

# St. John

Monthly Magazine

Vol. 16, No. 170 • March 2004

# THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

*“For God so loved the world  
that He gave His only begotten  
Son, that whosoever believes  
in Him should not perish, but  
have everlasting life”*

*(John 3:16).*

*“He was wounded for our sins,  
bruised for our iniquities”*

*(Isaiah 53:5).*

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# Verse of the month:

"He was wounded for  
our transgressions,  
bruised for our iniquities"  
(Isaiah 53:7).

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## In This Issue:

- 2 & 3** Schedule & News
- 4** Thine is the Power and the Glory  
*By H.H. Pope Shenouda*
- 6** I was wounded in the house  
of My friends  
*By Fr. Gawargious Kolta*
- 8** BreakPoint: Who Killed Jesus?  
*By Charles Colson*
- 9** Bible Study through Questions  
(Leviticus)  
*By Fr. Augustinos Hanna*
- 10** Modern Pharisees  
*By Fr. Anthony Coniaris*
- 12** My Place  
(Life Lesson in Short Story Form)
- 13** Looking Unto Jesus  
*By Mark Hanna*
- 15** Getting Rid of Youth Apathy  
*By Dena Seif & Mark Atia*
- 16** Comparative Religion /  
Holy War in Islam  
*By Mark Gabriel*
- 19** Kids' Page (Do God and Jesus Cry?)
- 20** Fr. Bishoy Kamel & Pastoral Work  
*By Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty*
- 21 & 22** News in Pictures



## March, 2004 Schedule:

Sunday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Diving Liturgy English 7:45 - 10:30 AM	Servants Preparation in Arabic 7:30 - 9:00 PM	Liturgy 8:00 - 10:00 AM Women's Meeting Last Wednesday of the month	Food Bank Thursdays to Sunday	Liturgy 9:00 - 11:45 AM During Lent	Vespers & Bible Study 7:00 - 9:00 PM + Beginners' Deacons- Meeting 6:00 PM + Elementary Meeting 7:30 - 9:00 PM
Divine Liturgy Arabic / Coptic 8:00 - 11:30 AM		Prayer Meeting 8:00 - 9:00 PM	Senior Citizen Club 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Arabic Language Youth Meeting 8:00 - 10:00 PM Followed by refreshments	College /Graduate Bible Study 7:30 - 9:00 PM
Servants' Meeting 12:00 - 1:00 PM			Bi-monthly Coverts' Meeting 7:30 - 9:00 PM		High School & J. High Youth Meetings 7:30 - 9:00 PM

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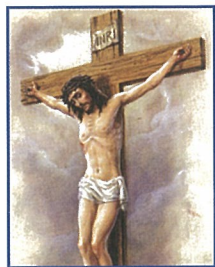
# NEWS

March  
2004



## 1. The Great Lent (Feb. 16-April 10):

The Holy Lent started February 16, and concludes with the glorious Feast of the Resurrection on Sunday, April 11. The Lent is the spring of the Coptic year and a period for spiritual growth and revival combined with deep prayers, giving alms, Bible study and serving the Lord. The Liturgies during the Lent: Wednesdays, from 8:00 – 10:00 AM., and Fridays, from 12:00 – 300 PM.



## 2. The Feast of the Holy Cross (March 19):

The Church celebrates the Feast of the Cross on March 19. The Church celebrates in joy using the festal tunes of Palm Sunday. Raising of the incense and the procession of the cross start 8:00 AM.

## 3. The New Building of St. John's Church:



+ The new Church will be finished, according to the contractor, approximately at the end of May 2004, and expected to be consecrated in summer by H. H. Pope Shenouda III and H.G. Bishop Serapion.

+ The work is taking place now in the parking lot. We apologize for the inconvenience.

+ St. John Church in Covina urges all Christ-lovers to double their donations, help and pray for the completion of the Church. May God bless the cheerful giver.

## 4. The Senior Citizen Club-cruise and election:

+ St. John Church Senior Citizen Club will start its cruise after Easter, for five days from April 19 – 23, 2004, which visits Catalina Island, Ensenada, Mexico. The fees are \$380.00 per person. For more information: Call Mr. Maher Saleh, Phone NO. (626) 260-3659.

+ The club also finished the election of its members on February 5, 2004, which resulted in electing Mr. Maher Saleh president, Ms. Hoda Ghazar secretary, and Mr. George Henein treasurer.

## 5. H.H. Pope Shenouda III:

❖ On January 15, 2004, H.H. Pope Shenouda visited London, England for three days to attend the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church and delivered a Theological lecture about the modern heresies and how the church should protect her youth from them.

❖ On January 27-30<sup>th</sup> 2004, H. H. Pope Shenouda hosted the first meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches in Cairo, Egypt.



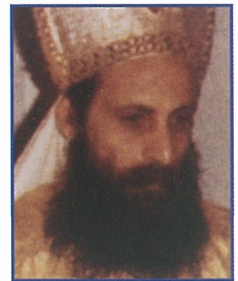
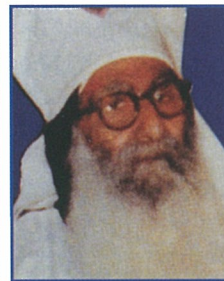
## 6. H.G. Bishop Serapion:

❖ On January 10, 2004, H. G. Bishop Serapion celebrated the first Liturgy in the new Church of Saint John the Baptist in Oxnard. The Church is located at: 1020 Bismark Way Oxnard, CA 93030. Our congratulations to the new Church.

❖ Our beloved Bishop traveled to Egypt to spend his Annual vacation, during the Holy Lent, in a spiritual retreat at St. Bishoy Monastery in Wadi-El-Natroun, Egypt. He is expected to return, God willing, on March 13.



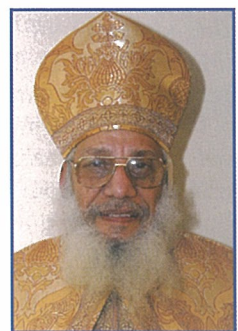
## 7. The Commemoration of H. H. Pope Kirollos VI, Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim and Fr. Bishoy Kamel:



Every March, we remember these three concurrent and remarkable saints, the late Pope Kirollos VI, Rev. Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim and Rev. Fr. Bishoy Kamel, whom most of this generation enjoyed their blessings. The three of them departed to be with the LORD during the month of March. May their blessings and prayers be with us all, Amen.

## 8. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary for the Ordination of Rev. Fr. Gawargios Kolta:

The Priests of St. John Church, Fr. Augustinos Hanna and Fr. Youhanna Alexander, the Board, the Deacons, Servants and all the congregation of St. John Church in Covina, congratulate their beloved Fr. Gawargios Kolta on his 23<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of his ordination in March 15, 1981. May the Lord Jesus Christ bless his service and grant him health, strength and long life.







# "Thine is the Power, and the Glory"

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

**"Thine is the Power, Glory, Blessing and Honour, forever, Amen."**

With this prayer, we follow the Lord Christ step by step along the incidents of this week that preceded the crucifixion. What then are these incidents? And how does the Church act during this week?

## How did The Suffering Start?

On Palm Sunday, the Lord Jesus Christ went to Jerusalem where He was gloriously received as a King: The people praised and cheered Him with palms, spreading their robes under His feet, and the whole city was in turmoil (*Matt. 21:10*). This annoyed the chief priests and the elders of the people: scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. They envied Him for the great love people felt for Him, so they started thinking of a way to get rid of Him! They were more upset when He entered the temple and expelled all who were buying and selling. They then asked Him, "By what authority are You doing these things?" (*Matt. 21:23*). Since then they decided to kill Him, telling one another "Look, the world has gone after Him" (*John. 12:19*).

The chiefs' desire to kill the Lord Christ was due to their envy, but the puzzling thing is the change in the multitude's attitude; they received Him like a King, then shouted to Pilate, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" (*Luke 23:21*). When the crowds cheered Jesus, they looked at Him as an earthly King, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David" (*Mark 11:9-10*). But the Lord Jesus refused a Kingdom on earth, as His is a Heavenly Spiritual one. The plot to get rid of the Nazarene was then a natural reaction from the Chiefs who lost hope in the long awaited kingdom!!

The church considers the end of Palm Sunday Liturgy the beginning of the Passion Week, as the plot to kill the

Lord Jesus Christ started to develop since then.

During this week the Church's Icons, Pillars and Lectern and sometimes even the walls are all draped with black cloth, creating an atmosphere of mourning. It makes everyone feel that he is sharing in the Lord's sufferings, as said by St. Paul, "that I may know Him and the power of His Resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings" (*Phil. 3:10*).

## Outside the Camp:

In the Law of the Old Testament, a sin offering was to be burnt outside the camp (*Lev. 4:12,21*), so it would not defile the camp with the congregation's sins. Thus the Lord Christ who took away the sins of the whole world, suffered outside the Holy City. They considered Him a sinner, sent Him outside the Camp and crucified Him. St. Paul explained, and referred to this matter by saying: "Let us go forth therefore to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (*Heb. 13:13*).

The Holy Church follows the Lord's steps during the Pascha Week and goes with Him outside the camp, closing the curtain to the sanctuary. The Church also leaves the first Chancel, the Chancel of the saints, and moves the Lectern to the second Chancel to pray away from the Altar, outside the sanctuary and the camp, bearing His reproach and saying: **"Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour, forever, Amen..."** With this hymn, we follow the Lord Jesus Christ in His passion, step by step, contemplating on every word we say to Him in His Passion...

## THE PASCHA HYMN

We sing this hymn for the Lord Christ all through the Passion Week, following all His movements. We sing it instead of the Canonical Hours, the five day prayers and the five night prayers. We repeat the hymn twelve times in each prayer instead of the

twelve psalms that are included in each prayer of the Canonical Hours.

The Lord Christ left Jerusalem to Bethany, where we follow Him saying, **"Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour"...**

The Lord, in humility, bent to wash the disciples' feet, and we praise Him saying **"Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour"...** The Lord was praying at Gethsemane in such agony that His sweat was like drops of blood and we proclaim, **"Thine is the Power and the Glory"...**

We follow Him hour by hour; when arrested, put on trial in the presence of His enemies, crowned with thorns, flogged, falling under the Cross, nailed, till He commanded His Spirit into the hands of the Father and when He took the robber on His right with Him into Paradise, we sing to Him all the time the hymn, **"Thine is the Power, the Glory, the Blessing and the Honour...forever, Amen."**

The first thing we praise the Lord Jesus Christ for, during Passion Week, is His Power. Yes, Lord, Thine is the power as... St. Paul said, "Christ the Power of God" (*1 Cor. 1:24*). It is true, Lord, that some might think You were weak on the Cross, but we know who You are. The first thing we know about Your Power is that You are the Creator. "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (*John 1:3*). You have the power too as a Judge "who will come in glory to judge both the living and the dead." Indeed, this crucified Lord who seemed to the people then as weak, had they considered what He had done throughout all the days He spent among them, they would have known how powerful He was.

## He was Powerful in His Miracles and His Holiness:

O Lord, You alone of all the powerful, defeated the sin, the world and the devil, while all the others were too weak to resist sin, "For she [sin] has



cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men" (Prov. 7:26). As it is said in the Holy Bible, "They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one" (Ps. 14:3). But You God, You are the Only One who challenged the whole world, saying, "Which of you convicts Me of sin" (John 8:46). You are the only One who overcame the Devil and said, "for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30). You alone are powerful in Your Holiness, "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26).

Lord, Your miracles proved Your wonderful Power, as You "had done among them the works which no one else did" (John 15:24). Your Power over Nature was shown: when You rebuked the wind and the waves and when You walked on the water. David sang for You saying, "You rule the raging of the sea: when its waves rise, You still them" (Ps. 89:9). **Thine is the Power, Lord...**

You showed Your Power over sickness and death: as you healed all diseases and weaknesses of the people, especially the incurable ones. Lord, You raised the dead, even he who had been in the tomb for four days and there was stench. You showed Your Power as a Creator: when You fed thousands with 5 loaves and 2 fish. You even created a new substance when you turned the water into wine and when you made eyes for the man who was born blind. Your Power over the devils was shown by casting away evil spirits, who left many saying, "You are the Son of God." Your miracles are countless, Lord.

Beside all these aspects of the Lord's Power, the puzzling one is shown in His suffering and crucifixion where He gives us a new concept of the meaning of Power.

### **The Lord's New Concept of Power:**

The world's concept of Power differs from that introduced by the Lord Jesus Christ. To the World, it means violence and the ability to strike, to defend one-

self and to subject others to authority. The Lord set an example of the Power which loves and sacrifices, endures and gives without limits.

When we think of Power, we have to look at it from the spiritual side, not the physical. That is how we should look at the Lord Christ in His sufferings. The materialistic world, poor indeed, thinks that the Lord Christ was weak when they struck Him on the face, mocked Him and crucified Him. That would have been true if the Lord Christ had those insults due to His inability, but in fact, He was far more powerful than all those who struck, mocked and crucified Him. He had the power to destroy them all, but He did not because He loved them and His love was more powerful than death. He was able to put them to death but He did not because He came to save them from death and by His own death to give life.

We glorify the Lord's endurance, which convinces us that. Power is in endurance, as the apostle says, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1). Some people are too weak to endure; even the least insult provokes them and makes them lose control and turn to revenge. It shows their weakness and lack of power of endurance.

The Lord Christ was powerful in His endurance, and this demonstrates the power of His love. For a person who has love is able to endure, while failure to endure shows lack of love. The Lord Christ came to take away our sins, "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way... and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:6). The Lord sacrificed Himself for our sins and for our sake He endured the insults of those who struck Him and spat upon Him. In His deep love, He was joyfully singing in the ear of each of us, "Because for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered My face" (Ps. 69:7). We listen to these words and answer in humility, "for my sake, You endured the injustice of the evil, the flogging and the slaps, and never turned Your face away from the shame of those who spat upon You.

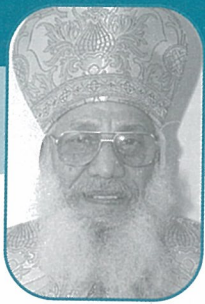
The power of the Lord Christ during His passion and crucifixion appears in that He was able to destroy all those who attacked Him but He never did because of His great love for us. He was punished for our sake and gave us His peace, took upon Himself our shame and gave us His Glory.

To understand the real Power of the Lord Christ we have to ask ourselves: what could have happened if Christ had refused the humiliation and crucifixion? or had commanded the earth to swallow all who were on it, or fire to come down from Heaven and burn them? He could have done so but that would have led to our destruction due to His refusal as a Redeemer to die for us. So the Lord said, 'I'll die so that you may not die, and be mocked so that may be glorified. I came especially for your sake to sacrifice Myself and endure insults for you out of love for you and for those who insult Me.' Therefore He did not only endure injustices, but loved, forgave and prayed for the wicked interceding for them saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

This is the real Power of a heart full of love, who tolerates those who trespass against Him, loves them, prays for them and sacrifices Himself for their sake. Who of us can follow the same example and when insulted by another inferior to his rank, would forgive, defend and also promote him! St. Peter, the Apostle, drew his sword to defend his Master when they arrested Him and he cut off the slave's ear not understanding power in its Christian spiritual concept, so the Lord asked him to put his sword back. It is good to have Holy Zeal, but violence is not our way. Our way is love. With this love the Lord healed the slave's ear and surrendered to the sinners for whose redemption He came...

The Lord came willfully to the Cross, to give His life a ransom for many... My brethren, when we stand near the Cross, we do not weep as did Mary Magdalene and the daughters of Jerusalem, we do not pity the Lord nor blame Him, we stand near the Cross to glorify both the Cross and the Crucified, singing the beautiful hymn: **"THINE IS THE POWER."**





# "I WAS WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF MY FRIENDS" (Zech. 13: 6)

By Fr. Gawargious A. Kolta

This prophecy was fulfilled in the life of our Lord Jesus. For the sake of saving mankind from eternal perdition, the only begotten Son, God the Logos was incarnated. Since death was in the way of our salvation, He yearned to go through it, because of His love to us. His life on earth was a chain of sufferings, from His childhood till He went to the cross to suffer the judgment of our sins. We are those who sinned and the Lord was the One who suffered. We are those who were indebted to divine justice as a result of our sins and He was the One who paid off our debts.

+ **Christ the Lord was disgraced from His childhood.** He was born in a poor family from an orphan young girl. In the filthiest place in the world, a stable, purity was born. The Omnipotence was wrapped in swaddling cloth in a manger. The manger and the cross stand at the two extremities of our Savior's life. He accepted to be born in a stable because there was no room in the inn, and He accepted the cross because men refused to have this Man as a King. In His childhood, He traveled in a dangerous escape from a wicked king, Herod, taking Egypt as a temporary home. He spent His childhood and His youth with a poor old carpenter, in a despised town (Jn. 1: 46).

+ **Our Savior started His ministry by fasting** forty days in the wilderness, after which He started the battle with the evil forces. Being the pattern Man, He taught us how to defeat Satan and overcome his temptations. When He started His ministry in His own town, Nazareth, **the Jews did not receive Him**, rose up, thrust Him out of the city and led Him to the brow of the hill on which the city was built, that the might throw Him over the cliff (Lk. 4:29). The Lord told them: **"No prophet is accepted in his own town"**. The people in Capernaum also rejected him, despite the mighty works that the Lord did with them, that He finally cursed them (Lk. 10:15).

+ **Rejection was also repeated in Jerusalem and Judea.** The Jews did not believe, persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him (Jn. 5:16). They took up stones several times to stone Him (Jn. 8:59, 10:31). They tried to seize Him to kill Him, but He escaped out of their hands. The scribes, the Pharisees, the priests and the Herodians tried several times to destroy Him and plot Him to death (Mat. 12:14, Mk. 3:6, Jn. 5:18, 7:1, 11:53). Herod, the fox was also planning to kill Him (Lk. 13:31). The Lord came to His own people, and His own did not receive Him. This is a fulfillment of the prophecy of King David: **"The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed"** (Ps. 2:2).

+ Our Holy blessed Lord **was absolutely pure and never convicted of sin or an imperfection.** He could stand up before the great crowds and said: **"Which of you convicts**

**Me of sin?"** (Jn. 8:46). The Jews told Him: **"You are a Samaritan and have a demon"** (Jn. 8:48). The Jews said that He did not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, **the ruler of the demons** (Mat. 9:34, 12:24). Some of the Jews called Him a **deceiver** (Mat. 27:63, Jn. 7:12), others called Him a **sinner** (Jn. 9:24), and many said that **He has a demon and is mad** (Jn. 10:20). In spite of the many signs, which Jesus had performed, they did not believe in Him and rejected Him. The Lord's soul was exceedingly sorrowful even to death for those people, who did not receive Him (Jn. 1:11).

+ **He wept over Jerusalem, the city of the great King and over the children of Israel**, because they did not know the time of their visitation (Lk. 19:41-44). He was exceedingly sorrowful for those who were perished. This happened before, in the time of Jeremiah. He said: **"Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people"** (Jer. 9:1). The Lord was grieving for the hard-hearted people, and the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled: **"He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, He was despised and we did not esteem Him"** (Isa. 53:3).

+ The Lord's soul was very **sorrowful for Judas**, His disciple who went to the chief priests and said: **"What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?"** (Mat. 26:15). They counted out to Him thirty pieces of silver. This was prophesied by the prophet Zechariah eight hundred years before (Zech. 11:12). The Lord was deeply agitated and said to His disciples the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm forty: **"He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me"** (Jn. 13:18). The merciful Lord held open to Judas several times the opportunity for repentance, but the traitor did not listen, because he delivered himself to Satan, who can possess only willing victims. Our Lord suffered such betrayal from within the household. Judas was the wolf who was present in the midst of the sheepfold. The Lord made His betrayal the condition of His cross.

+ **The denial of Peter** was one of the wounds that made our Lord's soul very sorrowful. Peter who said to the Lord: **"Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be"** (Mk. 14:29). He also said: **"I will lay down my life for your sake"** (Jn. 13:37). Peter failed twice when he kept himself away from Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane, he slept instead of watching and praying. Secondly, he did not keep his eyes on the Savior and the physical distance was a symbol of spiritual distance. He, who had drawn the sword in defense of the Master a few hours before, denied three times the Lord whom he had sought to defend. He who had called his Master "the Son of the living God" now calls Him the man, declaring in oath: **"I do not know the man"** (Mat. 26:27). The Lord turned and looked at Peter, who went outside and wept bitterly (Lk.



22:62). The mercy of the Lord extended to the one who denied Him as to those who crucified Him.

+ **The disciples left Him** struggling in prayers alone in the garden of Gethsemane. Being in agony, He prayed more earnestly and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Lk.22: 42). He said to the disciples: **"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death, stay here and watch with Me"** (Mat. 26:38). They were sleeping and did not stay with Him. When the Lord was arrested, all the disciples forsook Him and fled (Mat. 26:56). It is written: **"Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered"** (Zech. 13:7). The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled: **"I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me"** (Isa. 63: 3). They were not true to their words, when they said: **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"** (Jn. 6:68). Peter said: **"Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You"** and so said all the disciples (Mat. 26:35). The Lord was praying for them that their faith should not fall.

+ **The Jews were not faithful to Him.** They cried to Pilate: **"Crucify Him, Crucify Him"**. The Lord was exceedingly sorrowful for those who listened to His teachings, who were healed from their diseases, who were cleansed from their leprosy and those who were freed from demon possession. The Lord had done among them many signs which no one else did (Jn. 15:24). They did not only acknowledge His good deeds to them, but they also blasphemed Him, when He was hanged on the cross (Mk. 15:29). The sneered, saying: **"He saved others, let Him save Himself if he is the Christ, the chosen of God"** (Lk. 23:35).

+ **The Lord suffered humiliation during His trials.** When He was arrested, He was bound like a thief. In the house of the high priest, the Lord was beaten and the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands and spat in His face (Mat.26: 67). The same happened again in Pilate headquarters. The soldiers stripped Him and put scarlet robe on Him, twisted a crown of thorns and they put it on His head. They spat on Him took the reed, struck Him on the head and they mocked Him (27:27-31). Pilate ordered that Jesus be scourged 39 stripes and delivered Him to be crucified. The trial of Christ as a prophet was in front of the Sanhedrin and the trial of the Lord as a King was in front of Pilate.

+ **The Lord carried the heavy cross** on the way to Calvary. The scourging, the loss of blood, the crown of thorns and His sorrowful soul could bring His end before the crucifixion. He could not walk bearing His cross and He fell on the ground. They laid the cross on Simon the Cyrenian. It is the first time the Savior laid His cross on anyone.

+ **The agony of crucifixion was unbearable.** The rough nails were pierced in those hands from which the world's grace flow. His feet were also pinioned those feet, which sought the lost sheep among the thorns. Every prophecy was fulfilled. David looked forward to the role of hammer and the nails to the Messiah, the carpenter, who made the universe: **"Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouth like a raging and**

**roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and My bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My Jaws. ...They pierced My hands and My feet. I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them and for My clothing they cast lots"** (Ps.22: 12-18). Being stripped of His garments, He went to the cross naked to clothe us with the cloak of His righteousness. For our sake He preferred suffering to comfort us, shame to glorify us and the cross to save us, leaving His throne, which is carried by the Cherubim. I am afraid that **the Lord is still suffering for those who forsake Him, loving the world and its lusts more than Him.**

## An Everlasting Love

By Fr. Wayne Wilson

My dear spiritual sons and daughters:

I came across this uplifting story of one man's discovery of the love of God in his life.

"It had been my belief that God loved all of mankind, but I found it much more difficult to comprehend that he loved me personally. It finally became a reality through my own son when he was very small. One night as I stood looking down on my sleeping child, my love for him seemed to reach out and fill the whole room; I experienced an overwhelming sense of joy. Instinctively my spirit rose in thanksgiving to God for the gift of our son and our joy in him.

"At this moment there dawned upon my consciousness the certainty that God loved me like that, only much, much more. The assurance of His love ceased to be just an intellectual assent and became a living reality. It was then that I began to understand something of my own worth in the eyes of God, and through this recognition I found a new and growing capacity to love."

**Always remember that God loved us first.** When we hated Him He loved us. Your mother commenced to love you, but your heavenly Father never commenced to love you. His love for you had no beginning. His love is unending, spontaneous, uninfluenced, unfailing and eternal. He would have to stop existing before He could stop loving you. "I love you with an every lasting love," says the Lord.

### LOVE IN CHRIST

Fr. Wayne



## WHO KILLED JESUS?

### Setting the Record Straight

started his remarkable film project *The Passion of the Christ*. He immediately ran into a buzz saw of opposition from the liberal media and Jewish groups who were afraid the film would rekindle anti-Semitism.

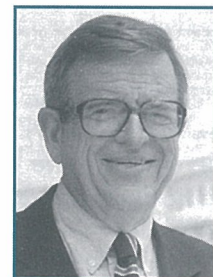
Now, Jews have a legitimate concern about this. During the Middle Ages, Christians treated Jews terribly. In Russia there were pogroms against the Jews. And of course some of the maniacs around Hitler professed that they were killing Jews to purify the Christian race.

But is this sensitivity today well-founded? If we would look at history alone, we would have to say that Pontius Pilate certainly was guilty. Legend has it that years after the crucifixion he was frantically washing his hands trying to cleanse himself from the blood of Christ. And, of course, Caiphus the High Priest certainly bears his share of responsibility. So do the crowds who yelled, "Crucify him." So was it the Romans or the Jews, the venality of Pontius Pilate or the passion of the mob?

It was both and neither. The Jews didn't cause the death of Jesus, nor did the Romans. They were merely instruments carrying out what God had decreed. He sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross so that the sins of mankind might be forgiven. And those who take Scripture seriously have always known who killed Jesus: You and I and all other sinful human beings did so.

The cover of the latest *Newsweek* magazine asks the right question: "Who killed Jesus?" This has been a raging debate for a year, since Mel Gibson

understands this. In his movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, the hand holding the spike being nailed through Christ's wrist is Gibson's. Who killed Jesus? Mel Gibson knows. And he made the very point with his own hand that he was responsible, not the Jews.

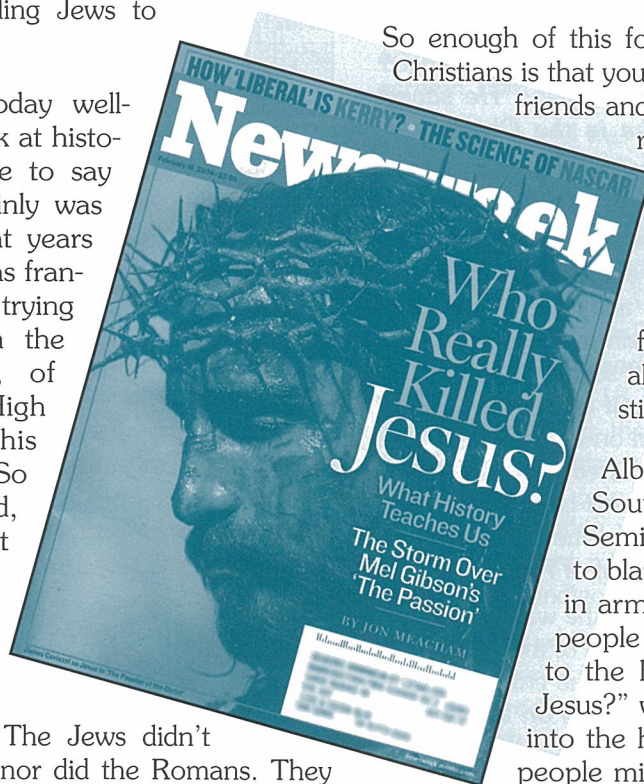


Similarly the Dutch painter, Rembrandt painted *The Raising of the Cross* as a self-portrait. As Christ hangs on the cross while it is being lifted into place, the soldier pulling it up is Rembrandt. Who killed Jesus? Rembrandt knew. He did. And I did. And you did. We're the ones who sent Jesus to the cross loaded down with our sins.

So enough of this foolish controversy. My advice to Christians is that you make it abundantly clear to your friends and neighbors that we are the ones responsible and then take them to see the film. Let them experience the passion and explain to them why it was necessary for Jesus to go to the cross. And be ready with a biblical answer for your Jewish friends who hear all of this propaganda, most of it stirred up by professional activists.

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says that it is not who is to blame that really has everybody up in arms. The media elite know that if people see this film, the right answer to the haunting question "Who Killed Jesus?" will be clear. What strikes terror into the hearts of the media elite is that people might once again be convicted of sin, repent, and come to faith in Christ.

So, three cheers for Mel Gibson. And thanks to *Newsweek* for asking the right question, even if it does not have the right answer. But now it is up to us Christians to do our job to educate our neighbors and flood the movie theaters.





## Bible Study through Questions

# 3 - The Book of Leviticus

By Fr. Augustinos Hanna

### 1. The name of the Book of Leviticus, as well as Genesis and Exodus, is taken from:

- A) The name of God.
- B) The name of the author.
- C) The first word in the Book.
- D) The Jewish feasts.

### 2. The Book of Leviticus is well known as:

- A) The laws of the Jewish priests.
- B) The laws of the Levites.
- C) The laws of holiness.
- D) The Book of bloody sacrifices.

### 3. The main theme of the Book of Leviticus is:

- A) Pleasing God.
- B) Forgiveness.
- C) Redemption through blood.
- D) Be holy as I am the Lord your God is Holy.

### 4. Leviticus, despite seeming hard and boring, the Jews used to make the children read it to teach them:

- A) The fear of God.
- B) The Justice of God.
- C) Holiness and cleanliness.
- D) The Jewish feasts.

### 5. Moses closed the instructions regarding burnt offerings of all three types with what information?

- A) Blood is the only atonement for sin.
- B) Man lives only by the breath of God.
- C) God always sees the sacrifice of the giver.
- D) The aroma of the sacrifice pleases God.

### 6. What requirements did God mandate for an animal sacrificed from the herd?

- A) If the animal is female, it must have never given birth.
- B) The animal must be male and without blemish.
- C) It may be either, but must be washed prior to killing.
- D) It must be tall at least as Aaron's chest.

### 7. The Book of Leviticus contains:

- A) Priestly code.
- B) Ritual and moral laws.
- C) Civil Laws.
- D) The Jewish Feasts.
- E) All of the above.

### 8. The grain offering of flour was a type of Christ's human body because all of these reasons EXCEPT:

- A) The fine flour is white and Jesus is holy without spot.
- B) The flour is soft and smooth, and Jesus was perfect.
- C) The flour is crushed grain; Jesus was crushed on the cross.
- D) The grain offering must enter fire; Jesus carried our hell.
- E) This offering should be made of leaven and honey.

### 9. What two things were the Israelites forbidden to eat throughout their generations according to Lev. 3:17?

- A) Insects and pork.
- B) Fat and blood.
- C) Big Macs and fries.
- D) Two-day-old manna.

### 10. If a priest or the general community was guilty of unintentional sin, the sacrifice required was:

- A) A large quantity of flour and a dove.
- B) A female sheep that had not given birth.
- C) A young bull without blemish.
- D) A male goat, without defect.

### 11. Along with an animal sacrifice to God, a person who stole goods or obtained them dishonestly from his neighbor, was required to make restitution. What was the requirement?

- A) He must repay the owner in full plus one fifth.
- B) He must repay fourfold like Zacchaeus.
- C) It was enough for the thief to confess to the priest.
- D) Doing good works remove his sin, as in Islam.

### 12. Why did God destroy Aaron's sons Nadab & Abihu with fire?

- A) Because they approached the altar without the anointed robes.
- B) Because they offered "profane fire" to the Lord.
- C) Because they were drunk.
- D) (B & C).

### 13. Leviticus 11, offered several examples of land animals, birds, and fish that were to be considered unclean, and not to be eaten or touched by the Israelites. Which of the following were part of that list?

- A) Camel
- B) Rabbit
- C) Sea Gull
- D) Swine
- E) Eagle
- F) Raven
- G) Ostrich
- H) Bat

### 14. How long was a woman considered unclean after giving birth?

- A) 21 days regardless of the baby's sex.
- B) Until the baby grew up, graduated from high school.
- C) Seven days, regardless of the baby's gender.
- D) 40 days for the baby boy and 80 days for the baby girl.

### 15. What was the significance of the scapegoat in Lev. 16?

- A) Symbolized the Israelites running away from God.
- B) Wandering in the wilderness.
- C) The goat symbolically carried away the sins of Israelites.
- D) Goats will be rejected in the last day.

### 16. What did Leviticus 21 state as the penalty for a man who married his brother's wife?

- A) The woman would be put to death.
- B) They would have no children.
- C) Some truly interesting family reunions would follow.
- D) They would be cut off from the people.

### 17. Which of the following were the Jewish priests forbidden to do? (3 answers):

- A) Marry.
- B) Shave their heads.
- C) Cut their bodies.
- D) Accept gifts from non-Hebrews.
- E) Uncover their heads.

Continued on Page 18



# MODERN PHARISEES

By Fr. Anthony Coniaris

Edited by Joe Ibrahim

Today we would like to discuss the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This parable is found in Luke 18:9-14. This is an important parable that teaches us the meaning of true righteousness and humility, and how to have a real loving relationship with Christ. The parable is given as follows:

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:”

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, ‘God be merciful to me the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

What is a Pharisee? The Pharisees of the New Testament were people who were strict obeyers of the laws of God. They were very knowledgeable about the scriptures and knew all of the rites and laws of God. However, they lacked the most important thing: love. Their hearts were hardened towards God and they were hypocrites. Externally, they seemed perfect, but internally they were most imperfect. They had reduced religion to a set of rules and regulations, without any love in their hearts. They made religion mechanical and they did not value a real personal relationship with God. The Pharisees prayed, fasted, read and memorized scriptures, and obeyed the commandments of God, and they made sure that these practices became visible to everyone around them. They separated themselves from others, especially the poor and the sinners. They felt that such people were not fit for the kingdom of God. They were very judgmental of others.

We want to discuss the notion of a Modern Pharisee. We begin with the following story from the cartoon characters in Charlie Brown:

“Linus had his security blanket in place with his thumb resting securely in his mouth, but he was very troubled. And turning to Lucy who was sitting next to him, he said, ‘Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?’ And her response was very typical. She said, ‘I just think I have a knack for seeing other people’s faults.’ An exasperated

Linus threw up his hands and asked, ‘What about your own faults?’ And without hesitation Lucy explained, ‘I have a knack for overlooking them’.”

This is exactly what the Pharisees did. They had a knack for seeing other peoples faults and overlooking their own.

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we read that the Pharisee went to the temple to pray. But instead of praying, he criticized and bragged, as he said, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess” (Luke 18:11). This Pharisee had a knack for seeing other people’s faults and overlooking his own, seeing only his so-called virtues and bragging about them. The tax collector by contrast who went to the same temple to pray, “would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, ‘God be merciful to me the sinner!’” Jesus tells us in this parable that the Pharisee that said, “I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector,” that Pharisee went to hell, whereas the tax collector who prayed “God be merciful to me the sinner!” was justified and went to heaven. This is like saying in today’s language that the Archbishop went to hell and the murderer went to heaven. Pretty tough language. No wonder the Pharisees were out to get Jesus.

A monk once wrote, “Everyone who gets to heaven will be surprised by three things. First he will be surprised to see many he did not think would be there. Secondly, he will be surprised that some are not there whom he expected to see there. And finally, he will be surprised that he himself is there.” Now that’s humility!

Part of what Jesus is telling us in this parable is that you can be in church all your life; you can be a Sunday School servant, you can be a deacon, you can be involved in all kinds of church services and activities, and still end up like the Pharisee in hell. Often times in life, we Christians often wind up looking like the Pharisee rather than the tax collector. We often look like the elder son that stayed home rather than the prodigal son who left but came back only to be criticized by his elder brother (Luke 15:11-32). We sometimes look like those who pick up stones to throw at sinners (John 8:1-11) rather than the ones who reach out to touch Jesus’ robe (Luke 8:43-45). We look more like the high priests who sat in judgment (Luke 23:1-25) rather than the lepers who call upon the name of Jesus for healing (Mark 1:40). We assume the prideful



mental illusion that we're better than other people. That we're right and everybody else is wrong!

Today we see plenty of modern Pharisees in our midst and we need not go far to find them. We may well find one in our own heart! What is a modern Pharisee? We give some characteristics.

1. Generally speaking, a modern Pharisee is a person who substitutes religious practices and rituals for an authentic loving relationship with God. These are the people who do the external things and do them well, and they make sure that they are noticed by others. They kiss icons, they light candles, they fast, they make the sign of the cross, and so forth. But they do them with no love in their hearts. Of course, these are beautiful disciplines and practices, and we should do them, but we should do them with love in our heart since this is the main test for a Christian.

2. The modern Pharisee performs these outward religious practices to foster in themselves the delusion that they are better than others. These outward religious practices become a substitute for confronting the reality of what they really are on the inside. As St. Paul says so beautifully of the Pharisees, "They have a form of religion, but they deny the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5). That is, they have an external form of religion, but they deny the spiritual (internal) aspect of it. And in Matthew 23:23, Jesus says so eloquently of the Pharisees, "They have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23).

3. The modern Pharisee is one who is addicted to religion. We use the word addicted here very carefully. When Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, He could of just as well called them religious addicts. Why? Notice that when the Pharisee went to the temple to pray in this parable, he actually got "high" on his belief that he was better than the tax collector. Religion had become the drug of his choice. He was addicted to his own self-righteousness!

We need to ask ourselves some very serious questions to test out the sincerity of our faith to see that

we too are not "high" on pride and self-righteousness. Here are some questions that we should always ask ourselves:

1. Do I use external rituals as a smokescreen or a distraction so that I won't have to look inside to confront the reality of my sinfulness? Recall what Jesus said about the Pharisees.

He said that they were "whitewashed tombs, clean on the outside and full of dead men's bones on the inside" (Matthew 23:27).

2. Do I feel that I am more religious, more Christian, and more Orthodox than others?

Do I point the finger at others, criticize them for not fasting enough, not praying enough, or criticize them for not doing other external things well enough?

3. Do I see my way as the only way to interpret what is truly Christian or Orthodox, and other ways as leading to condemnation?

4. Do I insist that my way be accepted without questions or discussion?

5. Do I entertain illusions of grandeur and see myself as the savior of many?

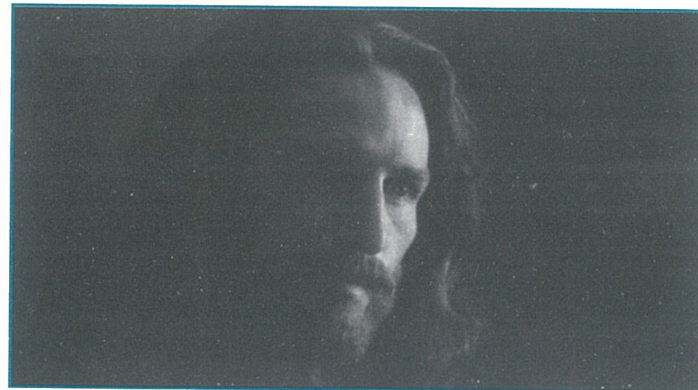




6. Do I insist on oppressive rules and regulations with my family, friends, or in my church service, regardless of how irrational they might be?
7. Do I look down on others in a judgmental way, and thereby indirectly hold myself up as a paragon of virtue?
8. Am I a heresy hunter, always on the look out for new errors so as to expose them?
9. Am I developing a messiah complex in which I see myself as the guardian of truth?
10. Am I playing God by judging others?

The Pharisee was precisely this kind of religious addict, who used religion as a smokescreen to prevent him from confronting the reality of the true sinner he was on the inside. He also used religion as a club, as a weapon, to attack and bash others. So the Pharisee's religion can be characterized as unbalanced, demonic, and insane! There is such thing as a healthy religion and an insane religion. The religion of Jesus is healthy, and the religion of Satan is insane.

So after reading this parable, we see that there is indeed



something very unreligious about this "religious" Pharisee who comes to the temple to pray. We cannot help but wonder what cruel act he will perpetrate on others next in the name of his high moral code. For you see, the Pharisee is really a moral person whose morality has gone sour! And our morality goes sour when it makes us self-righteous. And our morality goes sour when it makes us judgmental. And our morality goes sour when it separates us from other people. And our morality goes sour when it kills love in our hearts, fosters enmity, divisiveness, and a holier than thou attitude.

The great danger in reading this parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is that we may look elsewhere sometimes to find the Pharisee. We do not realize that something of the Pharisee may be abiding in each and every one of us. There is a story of a Sunday School servant who taught her class this parable once, and as she expounded on it at length, she closed her lesson by saying to the Sunday School kids, "Now children, let's thank God that we're not like that nasty Pharisee!" When we begin to feel that the Pharisee is in other people and not in us, then we in fact are the Pharisees.

Now Jesus gives us the corrective to the Pharisee in the vignette of the tax collector, who hides in a lonely corner of the temple. He does not even lift up his eyes to heaven. He does not compare himself to anyone else. He judges only himself. He does not say "God I thank You that I am not like other men, like that Pharisee over there." Rather he beats his breast and prays humbly, "Lord be merciful to me the sinner." And he says this as if there was no other sinner as sinful as he was. And this is why Jesus says, "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other."

The prayer of the tax collector is a very well known prayer, and it is called the Jesus prayer. It goes like this: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner." Many books have been written about the Jesus prayer. We should recite this prayer everyday, as did the tax collector in this parable and the Russian peasant in the book titled "The Way of a Pilgrim."

Reciting this prayer daily will truly build our spiritual life.

## Life Lesson in Short Story Form

# My Place!

One day, a man went to visit a church. He arrived early, parked his car, and got out. Another car pulled up near him, and the driver told him, "I always park there. **You took my place!**"

The visitor went into the church to attend the liturgy. Another member walked up to him and said, "That's where I always sit. **You took my place!**" The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome, but said nothing.

The visitor went to the youth meeting after the liturgy and found an empty seat and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, "That's my seat! **You took my place!**" The visitor was even more troubled by the treatment, but still said nothing.

The following week, as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them, the visitor stood, and his appearance began to change! Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet. Someone from the congregation noticed and called out, "What happened to you?"

The Visitor replied: "**I took your place!**"



# “LOOKING UNTO JESUS”: Rejoicing in the Crosses of Life While on the Way to Glory



By Mark M. Hanna

I begin the next leg of our race where we all left off last issue<sup>i</sup>, that is “run[ning] with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...” (Hebrews 12:1, 2). The goal is not to receive a perishable crown or medal, but an “imperishable” one (1 Corinthians 9:25). The reward or prize is much more valuable than eternity itself. The prize, rather, is God Himself. He is what this whole race of life is all about. He is the One who gives value to eternity in heaven. But to lay hold of the Prize, we must continue to run having endurance to complete the race.

Having drawn a line in the sand<sup>ii</sup>, became more wary of little foxes<sup>iii</sup>, and taken guard for obstacles that can hinder our progress<sup>iv</sup>, three months into our race, it is not time to slow down to catch our breath but time for us to press on forward reaching for God. This is the point of St. Paul when he tells us to look unto Jesus. That is, to “look unto Him who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross...” (Hebrews 12:2).

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## Endurance to the Finish

Just as the Lord Jesus struggled during the days of His flesh, so too must we take up our cross and follow in His path. He is called “the *author and finisher of our faith*” and “the *author of eternal salvation*,” maybe because He defined what it means to suffer in order benefit others. In other words, He wrote the book, as the saying goes, on how no matter who one is that approaching God does not and cannot happen without going the way of the cross.

This is what the Lord told the Rich Young Ruler that inquired of Him how he can attain eternal life,

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me” (Mark 10:21).

I imagine this rich young man not only having trouble with the idea of selling all possessions and giving to it to the poor, but even more troubling to him was the idea of taking up the cross. Treasure in heaven was not worth carrying a cross. The cross was the most shameful method of tormenting a convicted criminal, not to mention how agonizing it was. This young man had fulfilled the commandments and was

not by any means a convicted criminal worthy of the cross. But he was completely offended by the notion of carrying a cross. What he didn’t realize was that if he really wanted to attain eternal life then he had to attain the crucified Lord Himself, for the Lord said, “And this is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). This young man knew the commandments and kept them but he was not willing to know the God of the commandments and therefore he felt that this whole cross-thing was not worth it.

As you continue to run, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus” (Philippians 2:5), dear reader. Christ came for one reason and one reason only, to give us a much better life (John 10:10), and for this reason He hurried to the cross because He knew it meant our freedom from the bondage of Satan. Christ Jesus came to die in our stead; and it is specifically for this reason that we run too. We run, as St. Paul says beautifully to share in Christ’s suffering for me:

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death ... but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own ... but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind (Phillip. 3:10, 12, 13-15).

## Rejoicing to Carry the Cross

In Galatians 6:14 St. Paul wrote of his pride in sharing in the Cross of Jesus Christ: “But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” You see St. Paul had looked to the Lord Jesus and the cross did not offend him but was the source of boast and glory to him. St. Paul wrote the Corinthians explaining:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24).

The disciples all saw this so called “foolishness” when the Lord—the author of our faith—hurried to Jerusalem where He and they all knew He would be arrested because He had



told them so. He told them three times that He would be captured (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), nevertheless, He hurried and this hurry to His arrest is what they found amazing. His example of hurrying to the cross was frightening to them: "Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them [He hurried]; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid" (See Mark 10:32).

Perhaps the disciples were afraid because they thought the Lord was foolish to be walking and hurrying into the hands of those who wanted to kill Him, but He said, "for this purpose I came to this hour" (John 12:27).

### The Glory of Carrying the Cross

The Apostle Paul did not just speak eloquently about the cross, but he lived his Christian life carrying the cross and learned to rejoice in carrying it. He was afflicted with some sort of illness which in 2 Corinthians 12:7 he called "a thorn in the flesh." He wrote about it:

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (12:8-10).

### Looking Unto Jesus as You Live the Crucified Life

St. Paul learned to love the cross, afflictions and struggles from his master, whom he had seen and tasted. This is why he tells us all to "look unto Jesus," and learn how He perceived the cross. "Who," he goes on to say, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Hebrews 12:2). The joy! This joy the Lord saw ahead was for our benefit, our redemption and salvation. So, looking unto the Lord Jesus, let us run forward with courage and "endurance the race that is set before us."

The crosses of life, not only try our ability to even see the goal, but they also blur the Prize in our eyes so that it is not even worth the effort in the first place. Perhaps this was also why the Rich Young Ruler, who was not able to see beyond the cross, thought that the road to eternal life was just not worth it. This is why we must realize that the road to God is through the way of the cross. Realizing this, we all need to have endurance to continue the struggle of life—carry the cross without losing heart—in order to finally be rewarded with the very real Prize that is the Lord Jesus for eternity.

Be careful to not let the pursuits of life, i.e., career, possessions, entertainment, or even family distract you from the Prize. I love the advice that St. Paul gave to his young disciple Timothy, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life..." (2 Timothy 2:4). "Warfare" he tells him and as a soldier in God's army he

must know how not to get entangled with the affairs of this life, whose prince is Satan.

The Christian who is running his/her race of life must know how to disconnect from the worldly affairs. For example, a popular movie playing at theaters everywhere yet from the rating of the movie you know that it will involve content that is not appropriate for the eyes and ears of Christ. Should you go knowing that you're stronger than being influenced by an inappropriate scene(s) or should you avoid going in order to preserve the purity of your eyes, ears and mind? As a Christian, fully grafted into the body of Christ, I must not go to such a form of cheap entertainment and entangle my senses with the sin before me. How about the affair of going to inappropriate wedding receptions where unsuitable attire will be worn by many, especially females, and a general environment that Christ would not be found in? Or songs with inappropriate lyrics that occupy our minds with vulgarities and language of this world? The examples of entanglements are too many to keep track of, yet it was for this reason that Christ came, carried the cross, died and rose, so that we can be forever freed from the bondage of the world as ruled by Satan. St. Paul explains this saying, "[Christ] who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). This is why Christ came and looked so forward to the cross.

Dear Reader, if you are weary from running, the burdens of the journey and the distance has made you lose sight of the value of straining for the Prize remember that it is only by carrying your cross, enduring going after the Lord (whether due to the cross of an illness, some kind of tribulation, or a self-imposed struggle for purity) and laying hold of Him, that the reward—the Prize—for winning the race of life will be yours. Moreover, the Kingdom of Heaven will be ours as the final resting place forever with God.

Earthly wisdom tells us that the cross or struggles are to be avoided at all costs, but the author of our faith—Jesus Christ—went to the cross or came to die so He can give us life. Maybe to the wise in their own sight this is foolishness, but it meant life to all of us. This "foolishness" or suffering has a much deeper meaning when we look at it from the perspective of the *author of our faith*. This is the perspective that St. Paul wrote to the Romans about, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (8:18). Therefore, run to the cross looking unto Jesus.

### REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> St. John Magazine, February 2004, *On Your Guard for Obstacles*.
- <sup>ii</sup> St. John Magazine, December 2003, *A Line in the Sand*.
- <sup>iii</sup> St. John Magazine, January 2004, *The Little Foxes*.
- <sup>iv</sup> See 1.



# Getting Rid of Youth Apathy... ... in the Church

By Dena Seif and Mark Atia

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen. And we continue in our prayer. Please Lord, thank you for this day. Help those who are sick, poor and hungry. Please bless my mother and father and brothers and sisters, and all my friends. Help us get good grades and help those who didn't come this week to come next week. Amen.* Then a pause. And from there, your Sunday School teacher leads the class into the Lord's prayer, and then you're free to go. Sound familiar? Well it seems that this generic prayer being said in Sunday School classes all across the world – in classes ranging from kindergarten to college – is the new official prayer of the Coptic Orthodox Youth. Mind you, this was not the decision of some Ecumenical Council. Instead this has become one of the few signs that Coptic youth all over have fallen to such an apathetic state, that even our prayers aren't original, much less truly and genuinely sincere.

***"Let no man despise your youth;  
but  
be an example to the believers,  
in word,  
in conduct,  
in love,  
in spirit,  
in faith,  
in purity."***

***1 Timothy 4:12***

Here at Saint John Coptic Orthodox Church, we have been given a mission to completely revamp our image in the face of God. We have been spoon-fed all our lives, and although we have been blessed to have such devout parents and ancestors to instill in us this rich and beautiful religion, it is our own time to prove ourselves.

So as one of the services to the youth today, it is with this magazine, and this page that the Saint John Coptic Orthodox Youth are proud to present a page that is espe-

cially for YOUth and by YOUth. And to start us off for our first issue ever, we came up with the question, "What is the Importance of Youth in Our Church?"

Here are some of the answers we received...

**"Our time as youth is precious. We need to help others and glorify Gods name while we are young so we can learn for the future"**

**David Eskander**



**"My hope is that more youth get involved in service and have a two way relationship with God rather than than taking and not giving."**

**Maggie Ateia**



**"Maintenance!!!  
(Taking care of the church.)"**

**Andrew Morcos**



As you can see, we all have different ideas on how to be more proactive in the church and in our relationships with God. Please look out for upcoming issues, where we will be discussing some pertinent issues that deal with Coptic youth today.



# Holy War in the Quran:

## Fighting Unbelievers Until They Are Subdued

By Mark A. Gabriel, PH.D.

Former Professor of Islamic History at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt

WE FIND JIHAD as command to all Muslims enforced by the Quran. The focus of jihad is to overcome people who do not accept Islam. In Muhammad's day, jihad was therefore practiced against Christians and Jews on a regular basis, as well as people who were idol worshipers—anyone who did not convert to Islam. (See Surah 2:217; 4:71-104; 8:24-36, 39-65.) Let's let the Quran speak for itself:

Those who reject Islam must be killed. If they turn back (from Islam), take (hold of) them and kill them wherever you find them ...

—SURAH 4:89, *THE NOBEL QURAN*

So, when you meet (in fight—*Jihad* in Allah's Cause) those who disbelieve, smite (their) necks till when you have killed and wounded many of them, then bind a bond firmly (on them, i.e. take them as captives).

—SURAH 47:4, *THE NOBEL QURAN*

O you who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are close to you, and let them find harshness in you; and know that Allah is with those who are *Al-Muttaqun* (the pious).

—SURAH 9:123, *THE NOBLE QURAN*

Allah commanded the prophet Muhammad to enforce killing rather than taking prisoners.

It is not for a Prophet that he should have prisoners of war (and free them with ransom) until he had made a great slaughter (among his enemies) in the land.

—SURAH 8:67, *THE NOBEL QURAN*

Muslims were told to prepare themselves to fight against the unbelievers.

Let not the Unbelievers think that they can get the better (of the godly): they will never frustrate them. Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others

besides, whom you may not know, but whom Allah knows.

—SURAH 8:59-60, ALI TRANSLATION

### Jews and Christians are Enemies of Islam

In the Quran, Christians and Jews are called the "The People of the Book" in reference to the Scriptures that they follow. At first, the Quranic revelations encouraged Muslims to live at peace with Christians. (The revelations about Jews were never positive.) But after Muhammad's move to Medina, the revelations regarding all "People of the Book" became very hostile.

The following verse is considered to be the final revelation from Allah regarding Christians and Jews; therefore, it is understood to override all other revelations. It states:

And fight them until there is no more *Fitnah* (disbelief and polytheism, i.e., worshipping other besides Allah) and the religion (worship) will all be for Allah Alone [in the whole of the world]. But if they cease (worshipping others besides Allah), then certainly, Allah is All-Seer of what they do.

—SURAH 8:39, *THE NOBLE QURAN*

In other words, this verse says, "Fight those who reject Islam until all the worship is for Allah alone."

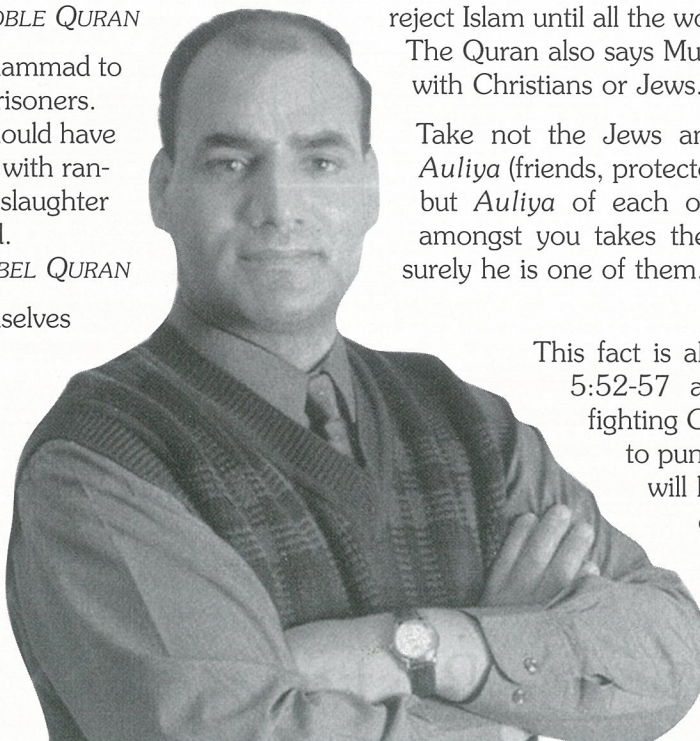
The Quran also says Muslims must not be friends with Christians or Jews.

Take not the Jews and the Christians as *Auliya* (friends, protectors, helpers), they are but *Auliya* of each other. And if anyone amongst you takes them (as *Auliya*), then surely he is one of them.

—SURAH 5:51

This fact is also emphasized in Surah 5:52-57 and Surah 4:89. When fighting Christians, the Quran says to punish them severely so they will leave their homes and be dispersed (Surah 8:57).

The Quran commands Muslims to force Christians and Jews to convert to Islam with very strong and





direct words. The following is from *THE NOBLE QURAN* in English, which includes commentary in the parentheses.

O you who have been given the Scripture (Jews and Christians)! Believe in what We have revealed (to Muhammad) confirming what is (already) with you, before We efface faces (by making them like the back of necks; without noses, mouth, eyes) and turn them hindwards, or curse them as We cursed the Sabbath-breakers. And the commandment of Allah is always executed.

—SURAH 4:47

Just in case the meaning is not crystal clear, this translation has a footnote at the bottom of the page, which reads, “This Verse is a severe warning to the Jews and Christians, and an absolute obligation that they must believe in Allah’s Messenger Muhammad and in his Message of Islamic Monotheism and in this Quran.”

### CONVINCING MUSLIMS TO GO FIGHT

When you read these Quranic verses, it is helpful to think of them in their historical context. Allah told Muhammad to go out and conquer the world, so many Quranic verses were given that encouraged the people to fight jihad. Here are some examples:

Allah is preferred in grades those who strive hard and fight with their wealth and their lives above those who sit (at home). Unto each, Allah has promised good (Paradise), but Allah has preferred those who strive hard and fight above those who sit (at home) by a huge reward.

—SURAH 4:95, *THE NOBLE QURAN*

Those who did not participate in jihad were threatened with hell fire.

... they hated to strive and fight, with their goods and their persons, in the cause of Allah: they said, “Do not go forth in the heat.” Say, “The fire of Hell is fiercer in heat.” If only they could understand!

—SURAH 9:81, ALI TRANSLATION

Those who retreat would incur Allah’s wrath.

If any do turn his back to them on such a day—unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own)—he draws on himself the wrath of Allah, and his abode is Hell—an evil refuge (indeed)!

—SURAH 8:16, ALI TRANSLATION

Obviously, you can see that killing, or jihad, is not an option. It is a must because it is Allah’s command (Surah 9:29). Every Muslim must do it to fulfill his faith. The only exceptions are those who are disabled, blind and crippled (Surah 4:95).

### ISLAM’S ULTIMATE GOAL

Jihad is carried out in order to achieve the ultimate goal of Islam—to establish Islamic authority over the whole world. Islam is not just a religion; it is a government, too. That is why it always gets down to politics. Islam teaches that Allah is the only authority; therefore, political systems must be based on Allah’s teaching and nothing else.

The Quran states:

If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah has revealed, they are (no better than) Unbelievers ... if they fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah has revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel.

—SURAH 5:44, 47, ALI TRANSLATION



People fighting jihad consider themselves to have succeeded when a nation declares Islam as both their religion and their form of government. Nations where this has been accomplished include Afghanistan (under the Taliban), Iran (through Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolution) and Sudan (under Hasan al-Turabi). Islamic fundamentalists are actively working to gain control of the “secular Muslim governments of Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Malaysia and others.

Man-made political systems—from democracies to dictatorships—are considered invalid. Moderate Muslims, how-



ever, do not always agree with this. A good example is past Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. He pronounced that there would be “no politics in Islam and no Islam in politics.”

The statement was unacceptable to my former university professor Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who had become the spiritual leader of Egyptian terrorist organization al-Jihad. After President Sadat said those words, Sheikh Abdel Rahman declared that the president was an infidel renegade who should be killed. Following Islamic law, al-Jihad carried out the declaration of its leader and shot the president to death. President Sadat paid the ultimate price—his life—in an effort to stop Islam from becoming the governing authority in Egypt in the 1980s.

In the 1980s radical Islamic groups focused their attacks on their own governments. Now these organizations are turning to attack the West directly.

### DO ALL MUSLIMS REALLY BELIEVE THIS?

This is a very good question. At this point, Westerners may be wondering if their Muslim neighbors are a part of a plot to overthrow their government. To answer this question, we must recognize that there are different kinds of Muslims, just as there are different kinds of Christians.

#### The secular Muslims

This is a good description of Muslims all over the world. They believe in the nice parts of Islam, but they reject the call to jihad. They take the cultural trappings of the message, but they are not living it out completely. These Muslims may be very dedicated to their system of thought, even though it does not represent true Islam. The majority of Muslims around the world—both in the East and in the West—fall into this category.



#### The traditional Muslims

There are two types of traditional Muslims.

The first type includes people who study Islam, know it and practice it, but they have a stumbling block with the concept of jihad. Some consider jihad to be a spiritual battle, like the Muslim Sufism movement.

The second type includes people who know that jihad is fighting non-Muslims, but they do not take action because 1) they do not have the ability

to do it by themselves, 2) they are concerned about what would happen to their lives, family and children if they join a fundamentalist group, or 3) they want to live a nice life on earth instead of dying.

#### The fundamentalist Muslims

These are the ones who perpetrate terrorism. They sometimes have long beards and head coverings. Their goal is to practice Islam as Muhammad did. Though we call them radicals, they are practicing true Islam.

### NOW YOU KNOW THE BASICS

Now you know the key facts of Islam. In contrast, let's look at what the media have been telling us. [Continued in the next issue.]

## Questions from the Book of Leviticus

Continued from page 9

**18. What was the name of the feast commanded by God to take place on the first day of the seventh month and was to be commemorated with trumpet blasts? The Feast of Tabernacles**

- A) The Feast of My Worries. B) Memorial of Trumpets.  
C) Feasts of Weeks. D) Passover.

**19. The 50<sup>th</sup> year in the new land was called the “Year of Jubilee, with special rules governing it. Which of the following were to be observed during that celebration? (Three answers)**

- A) Each person was to return to his family/clan.  
B) A “festival sacrifice “ was to be made on the altar daily.  
C) For the entire year there was to be free parking.  
D) Countrymen who sold themselves as slaves were to be released.

**20. How did the book of Leviticus end?**

- A) With the Israelites finally entering the Promised Land.  
B) With rules on tithing from the land, herd, and flock.  
C) With the death and burial of Moses.  
D) With the Levites promoted to priests.



*Fr. Augustinos congratulates the blessed new SPA's at his home.*





## Do God and Jesus Cry?

*"Jesus Wept" (John 11:35)*

As a man, Jesus cried real tears when He was sad. He was especially sad when His friend Lazarus died. (You can read the whole story I John 11). We can be sure that God knows how we feel when we're sad because we know that His Son, Jesus Christ, was a person with emotions, too.

God does not shed tears today, but He feels sad when people are hurting, when they disobey Him, and when they don't believe in Him, and expose themselves to danger and destruction.

We can bring joy to God by living as we should, showing love to Him and to each other, and tell people about Christ and His salvation. Think of how you can make God smile.

## Is it OK to think that you are better than somebody else if you really are better?

*"I say to everyone not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly... for as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom. 12:3-5).*

Be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking of yourself as better than others. Who says you are better? If we believe that we are better than we are, we become filled with pride. Be realistic about yourself and humble, too. Remember that all your abilities and talents are gifts from God. All people, even those who are good at what they do, need to depend on God.

There is nothing wrong about being glad that you did a good job at something (singing, scoring points in a game, getting good grades, being honest).

## Why can't we go to heaven and just see it and then come back?

*"I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And I heard a voice speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this. Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne in appearance like an emerald'" (Revelation 4:1-3).*

Try to imagine a teenager asking, "Can I grow up and then come back to be a kid again?" Not only would it be impossible to do that, but after someone grows up, that person probably would not want to be a kid again.

In the same way, anyone who goes to heaven will never, ever want to leave! Heaven is more than a place that you can visit. It's a very special place reserved for the end of our life on earth. And God uses our time here to help us change and get ready to go there. We know that heaven exists because God has told us so in His Word, the Bible. Living with Jesus in heaven will be so wonderful that you will never even think about coming back!

## Why did Judas betray Jesus?

*"Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'what are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' and they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver" (Matt. 26:14,15).*

Judas turned against Jesus and betrayed him because Judas did not care about what Jesus had come to earth to do. Judas had hoped that Jesus would be a military leader and free the Jewish people from the Romans.

Also, Judas loved money, and the religious leaders who wanted to kill Jesus offered Judas money to help them capture Jesus. If Judas had been one of Jesus' true disciples, he would not have betrayed him.

Afterward, when he saw that Jesus was going to be killed, Judas was so upset over what he had done that he killed himself.

There is nothing wrong with money, for we need it to buy things. But money must never become more important to us than people. Money is not what is truly important. Love and friendship matter a million times more! You can be a good friend to Jesus by loving Him and His people. Never put money or the things that money can buy ahead of Jesus.



# Fr. Bishoy Kamel

## EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK: PASTORAL WORK IN HIS LIFE

By Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

My goal is to record the depth of the life Fr. Bishoy lived, as much as possible. The secret of Fr. Bishoy's success was "his faith in his mission". Since his early years, he believed that it was impossible for him to live for a goal other than seeking the souls distant from the Lord and leading them to a life of union with God, in Jesus Christ.

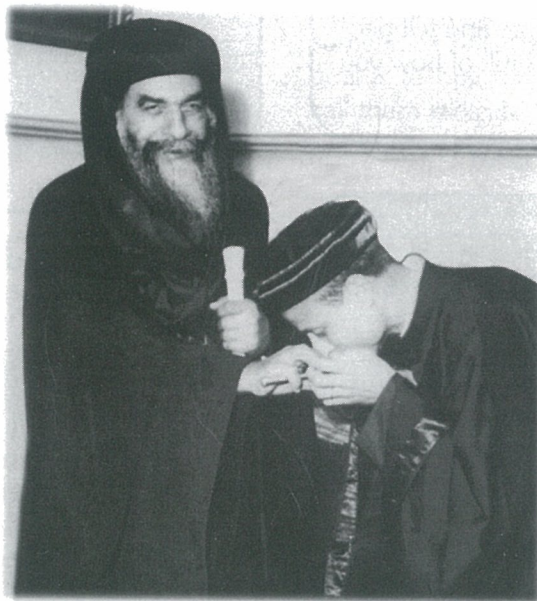
After his graduation, he was appointed as a teacher. In spite of his great success, he asked one of his Sunday school colleagues if his governmental salary could be compensated for so that he could leave his job and be free for the service of God. He did not care for a post and did not ask for a financial guarantee or special privileges. He did not wait for anyone to invite him to serve God. Rather, he chose the service, taking into account the cost: to live by faith.

After his ordination as a priest, he never deviated from the mission in which he believed. His pastoral work was intensifying the depth and power, day-by-day, and moment-by-moment, even in the bitterest pain – to his last breath. His farewell message to me was: **SERVICE.**

I can recall a few examples, which show his faith in the pastoral work:

1. In spite of his unique management skills, he left the financial matters of the church to the board and the Patriarchate. He did not even care to know the church's budget. He believed that the priest's time was too valuable to spend in non-spiritual works. This is the secret of the power of St. George's church in Sporting, Alexandria. It also may be the secret of the love of the board, the Patriarchate, and the entire con-

gregation. He was the first priest of that church and he sowed its seeds. He lived in Jesus Christ with love beyond any material consideration. Our beloved father was not a passive man, but worked for the sake of the kingdom of God without cessation. However, he believed in God's providence that whenever an idea exists for the sake of Christ there is no need for financial planning! Truly the more



he despised earthly matters the more abundant were the offers. God's blessing filled his life that not only one church was built but many others; St. George in El-hadra, Archangel Michael in Moustafa Kamel, St. Takla Himanote in El-Ibrahimia, St. Mary and Pope Kyrillos the great in Cleopatra, and St. Pater in Sidi-Bishr.

When I was leaving for Los Angeles, Fr. Bishoy told me the story of its church. He found a church for sale that cost one hundred thousand dollars. When he consulted the people regarding its purchase, one of the Coptic archons got upset and said, "We have collected five hundred dol-

lars over ten years, and now Abuna wants to commit us to a price which we cannot afford, setting ourselves up to financial problems. He then added, "Just because Fr. Bishoy succeeded in Egypt does not mean that he will succeed in America. Fr. Bishoy answered, "You have two weeks. Whoever finds a better church comes and presents it; and, I will have the down payment in my pocket." He meant by "my pocket" his own faith, since he did not own anything! Indeed many of the youth made personal loans for the down payment, which was \$23,000.00.

Fr. Bishoy continued to tell this wonderful story about God's care. After collecting a sum of money with the help of the youth of the church, they needed to collect an additional three thousand dollars within two days. With some effort the sum of money was collected. He put the checks and the cash in his wallet and went to the bank, only to discover that he had lost his wallet. He asked the bank attendants regarding the whereabouts of his wallet and searched the parking lot but did not find anything. Evening came, and there was no hope. He could not ask for a penny from anybody after they had given all they could. There was no more time!

In the middle of the night, while he and the youth were puzzled what to do, a man came asking for Fr. Bishoy. When he met him, the man asked if he had lost his wallet. Fr. Bishoy said, "Yes" Then the man gave back the wallet to him. Great joy filled the hearts of all. Then Tasonry Angelle asked *abouna*, in Arabic, to give the foreigner a reward in turn? But the man answered that he was a Muslim



from Pakistan and would like to share in building the church!

2. His evangelic work to fulfill his personal mission of delivering God's word was amazing. Three years had not passed since his ordination, when he asked Pope Kyrillos for another priest to work with him. One of the board members who loved Fr. Bishoy asked that the candidate for the priesthood should be taken before the altar and promise to obey Fr. Bishoy and not to create any trouble. But Fr. Bishoy commented that if the priest did not believe in the pastoral work, even his promise before the altar would be of no use, but through love the two of them can live by the same spirit.

In his pastoral visits to one of the famous Protestant ministers in Alexandria, Fr. Bishoy was asked to



change his mind concerning the ordination of another priest with him. The Protestant pastor assured him that it had been proven that one priest is more successful in service

than two, because of the problems caused by different opinions. But Fr. Bishoy's faith in his mission pushed him to ask for more priests. The church had five priests (in the year 1995), in addition to the other ones ordained in the area due to the blessing of his love.

His faith in God's work and his love to spread the kingdom of heaven was wonderful. He surrounded the church with new churches from every direction. Consequently, the population of the Coptic congregation in his church grew less than the surrounding new churches! He was quite happy with the results of service, for he did not believe in the numbers, but longed for the salvation of every person.



*In Commemoration of H.H. Pope Kyrillos VI, Rev. Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim & Rev. Fr. Bishoy Kamel Who departed in the month of March*



HOW 'LIBERAL' IS KERRY? • THE SCIENCE OF NASCAR

# Newsweek

February 16, 2004 • \$3.95

## Who Really Killed Jesus?

What History Teaches Us

The Storm Over Mel Gibson's 'The Passion'

BY JON MEACHAM

James Caviezel as Jesus in 'The Passion of the Christ'

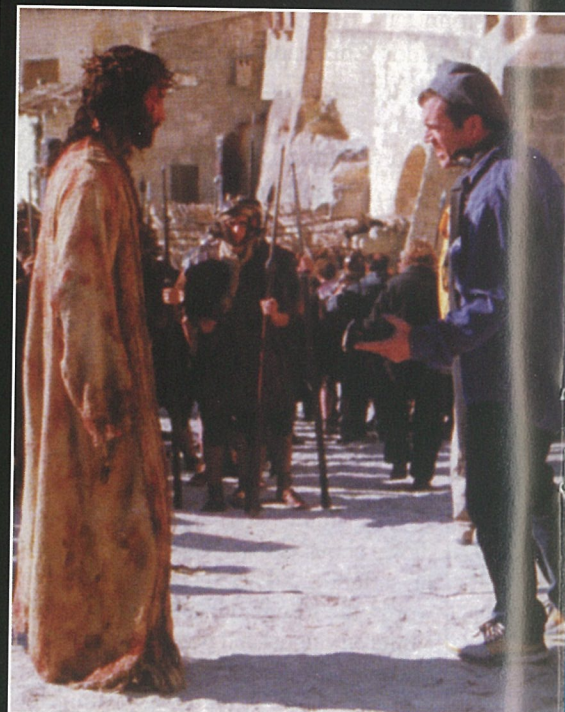
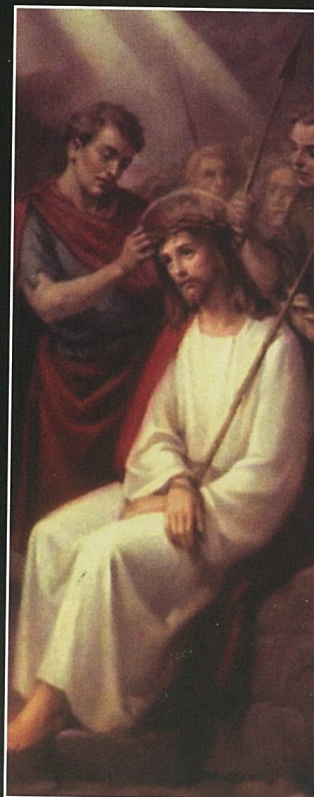


## Christianity Today

March 2004

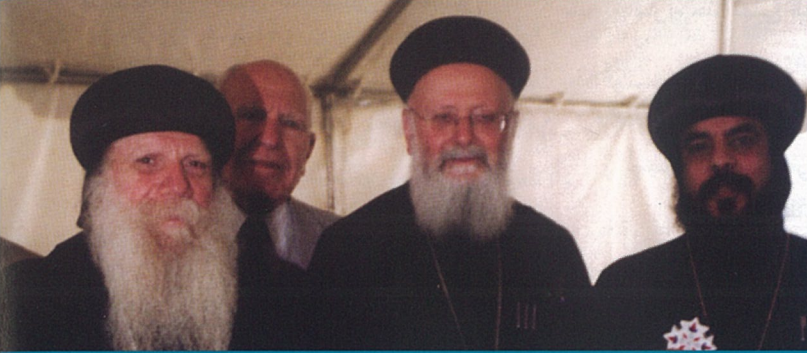
# THE PASSION OF MEL GIBSON

WHY EVANGELICALS ARE CHEERING A 'CATHOLIC' FILM



Mel Gibson directs Jim Caviezel as Jesus in the movie "The Passion of the Christ," that was released on Feb. 25.





*St. John's trip to  
St. Antony Monastery in  
the occasion of returning  
H.G. Bishop Karass' relics'  
January 16 & 17, 2004*

*St. John  
Church  
Boy Scouts*

