Christ was a distinctive sign to salvation so that every believer has to practice it. That baptism was necessary for sinners in the time of John the Baptist. Now Christian baptism is necessary for the believers **to obtain the new nature**. This was confirmed by the Lord Himself: ***“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”*** (Mk. 16:16). He also said to Nicodemus: ***“Unless one is baptized of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”*** (Jn. 3:5).

St. Peter also declared the necessity of baptism saying: ***“In the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight souls were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism”*** (1 Pet. 3:20 & 21). Salvation is accomplished through faith, baptism and good deeds.

Revelation of the Holy Trinity in Christ's baptism:

+ **The heavens were opened** during the Lord's baptism, revealing to us the Holy Trinity. It was opened to announce the reconciliation of heavens and earth, through the atonement, which would be accomplished by our Savior. **The heavens were opened also** when St. Stephan was martyred (Act. 7:56), and also for St. John the beloved in the island of Batmos, in the Revelation (Rev. 4:1).

+ **The revelation of the Holy Trinity** was clear and the three Persons (Hypostases) were distinct, as if separated, but God is one in three Persons. The heaven was opened to declare that **the Father** loved mankind, witnessing to **the Son** in the water of Jordan, and **the Holy Spirit** descended openly like a dove.

+ The descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ as a dove does not mean that the Son was separated from the Holy Spirit; and that did not change the deity of Christ. It was **a declaration** of His public service, as mentioned by Isaiah: ***“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because The Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound”*** (Isa. 61:1). The Lord Himself read this passage in the synagogue of Nazareth and He added: ***“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”*** (Lk. 4:21).

+ The Lord Jesus ordered His disciples, after His resurrection, to baptize all nations in the name of the Holy Trinity, saying: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”*** (Mat. 28:19). Therefore our church baptizes the believers by immersion three times in the name of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

The Role of the Holy Trinity in the life of man:

+ The Holy Trinity participated together in the atone-

ment of mankind. The **three Persons** are still working in harmony in the life of the believers and the church sacraments. This is clarified in Christ's teachings: ***“For God (the Father) so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”*** (Jn. 3:16). In order to enter the heavenly kingdom, one must be **born again** by water and the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:5).

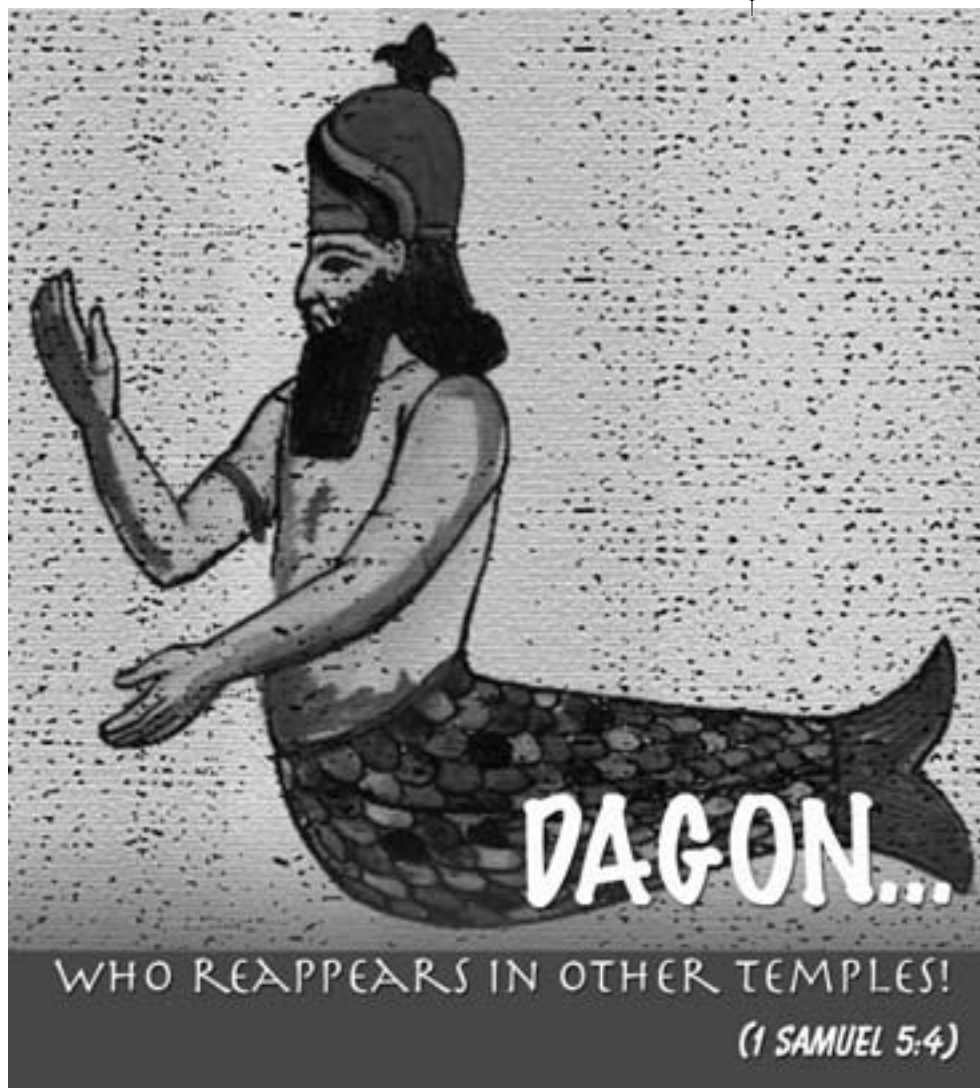
St. Paul told the Hebrews about the relation of the Father and the Son. He said: ***“God who at various times and in various ways spoke in the time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds”*** (Heb. 1:1&2). The Holy Spirit also participated in the incarnation of God the Logos (Lk. 1:35). The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men for their salvation and ***“no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”*** (1 Cor. 12:3). The Holy Spirit guides us unto the truth and He glorifies Christ (Jn. 16:13, 14).

St. Paul clarified the work of the Holy Trinity in the life of the believers, saying: ***“How more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God (the Father), cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God”*** (Heb. 9:14). The Holy Spirit who dwells in the life of the believers is sent by Christ, proceeds from the Father, and testifies of Christ (Jn. 15:26). He gives us the new nature when we get born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:6). Thus, St. Paul said: ***“But you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”*** (1 Cor. 5:6:11), that we can present the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 3:22,23). The three persons of the Holy Trinity share together in the apostolic benediction to the believers, as was mentioned by St. Paul: ***“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen”*** (2 Cor. 13:14).

+ **The Holy Trinity was not clearly revealed in the Old Testament**, for the Israelites lived a shallow spiritual life. There were living in the midst of many Gentile nations, worshipping different idols. It was difficult for them to perceive the meaning of the Holy Trinity. However, when God created man, He talked about Himself in the plural form (Gen. 1:26, 3:22). The Hebrew word for God (Alohim is in the plural form) was mentioned in the Old Testament 2500 times. Isaiah mentioned the Holy Trinity in many verses (Isa. 11:1,2 - 42:1,2 - 59:1,2 & 61:1). He prophesied about Christ's incarnation, saying: ***“I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there, and now the Lord God (the Father) and His Spirit have sent Me (the Son)”*** (Isa. 48:16). There are other verses declaring the Holy Trinity, mentioned in the books of the Old Testament (Ps. 33:6, Hag. 2:5-7).

May the blessing of the feast of Epiphany be with us all. Amen.





(3) Following the battle of Israel against the Philistines at Mount Gilboa, the head of slain King Saul was fastened “in the temple of Dagon” (1 Chron. 10:10) at Beth-shan.

Now, let us comment on the second incident, when the Philistines defeated Israel due to her apostasy and living in sin, and God allowed the Ark of the Covenant to be captured by the Philistines and they placed it in Dagon—their god’s temple. Notice what happened.....

The priests of Dagon were dumbfounded; their faces were masks of amazement! They were absolutely horrified as they surveyed the wreckage scattered across the floor of their sacred house. Such vandalism had never been known. “....behold; Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him!”

The Ark of the God of Israel was silent, solemn, and still; but every Philistine realized that its apparent impotence was misleading. That Ark had struck terror to the heart of their god—that is, if he had a heart!

1. How strong: God is quite capable of looking after Himself. The conquest of Israel and the resultant capture of the sacred Ark had made the Philistines delirious with joy. Their ancient enemies were now at their mercy; their god was in captivity! Dagon would be triumphant for ever; the captured ark had been placed at his feet. It was wonderful; and the heathen danced for joy. But “when they arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again” (v. 3). When the god fell the second time, the priests were demoralized and lost their desire to serve in his temple. Their position was intolerable. The power of the captured box beggared description. Had a true prophet been present, his eyes would have smiled from a face grimly inscrutable. The priests should have known on the first morning that Dagon’s tumble was but a precursor of coming tragedy. God was very capable of fighting His own battle wherever the enemy was found.

2. How sensitive: Sin can stay His hand It



By Fr. Augustinos R. Hanna

Dagon is an ancient Canaanite deity for blessing the grain and vegetation, associated with agriculture, texts as father of the great god Baal, and honored in early Phoenician times. He was worshipped as a national god of the Philistines who erected temples to him at Gaza and Ashdod. He was praised during martial victories. A temple of Dagon has been found in N. Syrian Ugarit— a shrine similar to the adjacent one to Baal. It has a naos, an altar court approached by three steps, and other features found later in Hebrew architecture. Some authorities, like Albright, believe that Dagon was an early Accadian deity, to whom homage was paid throughout the Euphrates Valley as early as the 25th century B.C.

Three Old Testament incidents center in a shrine of Dagon:

(1) A Philistine temple of Dagon at Gaza was the scene of Samson’s death (Judges 16:23-30).

(2) Philistines at Ashdod were killed when the Hebrew Ark was carried into their temple of Dagon (1 Sam.5:1-7); and the statue of the god tumbled to the ground.



is sometimes difficult to recognize God's invincibility when temporary defeat overwhelms His cause. If the ark represented eternal might, why were the Philistines permitted to seize it? The answer to that question might have been found in the sanctuary. "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord...the sin of the young men was very great... for men abhorred the offering of the Lord" (1Sam.2:12, 17). Deliberate sin had ruined Israel; their respect for the Ark amounted solely to idolatry. Thus God decided to teach His people a most painful lesson. He permitted the conquest by the Philistines that is defeat Israel might learn the lessons which they ignored in victory. These are age-long principles. Neither man nor movement needs fear when their cause is just in the sight of God. "No good thing will be withheld from those who walk uprightly."

3. How significant: God never finally forsakes His people: Dagon's fall was followed by other disasters, for wherever the Philistines took the Ark, the people were smitten by death and disease. Ultimately the wise men diagnosed the cause of their trouble, and advised that the ark should be returned to Israel. Yet, to remove any doubt in the matter, the ark was placed upon a new cart, to which were harnessed tow milch cows whose calves were left in the stall. "And the kine took the straight way to Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left..." (1 Sam. 6:12) Thus God returned to his people, who by all known laws had forfeited the right of His favor. God's kindness is always greater than man's sin, and every phase of religious history demonstrates the fact. God allowed the Babylonians to subjugate Israel; He allowed the stricken nation to remain in captivity for seventy intolerable years, but in the fullness of time He brought them home again. Mankind may grieve and forsake God, but God never forsakes His children. They might need discipline, but He does not forsake or neglect them.

4. How Safe I may be if my Dagon is smashed? "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1). Dagon's mutilation suggests that God enjoys select company. He can be exceedingly jealous, and resents the presence of other deities. I cannot expect His blessing when my own idols are permitted to stand on their feet! If I emulate the example of the priests of Ashdod, if I ignore God's initial warning, His second stroke will be far heavier than the first. It is always easier and wiser for man to smash his own idols- this relieves God of a task.

Reader's Corner

Frhanna,

The F-16 fighter jet is one of America's most lethal weapons.

Egypt's President has declared that Egyptian Christians must "convert to Islam, pay tribute, or leave!"

The Muslim Brotherhood – the ruling party of Egypt – has declared that the Jewish people are the "source of evil in the world."

Despite the escalating threats coming from Egypt's terrorist-led government, the Obama Administration is set to give Egypt 20 American-made F-16 jets and require American servicemen to train Egyptian pilots.

We cannot allow the possibility of American weapons being pointed at Israel or the Egyptian people. Join the ACLJ in demanding that all aid to Egypt be cut off until Congress can certify that it is in the interest of U.S. and Israeli national security.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is on the verge of passing a radical new Shariah law-based constitution. Egypt's anti-American, anti-Israel Muslim Brotherhood government could use this radical Islamic constitution to strip religious liberty from Egypt's Christians, the largest Christian community in the Middle East.

Yet the Obama Administration is still planning to send 20 of our most sophisticated fighter jets and 200 of our best tanks to a regime that is a threat to Egypt's Christians and Israel.

The ACLJ is working with Members of Congress to ensure that our best military weapons are not used against Egypt's Christians or against Israel.

Jay Sekulow

ACLJ Chief Counsel

P.S. Please forward this critical petition on Facebook and through email.





16. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me. Asaph could not bear the thought of scandalizing the family of God. Yet his thoughts seethed fermented and caused intolerable anguish. To speak might have relieved one sorrow, but it would have created another. He refused so dangerous a remedy. The triumph conscience that compels us to keep the wolf hidden beneath our garments does not forbid its gnawing at our insides. Suppressed fire in the bones rages more fiercely than if it could be vented. Those who know Asaph's dilemma will pity him as no others can.

17. Until I went into the sanctuary of God. His mind entered eternity, where God dwells as in a holy place. Asaph left the things of the senses for the things invisible. His heart gazed within the veil; he stood where the thrice holy God stands. Thus, he shifted his point of view and the apparent disorder resolved into harmony. The motions of the planets appear discordant from this world, which is itself a planet. They appear as "progressive, retrograde, and standing still." If we could place an observatory in the sun, the center of the solar system, we would perceive all the planets moving in perfect circles around the head of the great solar family.

Then I understood their end.

He had seen too little to judge. A wider view changed his judgment. He saw with an enlightened eye the future of the wicked, and his soul was no longer in debate as to the happiness of their condition. No envy now gnaws at his heart, for it is replaced with a holy horror of their present guilt and

impending doom. He recoils from being dealt with in the same manner as the proud sinners, whom until now he regarded with admiration.

"Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction, Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

18. The psalmist's sorrow had culminated, not in the fact that the ungodly prospered but that God had arranged it. Had it been mere chance, he would have wondered but could not have complained. How the arranger of all things could so dispense his temporal favors was the vexatious question. Here he sees that the divine hand purposely placed these people in prosperous and eminent circumstances, not with the intent to bless but the very reverse.

Surely You set them in slippery places.

Their position was so dangerous that God did not set His friends there, only His foes. He chose, in infinite love, a rougher but safer footing for His beloved.

You cast them down to destruction.

The same hand that led them to their slippery place hurled them down. They were elevated by judicial arrangement for the full execution of their doom. Eternal punishment will be all the more terrible in contrast with their former prosperity. The case of the ungodly is horrible. Their worldly joy, instead of diminishing the horror, actually makes the effect of eternal punishment more awful, just as vivid lightning in a storm does not brighten but reveals the thick darkness. The ascent to Haman's fatal gallows was an essential ingredient in the terror of the sentence, "Hang him on it" (Esth. 7:9). If the wicked had not been raised so high, they could not have fallen so low.

19. Oh. How they are brought to desolation, as in a moment. This is an exclamation of godly wonder at the suddenness and completeness of the overthrow of sinners. Headlong is their fall, without warning, without escape, without hope of restoration! Despite their golden chains and godly apparel, death does not wait but hurries them away. Stem justice, not bribed by their wealth, hurls them to destruction.

They are utterly consumed with terrors.

They have neither root nor branch, they cease to exist, and there is nothing left of their former glory. Like blasted trees consumed by lightning, they are monuments of vengeance. Like the ruins of Babylon, they reveal in their great desolation the Lord's judgments against all who unduly exalt themselves. The momentary glory of the graceless is in a moment destroyed; their loftiness is in an instant consumed.

20. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You



awake, You shall despise their image. They owe their existence and prosperity to the forbearance of God, which the psalmist compares to a sleep. As the dream vanishes, the pomp and prosperity of proud transgressors melt. When God awakes to judgment, they who despise Him will be despised. They are already “the stuff dreams are made of.” Let the little, poor, unsubstantial sons of dreams flaunt their hour, for they will be gone when the day breaks. Who cares for the wealth of dreamland? Who indeed but fools? Lord, do not leave us to the madness that covets unsubstantial wealth. Teach us Your own true wisdom.

21. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; you hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. He says, Thus my heart was grieved. It was a deep-seated sorrow, one that penetrated his inner being. Alexander reads it, “My heart is soured.” His spirit had become bitter. He had judged in a harsh, crabby, surly manner. He had become depressed, full of black bile, melancholy, and choleric. He had poisoned his life at the fountainhead and made all its streams better.

And I was vexed in my mind.

He was as full of pain as one afflicted with kidney disease. He had pierced himself with many sorrows. His hard thoughts were like kidney stones. He was utterly wretched, caused by his own reflections. Miserable philosophy that stretches the mind on the rack and breaks it on the wheel! Blessed faith that drives away the inquisitor and sets the captives free!

22. I was so foolish. Asaph, a saint of God, acted as if he had been one of the fools whom God abhors. Had he not envied them? The wisest have enough folly to ruin them unless grace prevails. **And ignorant.** He acted as if he knew nothing, babbled like an idiot, and uttered the drivel of a witless loon. He did not know how to sufficiently express his foolishness.

I was like a beast before You.

Even in God’s presence, he had been brutish and worse than a beast. The grass-eating ox has only this present life and can only estimate things by the sensual pleasure they offer. The psalmist had judged happiness by this mortal life, by outward appearances and fleshly enjoyments. He had, for the time, renounced the dignity of an immortal spirit. Like an animal, he judged according to the sight of the eyes. We should be loath to call an inspired man a beast, yet in his penitence, he called himself that. Further, he uses the plural for emphasis, as if he were worse than a single beast. It was evidence of true wisdom that he became deeply conscious of his folly. We see how good mourn their mental wanderings bitterly. They make no excuses; they set their sins in the pillory and cast vile reproaches on them. Oh, for grace to detest the

very appearance of evil!

23. Nevertheless I am continually with You.

He does not give up his faith, though he confesses his folly. Sin may distress, yet we may be in fellowship with God. It is sin loved and delighted in the separates us from the Lord, but when we heartily regret it, the Lord, will not withdraw. What a contrast in this and the former v.! He is as a beast and yet continually with God. Our double nature always cause conflict and is a continuous paradox. The flesh allies us with the brutes, and the spirit affiliates us with God. **You hold me by my right hand.** With love, You embrace me; with honor, ennoble me; with power uphold me. He had almost fallen, yet he was always upheld. He was a riddle to himself and a wonder to many. This v. contains the two precious mercies of fellowship and holding. And since they were given to one who confessed himself a fool, we also may hope to enjoy them.

24. You will guide me with Your counsel. I am finished choosing my way and trying to pick a path in the jungle of reason. He yielded not only the point in debate, but also all intentions of debating. He puts his hand in that of the Great Father, asks to be led, and agrees to follow. Past mistakes are a blessing when they drive us to this. The end of our wisdom is the beginning of being wise, for with Him is counsel. When we come to Him, we are sure to be led aright. **And afterward,** receive me to glory. Take me to Your splendor of joy. Your guidance will conduct me to this matchless terminus. I will have glory. You Yourself will receive me. “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.” (Gen. 5:24), so all the saints will be caught up, received into glory.

25. Whom have I in heaven but You! And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish. It is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the lord God, that I may declare all your works. Asaph turns from the glitter that fascinated him to the true gold, which was his real treasure. He felt that God was better to him than all the wealth, health honor, and peace that he so envied in the world. And there is none upon earth that I desire beside you.

26. My flesh and my heart fail...but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. God would not fail him, either as protection or a joy. His heart would be kept by divine love and filled eternally with divine glory.

27. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish. You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

28. But it is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord.... That was Asaph’s final decision after his long research and watching the entire picture including the other side of eternity.





Thomas L. Friedman

New York Times

Three weeks ago, the prime minister of India appointed Syed Asif Ibrahim as the new director of India's Intelligence Bureau, its domestic intelligence-gathering agency. Ibrahim is a Muslim. India is a predominantly Hindu country, but it is also the world's third-largest Muslim nation. India's greatest security threat today comes from violent Muslim extremists. For India to appoint a Muslim to be the chief of the country's intelligence service is a big, big deal. But it's also part of an evolution of empowering minorities. India's prime minister and its army chief of staff today are both Sikhs, and India's foreign minister and chief justice of the Supreme Court are both Muslims. It would be like Egypt appointing a Coptic Christian to be its army chief of staff.

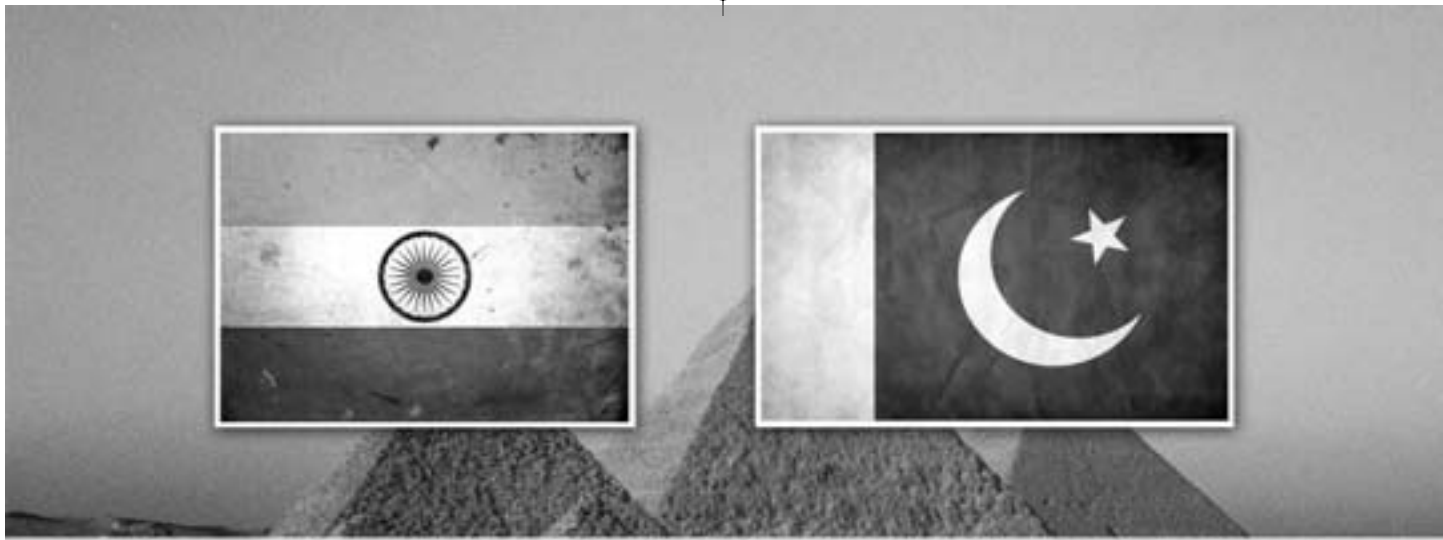
"Preposterous," you say.

Well, yes, that's true today. But if it is still true in a decade or two, then we'll know that democracy in Egypt failed. We will know that Egypt went the route of Pakistan and not India. That is, rather than becoming a democratic country where its citizens could realize their

full potential, instead it became a Muslim country where the military and the Muslim Brotherhood fed off each other so both could remain in power indefinitely and "the people" were again spectators. Whether Egypt turns out more like Pakistan or India will impact the future of democracy in the whole Arab world.

Sure, India still has its governance problems and its Muslims still face discrimination. Nevertheless, "democracy matters," argues Tufail Ahmad, the Indian Muslim who directs the South Asia Studies Project at the Middle East Media Research Institute, because "it is democracy in India that has, over six decades, gradually broken down primordial barriers — such as caste, tribe and religion — and in doing so opened the way for all different sectors of Indian society to rise through their own merits, which is exactly what Ibrahim did." And it is six decades of tyranny in Egypt that has left it a deeply divided country, where large segments do not know or trust one another, and where conspiracy theories abound. All of Egypt today needs to go on a weekend retreat with a facilitator and reflect on one question: How did India, another former British colony, get to be the way it is (Hindu culture aside)?





The first answer is time. India has had decades of operating democracy, and, before independence, struggling for democracy. Egypt has had less than two years. Egypt's political terrain was frozen and monopolized for decades — the same decades that political leaders from Mahatma Gandhi to Jawaharlal Nehru to Manmohan Singh “were building an exceptionally diverse, cacophonous, but impressively flexible and accommodating system,” notes the Stanford University democracy expert Larry Diamond, the author of “The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World.”

Also, the dominant political party in India when it overthrew its colonial overlord “was probably the most multiethnic, inclusive and democratically minded political party to fight for independence in any 20th-century colony — the Indian National Congress,” said Diamond. While the dominant party when Egypt overthrew Hosni Mubarak's tyranny, the Muslim Brotherhood, “was a religiously exclusivist party with deeply authoritarian roots that had only recently been evolving toward something more open and pluralistic.”

Moreover, adds Diamond, compare the philosophies and political heirs of Mahatma Gandhi and Sayyid Qutb, the guiding light of the Muslim Brotherhood. “Nehru was not a saint, but he sought to preserve a spirit of tolerance and consensus, and to respect the rules,” notes Diamond. He also prized education. By contrast, added Diamond, “the hard-line Muslim Brotherhood leaders, who have been in the driver's seat since Egypt started moving toward elections, have driven away the moderates from within their party, seized emergency powers, beaten their rivals in the streets, and now are seeking to ram a constitution that lacks consensus down the throats of a large segment of Egyptian society that feels excluded and aggrieved.”

Then there is the military. Unlike in Pakistan, India's post independence leaders separated the military from politics. Unfortunately, in Egypt after the 1952 coup, Gamel Abdel Nasser brought the military into politics and all of his successors, right up to Mubarak, kept it there and were sustained by both the military and its intelligence services. Once Mubarak fell, and the new Brotherhood leaders pushed the army back to its barracks, Egypt's generals clearly felt that they had to cut a deal to protect the huge web of economic interests they had built. “Their deep complicity in the old order led them to be compromised by the new order,” said Diamond. “Now they are not able to act as a restraining influence.”

Yes, democracy matters. But the ruling Muslim Brotherhood needs to understand that democracy is so much more than just winning an election. It is nurturing a culture of inclusion, and of peaceful dialogue, where respect for leaders is earned by surprising opponents with compromises rather than dictates. The Nobel Prize-winning Indian economist Amartya Sen has long argued that it was India's civilizational history of dialogue and argumentation that disposed it well to the formal institutions of democracy. More than anything, Egypt now needs to develop that kind of culture of dialogue, of peaceful and respectful arguing — it was totally suppressed under Mubarak — rather than rock-throwing, boycotting, conspiracy-mongering and waiting for America to denounce one side or the other, which has characterized too much of the post-revolutionary political scene. Elections without that culture are like a computer without software. It just doesn't work.





Desert Locusts Threaten Egypt, Swarms Lay Eggs

By Rudy Ruitenberg
December 21, 2012

Egypt, Sudan and Saudi Arabia face a threatening desert-locust situation as winter breeding of the pest insect is in progress, the United Nations' Food & Agriculture Organization said.

Small swarms arrived on the Red Sea coast last month from summer-breeding areas in the interior of Sudan and laid eggs that recently hatched, the UN's Rome-based agency wrote on its Locust Watch website today. Egypt is Africa's biggest wheat grower, with expected output of 8.5 million metric tons in 2012-13, according to the International Grains Council. An adult desert locust can eat its own weight in food daily, according to the FAO. "Egg laying is continuing in Egypt and control operations are in progress," the UN agency wrote. "So far, infestations are confined."

In southeast Egypt and northeast Sudan, immature locusts known as hoppers are forming bands, while on Saudi Arabia's coast north of Jeddah control operations are in progress against hoppers, with more hatching expected in coming weeks, the FAO said.

"Strict vigilance should continue in Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria and Libya during the coming weeks to detect any groups or swarms coming from the Sahel," the FAO wrote. "Thereafter the threat should subside."

Swarms containing tens of millions of locusts can fly as much as 150 kilometers (93 miles) a day, and a female locust can lay 300 eggs in her lifetime, according to the agency.

Desert locust distribution can extend over 60 countries during plagues, covering about 29 million square kilometers or about a fifth of the world's land, according to the FAO.



We Are Needy Creatures

"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

From our first breath until our last, we have few truly essential needs. Without oxygen, we would perish in minutes. We must have food and water. Our bodies, when exhausted, require rest. And in harsh weather, we must seek shelter. So, while we are needy creatures, our basic needs are few.

When it comes to our wants, however, there seems to be no limit. The entire advertising industry is devoted to expanding our "needs."

But what about those basic needs we overlook? What about our need for the Bread of Life and the living water of God's truth? What about our need for spiritual fellowship that gives strength, hope peace, and comfort? The vague dissatisfaction so many people experience is really spiritual malnutrition and thirst.

The Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman about water that would become "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). He had what she truly needed—what the Apostle Peter later called "the words of eternal life" (Jn.6:68).

Have we been ignoring Christ's words, "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Matt. & Lk. 4:4). Have we been failing to nourish our souls while pursuing our wants? "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

Just as our body needs daily food, so does our spirit.





Huckabee: Lack of religion in classroom leads to violence in schools



Posted by CNN Political Unit

(CNN) - Responding to the deadly mass shooting Friday in Newtown, Connecticut, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee said new laws regulating guns won't deter such shootings, linking a lack of religious discussion in the classroom to increased violence in schools.

"We ask why there's violence in our school but we've systematically removed God from our schools," Huckabee said on Fox News. "Should we be so surprised that schools have become such a place of carnage? Because we've made it a place where we don't want to talk about eternity, life, what responsibility means, accountability."

"That we're not just gonna have to be accountable to the police if they catch us but one day we stand before a holy God in judgment. If we don't believe that, then we don't fear that," he said.

"People are going to want to pass new laws,"

Huckabee continued. "This is a heart issue ... laws don't change this kind of thing."

Huckabee made similar comments following the mass shooting at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, earlier this year saying violent acts should not be a surprise considering the removal of religion from public forums.

"We don't have a crime problem, or a gun problem, or even a violence problem. What we have is a sin problem," he said after the July shooting on Fox News. "And since we've ordered God out of our schools and communities; the military and public conversations... we really shouldn't act so surprised when all hell breaks loose."

Friday morning a gunman entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and opened fire killing 20 students and six adults before apparently killing himself. The tragedy has intensified the debate over gun laws in the U.S.



Congratulations

St John Church, Covina congratulates
Christine Marie Kenney
 for her graduation;
 wishing her continuous success in her
 spiritual and practical life.



To the Coptic Orthodox Churches, notably St. Mark's Church in Los Angeles and St. John's Church in Covina:

As I have been a babe in the Orthodox tradition and practices, I have spiritually matured bath in faith and in works. Nearly seven years ago (April 9, 2006), I was baptized into the Holy Waters like Christ and raised up as a renewed Disciple in Christ.

Thank you for the continued support while I studied for my **Masters' of Education with an option in Reading**. I am a recent graduate (June 2012) from **California State University in Los Angeles (CSULA)**. Additionally, from CSULA, I have obtained my **California Teaching Credential** in 2010. Currently, I am enrolled in the **University Induction Clear Credential Program** at the **University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA)**. God willing, I will obtain the **Clear Credential Certification** in June 2013.

Thank you all for your Continuous prayers and encouragement!

Christine Marie Kennedy



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Merry Christmas

&

Happy New Year

St. John

St. John Senior Citizens' Christmas Party



و إنت جاي الجنة بمجهودك ولا بنعم للدستور؟؟

By Ramy Ashraf



Arabic News-7